

How Are You (Really)?

Being Genuine with Students

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Teaching Strategies
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- As a clinical faculty member in my third year of teaching and being not too much older than some* of my students, I have spent a fair amount of time and energy trying to come across as the stereotypical super cool sage professor.
 - *Not many, but *some*.
- Because of that concern, I have resisted sharing with my students any of my own personal or professional mishaps, errors, or frustrations, lest the students see me as something less than an authority figure.
- If a student ever asked, “how are you?”, I was always okay, if not great!
- Enter the pandemic. Over the past year we have all been unavoidably in a situation where which being “okay” was sometimes a struggle and being “great” was often aspirational. In this environment, telling my students that I was “okay, if not great” made me feel inauthentic.
- “The mutual charade of “I’m fine, thank you” can seem pointless when both sides know that neither of them is fine.”

Ashley Fetters, “What to Ask Instead of ‘How Are You?’ During a Pandemic,” The Atlantic, April 24, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2020/04/should-i-still-say-how-are-you-during-a-pandemic/610639/>

- Reflecting on this feeling compelled me to accept that I was unable to convince my students that I was not stressed out and worried – and that I should share those feelings, within reason.
- This practice of honest sharing helped me better understand that being okay is not the absence of worry and stress but is instead the letting go of the ability to avoid feeling that way.
- I do hide the ball a little. I was (and still am) conscious of burdening students with my own problems, but I have found that sharing a limited amount of the worry and stress in my own life has created a two-way street of empathy.
- It has also created a stronger collaborative relationship with students, which is helpful in remote clinical instruction where we are talking to our computers.
- Sometimes distractions can be engagement. I did my best to keep my dogs away from the computer while I zoomed, lest it seem like my household is out of control. That is, until one instance during a tense prep session for a negotiation competition when my dog started chasing her tail behind me. It broke the tension, and as the student said, “that was the high point of [her] day.”
- I learned that, in a way, vulnerability can be as important to credibility as confidence.

Further Reading:

- Ashley Fetters, “What to Ask Instead of ‘How Are You?’ During a Pandemic,” The Atlantic, April 24, 2020
<https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2020/04/should-i-still-say-how-are-you-during-a-pandemic/610639/>

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