

THE NEW TEACHER'S ADVANTAGE

A GUIDE TO HELP NEW TEACHERS FIND QUICK SUCCESS
IN THE CLASSROOM



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Understanding and Responding to Classroom Misbehavior

All teachers, regardless of their management skills, are challenged by student misbehavior: both in understanding it and responding to it. Classroom discipline problems can cause any teacher to re-think why he went into the profession. In fact, it is one of the main reasons why many educators leave their jobs. Acquiring good student management skills can help prevent the feeling of frustration and disillusionment and help you to become a more confident and effective teacher.

Discipline problems in most classrooms range from minor to major. Fortunately, most misbehavior falls into the minor category and includes such problems as students being late to class, talking out of turn, wasting time, bringing drink or food into the classroom, etc. Major incidents include fighting, insubordination, swearing, dishonesty, vandalism, etc. Many of these latter incidents occur outside the classroom. However, when they take place in your classroom there is nothing better than a well-prepared response. Knowing what you will do in these situations can help address the problem, keep it from escalating and perhaps prevent it from occurring the next time.

Bullying is a discipline problem that has recently received a good deal of attention and requires sensitivity by all teachers. Bullying is a problem every teacher must be prepared and willing to address. The results of bullying can be severe. Victims become depressed and perhaps look to retaliation or school withdrawal as their own solution to the problem.

On the extreme end of the discipline continuum are school shootings. These incidents have left both educators and students concerned for their safety. All teachers should be aware of their school's "emergency guidelines" and be part of the team that listens carefully to students and reports information that could head off a tragedy.

The good news is that very few students pose serious discipline problems: the majority follow rules, cooperate with staff and get the most from their school experiences. Even students who misbehave do so only infrequently and most of their misdeeds are minor ones. However, the more you learn *why* students misbehave and how you should respond to the misbehavior, the more productive and effective you will be as a teacher.



Why should educators be so concerned about good

student management? There are many reasons. First, classroom misbehavior interferes with the flow of classroom activities: it disrupts the learning process. It has been estimated that approximately one-half of all classroom time is taken up with activities *other than* instruction. Discipline problems are responsible for a good portion of lost teaching and learning time.

Second, discipline problems multiply quickly. A teacher with weak management skills soon discovers that even some of the better behaving students are starting to get into trouble. It is not long before this teacher is at the mercy of a large group of misbehaving students. Little if anything gets accomplished in this classroom. Complaints by students and parents soon follow.

Additionally, we have never seen a teacher evaluation device that didn't, in some way, address the "maintenance of classroom discipline." The fastest way to find your job in jeopardy is to be judged "unsatisfactory" on this item. Principals realize that without good classroom management students can't learn and teachers can't teach. Even if the teacher is an expert in his content area, all is lost when there is a lack of control. A lack of classroom control is an indicator that the students hold the teacher in low regard.



Finally, it is hard to earn the respect of your colleagues if your classroom is poorly managed. How you handle your students affects the success of the overall school discipline program. Your colleagues know this. Middle and high school teachers fear that students in a poorly managed class will come to them expecting to act the same way. Colleagues are often reluctant to cover a class for a teacher who has discipline problems. Not many teachers like to give up a plan period to be an internal substitute, especially if they know the class they are going to is unruly.

As a teacher, you have the responsibility to meet the academic needs of your students. In most cases these needs are varied and complex. Teachers who spend too much time managing the behavior of their students find they have little energy to devote to creating and teaching good lessons. Discipline problems stifle creativity for both the teacher and the students. The teacher with few student management skills is often frustrated and ineffective.

The purpose of this guide is to provide an overview of why students misbehave and what we believe are the best ways to prevent as well as respond to misbehavior. Our goal is to help you enjoy your job as a teacher and reap the rewards that come from

interacting with students in an instructional setting. Without good student management skills this goal is not possible.

The Nature of Misbehavior

Why do students misbehave in the first place? Answers to this question aren't always obvious. Perhaps if there was time to know each student personally, answers to this question might come more easily. Large class sizes, multiple teaching preparations, and an abundance of paperwork make it difficult to know students well enough to understand what lies behind the misbehavior of every student.

