LEADING BESIDE™

STUDENT REFUSAL QUICK-RESPONSE GUIDE

A simple 6-step routine for the moment a student says, “I’m not doing it.”

FREE TEACHER RESOURCE

A quick-reference guide for special education, resource, intervention, and middle-school teachers.

1 PAUSE

Keep your voice calm and your language brief. Avoid turning the moment into a long argument.

Try: “I can see you're having difficulty getting started. Let's figure out the first step.”

2 CHECK

Before assuming the reason, check the task. Does the student understand what to do? Is the amount manageable? Does the student know how to begin?

Ask: “What part feels difficult?”

3 CHUNK

Reduce the immediate starting demand. Focus on one small, clear step rather than the entire assignment.

Try: “You don't need to finish everything right now. Let's start with number one.”

4 CHOOSE

Offer two appropriate options. Choice can give the student a predictable way to begin without creating an open-ended negotiation.

Try: “Would you like to start with the reading or the first question?”

5 COMMUNICATE

Give the student a way to request help, clarification, a planned break, or another appropriate support.

Try: “Tell me what you need to get started.”

6 DOCUMENT

If refusal happens repeatedly, record what happened before, what the student did, what support was provided, and what happened next.

Look for patterns—not assumptions.

WHAT TO SAY IN THE MOMENT

Keep your response brief, neutral, and focused on the next manageable step.

INSTEAD OF…

“You need to do your work.”
Try: “Let's figure out what part feels difficult.”

“You're wasting time.”
Try: “Let's use the time we have to complete the first step.”

“I've already explained this.”
Try: “Let me explain the first step another way.”

“Why aren't you doing anything?”
Try: “What do you need to begin?”

QUICK CHOICES

START WITH ME

“Let's do the first one together.”

START WITH ONE

“Choose one question to begin.”

SEE AN EXAMPLE

“Would an example help you start?”

TAKE A PLANNED BREAK

“Use your planned break, then we'll choose the next step.”

A 30-SECOND TEACHER CHECK

☐ Does the student understand the direction?
☐ Does the student know how to begin?
☐ Is the task too large or unclear?
☐ Is an appropriate accommodation or support needed?
☐ Can I reduce the immediate starting demand?
☐ Can I offer two appropriate choices?

Remember: A refusal is an observation—not an explanation by itself. Consider the task, context, student communication, and patterns over time.

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WHEN REFUSAL KEEPS HAPPENING

Use this mini-checklist to move from a single difficult moment toward a clearer pattern.

LOOK AT THE TASK

☐ What subject or activity was the student doing?
☐ Was the task independent or supported?
☐ Was the task long, unfamiliar, or multi-step?
☐ Did the student have the skills needed to begin?
☐ Were applicable accommodations available?

LOOK AT THE PATTERN

☐ Does refusal happen at a particular time?
☐ Does it happen with particular types of assignments?
☐ Does it happen after a specific classroom event?
☐ Does the student request help, a break, or a different activity?
☐ What happens after the refusal?

QUICK NOTES

Task: _____

What happened before? _____

What did the student do? _____

Support provided: _____

What happened next? _____

Possible pattern to watch: _____

WANT THE COMPLETE TOOLKIT?

The Student Work-Refusal Toolkit includes ready-to-use student checklists, choice boards, task-chunking pages, work-initiation tracking, observation forms, teacher scripts, student reflection, and implementation tools.

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Practical. Inclusive. Resourceful.

Created by Dr. Vevian D. Salahid

Full toolkit: _____

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