



## Why Trial And Error Is Bad For Difficult Students

By Michael Linsin

Difficult students need your leadership. They need your consistency. They need [your honesty](#), your forgiveness, and your unwavering belief in them.

They need your fixed boundaries, your steady, predictable presence, your faithful accountability, and your commitment to doing what is right by them and their future.

In other words, they need *you*.

What they often get, however, is something entirely different. What they often get is an endless succession of haphazard strategies.

Week after week they're the subject of every "why don't you try this" strategy under the sun. They're the subject of trial and error, of experimentation, of offhand bits of advice thrown against the wall to see what sticks.

One week their [every move is corrected](#). The next week they're ignored. The week after that they're excessively praised.

From behavior contracts to special privileges to a humiliating day in the principal's office, over the course of a school year challenging students are propped up, cut down, and tossed about like a dinghy in a squall.

A promised Twizzler stick after a good day, a week's worth of recess time-out, a smiley face sticker on a progress report . . . the long column of disjointed strategies merely deepens their feelings of differentness and pushes them further and further from success.

It's confusing and destructive. It labels them in the eyes of their peers and plays with their emotions. It crushes their spirit. It convinces them that there is something wrong with them, that they're not like other students, that they don't measure up.

The fact is, difficult students will never truly improve as long as they're treated like test subjects. For it isn't trial and error that transforms behavior.

It's you.

It's your fair and consistent accountability. It's your humor and rapport. It's the smiles, the gentleness, the mutual likability, and the heartfelt connection between you. It's the same, day-after-day influence of a teacher they look up to and a classroom that makes sense.

But you have to put a stop to the harmful cycle of trial and error. You have to end the revolving door of strategies du jour, the pushing and pulling of emotions, the manipulation and rug-pulling, and the hurtful labels that threaten to drag them down for a lifetime.

You have to take a stand and say, "Enough is enough." You have to create a stable environment they can count on — one you begin teaching, modeling, and implementing [the first day of school](#).

You have to stay the course and let the joy and peace that comes with being a priceless member of your classroom grab hold.

Fill their heart.

And transform behavior.