There are many reasons why students misbehave. Some misbehave because of problems at home. Tension between parents can cause some students to act out at school. Separation, divorce, alcoholism, drug abuse and other stressful situations may trigger misbehavior. As a teacher, one can't be expected to change a student's life outside of school but one can try to understand it. This understanding may help you work with the student more effectively.

Some students don't comply with school rules because they find the class work too difficult or, in some cases, too easy. These students are either frustrated with the difficulty of the work or they feel unchallenged. In either case, the results can be the same: boredom, distraction and misbehavior.

Perhaps the most difficult students to reach are those who have already given up on themselves. They are behind in their grades and/or credits and strike out at will. Many are angry at the world and act with little regard to the consequences. Even veteran teachers find these students a challenge.



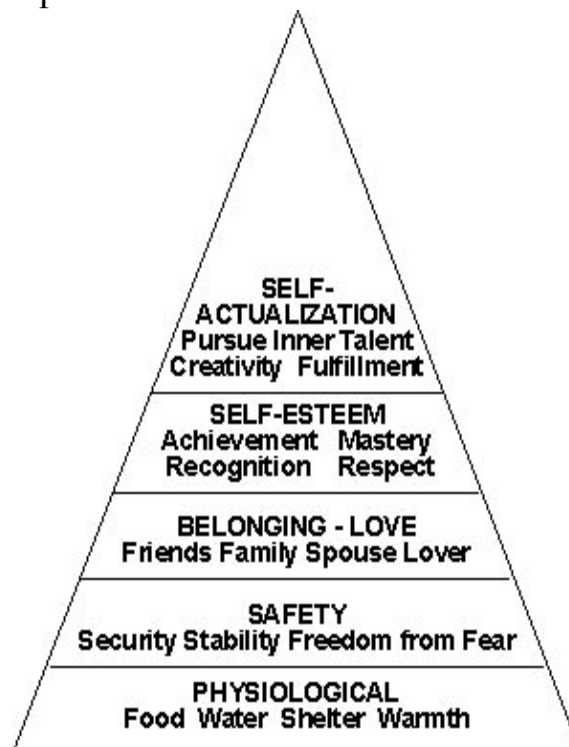
There are many formal theories about why students misbehave. Adlerian psychologists believe that students misbehave to achieve one of four inappropriate goals. The goals are to gain attention, seek power, seek revenge or avoid failure. It is theorized that when students are not accepted by behaving positively, they resort to misbehavior to achieve their goal.

Abraham Maslow was a psychologist and a behavior scientist. His “Hierarchy of Needs Theory” was first presented in 1943. His concepts were offered as general explanations of human behavior. Maslow arranged needs in a hierarchy. He delineated five levels of needs: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem and self-actualization. One need does not have to be fully satisfied before the next one emerges.

Understanding human basic needs help to explain all types of behaviors, from good to bad. Basic needs must be met before anyone, including students, can be motivated to be self-disciplined, much less inspired to study, be respectful and achieve academic goals.

Don’t forget about the connection between student physiological needs and behavior. To perform well students need proper nutrition and rest. Many students, regardless of the monetary standing of their families, come to school hungry. Proper nutrition helps promotes good behavior and learning.

Some students don’t come to school adequately rested. Televisions in bedrooms make it easy for students to watch late night shows instead of getting needed sleep. Student access to phones and computers (instant messaging, chat rooms, etc.) also make it easy for late night conversations with friends. You may find that a tired student is one who is on edge and quick to lose his temper.



What is an Effective Classroom Discipline Plan?

Most schools have schoolwide discipline plans where rules apply equally to all within the building. These rules are often created by a cooperative effort of the administration, teachers, and in some cases, parents and students. In most school districts the plan is reviewed yearly and approved by the board of education.

These rules are usually compiled in a handbook and serve as formal notice to all within the school as to what behavior is expected. Most handbooks list specific rule violations and spell out consequences for each infraction. It is not uncommon for the administration to ask for students to acknowledge receipt and understanding of the contents of the handbook through a signature. Some schools also have parents sign the book indicating they have read the rules. The signatures indicate the student and/or parents are aware of the rules should there later be a contention that the rule was not communicated.



