

Regardless of whether students have done something wrong, it can be intimidating to be called into an administrator's office for an interview. And that can make them less forthright or make them feel as if they must deceive you in some way. The tips below can help you set the stage for a comfortable conversation in which students feel they can be honest.

- Set your table. Provide a warm introduction, offer the individual water or a snack, ask questions that show concern, such as whether this is a good time for a talk and if they were able to find parking, etc. Ask how their day is going, and explain the purpose of the interview. Let the person know you are happy to answer any questions s/he may have.
- Build a personal connection. The key here is to demonstrate your humanity. Share something personal about yourself to make yourself more relatable and possibly find some commonalities, whether that's in shared experiences or interests.
- Portray a nurturing, empathic stance. You want those you are interviewing to see that you care about their wellbeing, rather than simply being there to somehow get them in trouble.
- Place some personal, comforting items throughout your office. A family photo makes you seem like a real person, so that your role isn't the only thing that defines you in the other person's eyes. Stress balls, stuffed animals, or other animals that students can hold and play with can help to ease their anxiety.
- Engage in active listening. Put your own agenda on hold and focus on what the other person is saying. Ask questions that are open-ended and exploratory, and follow up on your last question before asking new ones.
- Attend to both your and the other person's body language. Keep an open posture, lean in, nod as the person speaks, and generally just make sure your body language conveys attentiveness and caring.
- Mimic the person's tone and use the same kinds of words to summarize what you've heard. Once you share back with the person what was said, you can ask questions designed to point out discrepancies and create dissonance. It's at this point that you start to approach the teachable moment.
- Accept students where they are with their problems. Make sure your tone remains one of empathy and curiosity for the person, and avoid judgmental statements. Identify what isn't working for the student in a way that shows you simply want to help them move forward in a more positive way.
- If you get something wrong, allow them to correct you and consider that a gift, because it shows they feel comfortable enough to want to better explain how they see things.
- Roll with the resistance. Don't take the bait if a student becomes argumentative or frustrated. Move with them rather than against them. Understand that such behavior is a cry for understanding.



- Support positive shifts in thinking and moves towards self-efficacy. In other words, learn to catch students in gold-star moments.

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