

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT TIPS: Reflections from an all-star volunteer

A positive volunteer-student interaction requires more than just delivering the curriculum and leading the activities. It comes from you, the volunteer instructor - your unique personality, use of humor, and the sharing of real life situations that you have personally had to deal with, whether in a positive or negative light.

It's about wanting the audience to remember what you are teaching them. It is important to face the fact that not all students are interested, regardless of instructor personality, demeanor, skills, or experience level. **Put more of your energy into engaging the ones who show you that they are interested and some of the others will naturally follow.** You can't win them all, but hopefully they are listening to some of the teachings you are trying to get across.

The key is to relate to the students as adults. They are young adults. Some of them may be financially responsible for their families and well versed in "real life" stresses and demands. Treat them with respect and work to gain their trust like you would any other adult you've just met. Treating them like adults will help you to build rapport, since most authority figures don't treat them that way. It will also help them to understand the importance of what you are teaching them, since they are skills they will need to master throughout adulthood.

Regardless of age or background, adults have at least one thing in common with youth: You were once a teen in high school! Make a connection to your past experiences without making it about "you". You may have teens in your home or interact with teens regularly. Make a connection to their experiences without making it about "your kids." These stories should be realistic and relevant, but not so specific that the students can't apply them to their own lives. Don't forget that the students may have very different living situations, resources, and opportunities than what you had available to you or the teens you know personally.

Other tips:

- Gain understanding and "wisdom" from prior SecureFutures experiences. The more you do it, the better you will get!
- Don't rush through the presentations. If you don't make it through every slide it's ok! Learn the content of the presentation thoroughly so that you can still teach the most important concepts (or most of them) throughout your stories and discussions, even if you have not made it to the end of the slides.
- Take the time to answer the questions thoroughly and quickly without going into a lot of humdrum detail. (Take your time, but hurry up!)
- Engage the students. Ask them questions, but don't force it. Some classes just will not talk. Get creative and think of ways to keep them interested. **You should be tired after teaching a 90 minute session.** When students see that you are giving them your best and your all, they tend to appreciate your efforts in their own subtle ways.
- Talk with the educator about school involvement with college selections, SAT testing questions, scholarship questions, etc. Understanding what the school is teaching or organizing around these topics will help you to tailor your presentation and skip topics that are covered by the school.
- Ask the educator to help with engagement. Ask them questions if the students aren't answering. Ask them if they have stories to share. Encourage them to chime in if they have comments to add. Ask for support if the students' behavior becomes unruly or the class gets distracted or off-track.

No one is the perfect instructor, of course, but hopefully you enjoy teaching and giving back. All of us are different and have our own unique ways of teaching financial literacy lessons. **The biggest takeaway from all of this is to figure out a way to relate to the students as adults and learn from them, as well.**

These tips are based on correspondence with Eddie Nash, 2018 Difference Maker award winner