If the school has rules, why does an individual teacher also need his own set of classroom discipline rules? These classroom rules are first, a reminder to the students in your class that you *enforce* the rules of the school and second, it allows you to tailor the overall school rules to meet the specific needs in your classroom. For example, there may be a general school rule stating that students be respectful at all times, but you may feel there is need for a more specific definition as it applies to your classroom. In this case, you want to make certain students know they are not allowed to talk back or make fun of a classmate. Specific classroom rules that are derived from the general rules of respect and responsibility are safe to institute as long as the rules and the consequences are reasonable.

Many experts believe the best discipline plan is one of prevention. We know that prevention starts with good lessons plans, solid implementation, continuous assessment of learning and the maintenance of a positive learning environment. It is indisputable that students perform best when the instructor teaches engaging lessons, maintains momentum, manages transitions well, maintains group focus and creates a student-centered classroom. Yet good teaching doesn't prevent all discipline problems. Rules are still needed and must be communicated and consistently enforced to keep discipline problems at a minimum. Rules provide students with needed behavioral

boundaries.

Classroom discipline plans don't need to be complex. The fewer rules you have, the easier it will be for your students to understand and conform to them. Be careful not to provide for too much student input since students tend to suggest rules that are too strict and consequences that are too severe. Rules should be posted in the classroom to inform and to remind all students of your expectations. They must also be applied fairly and consistently.

How we work with students is shaped by our belief of how students learn and behave. We either see students as passive and in need of a great deal of structure or active and motivated with a need for few rules. The teacher who views students as the latter uses encouragement and empowerment to get results while the teacher who sees students as passive uses threats and control to get results.



If you are new to teaching it is a good idea to consult with a colleague before finalizing a discipline plan for your classroom. Veteran teachers are experienced and have a sense of what works and what doesn't work. Also make certain your discipline plan is congruent with the overall school rules. For example, if chewing gum is permitted in your building you don't want to have a classroom rule that forbids it (exceptions may be made for classes like band and chorus) and you don't want to have a rule that allows it if there is a school rule against it. You should review your discipline plan with the principal. Don't forget to give each new student who is assigned to your class his own copy of the plan.

A good classroom discipline plan may consist of only five or six rules and consequences. The first rule should be "follow all school rules." Your plan should only include behavior-related infractions. It is improper to itemize academic or procedural expectations or problems on your discipline plan. Try to avoid having a rule about forgetting your pencil or your homework assignment. See the appendix for sample classroom discipline plans by grade levels.

Make certain your classroom rules are not too lenient or too harsh. It is important that your class rules are supported by your colleagues as well as your principal.

Clearly stated consequences are an important part of any effective classroom discipline plan. These consequences should have provisions for repeat offenses. For example, if you have a rule against your students running in the classroom you may want to issue a warning on the first offense but have the consequence be more severe for additional running infractions. A consequence can be just as effective when it involves giving up a privilege such as recess, free time or computer time.

In addition to making the student serve time after school or give up a privilege, it is a good idea to have him *reflect* about his mistake. This reflection should include goal setting. Have the student complete an exercise created by you that includes information about why it is wrong to run in the classroom, what might happen if he runs, and ways to prevent the behavior—including goal setting. A tailored lesson of this nature serves as a logical consequence since it allows the student to make a connection between his improper choice and the action being taken.

It is not always easy to devise logical and meaningful consequences for misbehavior. The Advantage Press has designed a series of lessons for elementary, middle school and high school students that are reflective and offer logical consequences for student misbehaviors.

The Advantage Press has prepared lessons that serve as a positive consequence for negative behavior. These lessons require students to read about why certain behaviors are unacceptable. Fictional characters exhibiting similar behavior problems are presented so students can understand the cause of the misbehavior, consequences of the misbehavior and how to improve. These discipline packets require students to write answers to questions about what they did, what they read, why rules exist, why they violated the rule and ways they can improve, including a section on goal setting.



