

# Practical Tips for Elementary Music Classroom Management That Aren't Just "Build Relationships"

After 20 years in the music classroom, I've heard the same advice on repeat: *"Just build relationships."*

Of course, relationships matter. But when you teach 500+ students on a rotating schedule, you're not going to bond deeply with every single one. You need strategies that work *now*, that don't depend on deep rapport or perfect classroom conditions. Here are three practical, relationship-adjacent tips to help manage your elementary music classroom in 2025.

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## 1. Be Authentic (Even With Kindergarteners)

Music teachers often feel pressured to perform a sugary-sweet persona—especially with the younger grades, but kids, even the littlest ones, have an incredible radar for insincerity. Use your natural voice. If you're not the bubbly type, that's okay. Be warm, clear, and genuine. You're teaching children, not puppies.

Authenticity fosters trust. If you're calm and consistent in how you show up—even when giving directions—they'll mirror your tone. And if you mess up? Name it and move on. It models what real humans do.

*Bonus Music Tie-In:* Use your natural vocal inflection when giving tonal directions (e.g., "singing voice," "whisper voice"). It's another way to reinforce authentic communication *and* musical concepts.

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## 2. Be Consistent (With Systems and Your Word)

As a music teacher, you inherit behavior patterns from every homeroom teacher—and the inconsistencies that come with them. That's why **predictability is your superpower**. It reduces anxiety and sets the tone for learning.

- Use the same procedure every time you enter/exit the classroom, play games, pass out instruments, etc.
- Give the same cue every time you want them to form a circle, go to Orff instruments, get into a particular dance formation, etc.
- Set visual expectations like CHAMPS, or a call-and-response pattern that students can internalize.

*2025 Reminder:* Routines matter even more now. Students are recovering from years of inconsistent school structures. They thrive with clear, repeatable systems—especially in your once-a-week, high-energy class.

And let's talk follow-through: If you say you're going to do something, *do it*. Don't bluff consequences. They'll stop believing you. Whether it's stopping a game early, moving seats, or rewarding a job well done—*mean what you say*.

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## 3. Be Respectful (Even When You're Tired)

Respect is not earned from kids; it's modeled by adults. That doesn't mean you never get firm—it means you never forget that the child is still learning how to be human. And in music, where self-expression and impulse control collide, respect has to lead every interaction.

- Avoid sarcasm or power struggles (especially with neurodivergent students).
- Give space for chatter—sometimes they just need to be heard before they can sing.
- Use calm phrasing: *"I see you're upset. I'll wait."* or *"Let's take a reset."*

*In Crisis?* De-escalate first, solve later. Defiance is usually the tip of a deeper iceberg. Keep safety first—for them and the rest of the class. Document calmly, notify the team, and release the guilt. That's not giving up. That's protecting everyone's right to learn.

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## Final Thoughts

If classroom management feels like a daily battle, try adjusting your tone, tightening your routines, or stepping back to ask, *“What energy am I bringing into this room?”*  
Building relationships isn’t the only way forward. Respect, consistency, and authenticity are all part of classroom culture. They’re tools you can use *even if you never learn all 500 names*.

Happy 2025-2026 school year! Remember, we can’t be effective teachers alone. Join a teacher community such as this one, find your people, and be ready to show up to make music with tiny humans!

**Sing! Say! Dance! Play! Care!**

– Analisa