(Free samples are available at <http://www.AdvantagePress.com>)

Advantages to using this pre-packaged set of discipline packets include:

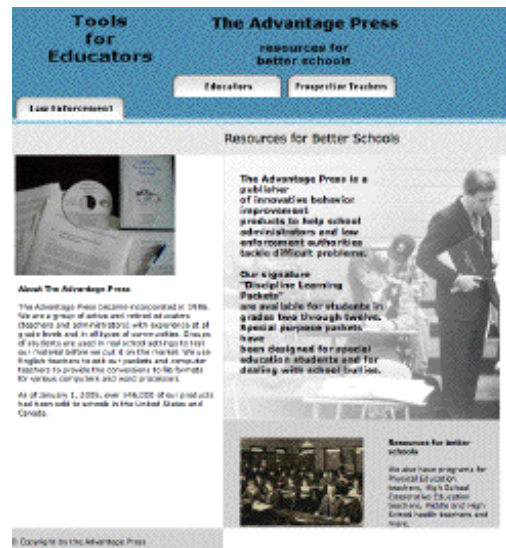
- All students face the same consequences for the same offense
- Students will no longer associate wasting time or doing homework with being disciplined

- Discipline will be fair, consistent and related to the misbehavior
- Packets provide talking points to conference with the wrongdoer about his actions
- Lessons reinforce reading and writing skills

You can order discipline lessons for your classroom by visiting:
<http://www.AdvantagePress.com>

or by calling 630-960-5305. Lessons are available on CD or in three-ring binders ready for use. In addition, bully and motivation packets are also available.

To make your classroom discipline plan more effective you should provide students an outline of your classroom procedures. Procedures also help to establish order by letting students know how things get accomplished in your classroom. These procedures may include a simple listing of what students should do when they enter your classroom, leave it, forget to bring a pencil or pen or their book, want to sharpen a pencil, want to ask a question, turn in a paper, etc. Clear procedures add to an orderly and productive classroom and make it easier for students to meet expectations.



Introducing Your Classroom Discipline Plan

Now that you have carefully written your classroom discipline plan and the day-to-day operating procedures for your classroom, it is time to share it with your students. This should be done the first day of school. Simply tell your students that you want to review your expectations of them while they are in your class. State each rule and procedure and provide your reason for including it. Explain how rules and procedures are necessary for the classroom to operate properly. Mention how cooperation with all rules is essential if students are to get the most out of their experience with you. Tell your students you have confidence in their ability to follow the rules and procedures explain how they will make it easier for everyone to enjoy their experiences in the classroom. You may also want to state that classroom rules will ensure everyone will be treated fairly.

Post your rules and procedures on your bulletin board and refer to them when you need to reprimand a student or have a classroom discussion about expectations. It is also important to review your rules and procedures with each new student after the first day of school.

Finally, to make your discipline plan and your classroom procedures work well, don't forget about reinforcement. Let students know when you appreciate their behavior. Acknowledge the fact that they caught on quickly to the classroom procedures and point out how well the class operates because of their cooperation. This approach accentuates your desire to focus on their successes and not their mistakes. It's important to remember the rules apply to you as well as your students. This means you should be on time and prepared to teach a meaningful lesson every day. If you don't set the example, your expectations will probably not be realized.

To summarize:

- Prepare good lessons
- Execute them in a stimulating and engaging manner
- Have confidence in yourself
- Establish a handful of rules with logical and meaningful consequences
- Keep parents informed of your instructional and discipline plan
- Outline routine procedures for your students



If you can accomplish these, the chances are good that you will be able to keep discipline problems in your classroom to a minimum.

Responding to Student Misbehavior

How you respond to a student when a rule is broken can either minimize or escalate the problem. As the adult in the equation, you are the one who is expected to take appropriate action. Your responses, depending on the severity of the misbehavior, will range from passive to aggressive. You should think of this range as existing on a continuum, with a passive response and an aggressive response on opposite ends.

Passive Response

Moderate Response

Aggressive Response

Passive Teacher Responses

Doing nothing in response to a minor infraction is always an option. Ignoring some minor misbehavior may be all that is needed for a student's self-correction to occur. Some students can make this correction within a few seconds. For instance, some students will stop talking and get back on task as soon as they realize you notice them. Your glance is all that is necessary.

In some cases the misbehavior may only require only a pause in the lesson and eye contact. For example, when a student is not paying attention to what you are saying, simply stopping what you are doing and establishing eye contact for a few moments may be enough intervention to get the student back on track.

Other types of minor misbehavior may require a combination of strategies on your part. If a student who was talking and then stopped later decided to turn around in his seat and talk again, then you should pause the lesson, establish eye contact and move closer to the student. Most students will sense your change in position and demeanor and re-engage. Placing your hand on the student's desk or book can also be quite effective in getting the student to self-correct. We do not recommend touching a student. Verbal and non-verbal strategies work in most cases.



Although the misbehavior may have been minor, a follow-up with the student after class or after school is

still recommended. Sometimes only a few words like “I noticed you were talking a couple of times today instead of working. It really is to your advantage to stay focused on the lesson. I want you to learn and you can’t learn when you are talking.”

Focus on the misbehavior and ways the problem can be solved. Private conferences with students seem to have the best effect on all types of misbehavior. Later we will talk about how to structure student-teacher conferences to achieve the best outcomes.

Moderate Teacher Responses/Strategies

Moderate strategies require a firmer stance since the misbehavior is more serious or is repeated. This doesn’t mean, however, that you shouldn’t continue to show interest in and concern for the misbehaving student. All students should be treated with respect and dignity regardless of their mistake.

Several examples of moderate teacher responses to misbehavior will follow as a way to illustrate what are considered to be good teacher responses.

If two students are arguing and interrupting the class, your intervention should have several components. The tone of your voice, eye-contact, proximity and self-confidence are all important. Walk quickly to the two students and call them by name. Say in a firm but confident voice, “This argument is keeping us from learning. It must stop now so that we can go on with the lesson. I want both of you to see me after class.”



When you meet with the students after class, talk to them about the consequence, which should include reporting to your classroom after school and working on a reflective discipline exercise that focuses on the disruptive behavior. It is not a good idea to permit students to do homework while being detained with you. You don’t want to have them believe that school work is the punishment. The discipline exercise should help the student understand the nature of the conflict and what they can do to prevent a re-occurrence.

When two students have a conflict it is a good idea to let the school counselor or social worker know about it. Many schools have conflict resolution programs that are quite successful in resolving student differences.

A moderate response is also required for the mildly disrespectful student. The student

may say something like “this is lesson is a joke. I don’t know why you bother teaching us this stuff.” This type of comment shouldn’t be ignored and requires a quick response. Establish eye contact with the student and, with a strong, compelling voice, say “What you said was disrespectful and the comments must stop now. I expect all students to be respectful at all times. See me after class.” Again, have the student report to you after school to complete a reflective lesson on disrespect and hold a follow-up discussion to review his work.

If this is a repeat offense or a personal verbal attack a school administrator should become involved as more progressive discipline measures may be needed.

Aggressive Teacher Responses/Strategies

Aggressive teacher responses or strategies are needed when the behavior is more severe. Always stay professional with the student. Try not to become emotional as this could impact the type of student response. Yelling, threatening or using guilt-inducing statements only reduces the chance for the student to comply. In fact, when confronting more serious types of offenses, the more under control you are, the sooner the misbehaving student will gain control.

Some serious misbehaviors may require notifying or sending a referral to the administration. Check with your school administration on school guidelines.

The following are more serious behaviors that every teacher may have to confront:

Cheating

When you catch someone cheating on a quiz or a test you have to decide when and how you want to deal with the student. You can walk over to the student and take his test, accuse him of cheating and say something like, “You know Tom, you will receive a zero on this quiz because you were cheating.” When you do this the student may counter with, “No, I wasn’t cheating!” Then you enter into a debate with the student in front of the class about whether Tom was cheating.



It may be better to let the student continue to take the test and then confront him after class or after school. You can say, “Tom I saw you being dishonest and therefore, I can’t give you any credit for the test. Furthermore, I want you to report to me after school for a detention on Tuesday.” During Tom’s detention is a good time to ask him why he was being dishonest and to explain to him why honesty is important. Again,

have him work on a reflective exercise about his rule violation so you can discover why he was dishonest and what he plans to do about it.

If dishonesty is a reason for suspension in your school, tell Tom when you meet with him after school that it is school policy that you make a referral to the administration. After administrative action you still need to conference with Tom.

Profanity

Profanity or swearing is not only a violation of your classroom rules, it most assuredly violates a school rule. Your approach should be one that de-escalates the problem by being firm but professional. Control any negative emotions you may have even if the student directed his words at you. A de-escalating response might include: “Karen I know you are aware that what you have said is not acceptable in school. Stop swearing now and see me after class.” By not becoming emotionally entangled, your response lets the student know that you can’t be manipulated by her insults.



In some cases a student may continue to swear. At this time you should refer the student to the office immediately. If you have a phone or intercom you can contact the office and indicate who you are sending to the office and state that a referral will follow. Write the referral and send it with another student to the office so that the administrator knows exactly what happened.

If the student stops swearing upon your request you can tell him to see you after class. At this point it becomes a judgment call about whether you handle the problem or refer it. If the swearing was directed at a person then you will want to make a referral.

Disobeying

Disobeying a teacher or being insubordinate is a major rule infraction. This is a situation where the student, through his actions or lack of them, is defying your request. For example, a student who takes the wrong seat and then refuses to move is being insubordinate. This type of behavior requires an immediate response. You should calmly walk to the student and address him by name saying, “I have asked you to move to another seat, are you refusing my request?” If the student doesn’t move, then say in a confident and commanding way, “If you will not do as I ask there will be serious consequences.” Then write a referral and send it to the office with another student.

Holding Meaningful Teacher-Student Conferences

Student misbehavior is not only a teaching challenge but can also be seen as a teaching opportunity. This is why consequences should include a reflective element. To learn and to change should be a goal of every discipline problem. Reflective lessons with follow-up conferences are the best way to achieve this result.

A good conference will focus on the misbehavior, not the student's character. It also gives you an opportunity to explain why the behavior is not acceptable and to re-state your expectations. A personal conference will give the student an opportunity to recognize his mistake and set goals to prevent re-occurrences. Keeping a student after school for a detention or conference should be preceded by office and parent notification.

Teacher-Student conferences allow the student a chance to explain why he acted as he did and to apologize for the wrongdoing. Reflective exercises like those published by the Advantage Press give the student a chance to explain his behavior and to write behavior improvement goals. You should review the goals and reinforce them when positive behavior occurs.

When a student becomes a repeat offender you should try to understand what is motivating him to misbehave. Think about which of his needs are not being met and what the student is trying to compensate for when he misbehaves.



When the conference ends, your work is not complete. Look for ways to get to know the student. Often you can forge a better connection with the student by getting to know him better. Is there an interest in sports, music, fashion or some other activity? If the student plays on a school athletic team try attending a game and mention later how much you enjoyed watching him play. Often, these personal approaches will open lines of communication. Students seem to do their best with teachers who are understanding and take a personal interest in them.

Finally, follow-up with parents in a positive way. Let them know about the

misbehavior and what the consequences were. Don't forget to tell them that their help will be appreciated in getting their student back on track. If you get in the habit of communicating positive achievement or actions about a student it will be easier to talk with parents when a mistake is made.

The following is a list of ways not to respond to misbehavior. Understanding what not to do can help you decide what might be a better choice when you must discipline.

Ways Not to Respond to Misbehavior

1. Don't issue ultimatums like "I never want to see you back in my room again."
2. Don't punish the entire class for the misbehavior of a few.
3. Don't assign manual labor as the punishment (such as having a student clean the floor or desks) unless it relates to the wrongdoing itself. Get administrative approval before assigning such tasks.
4. Don't make a student stay after your class if it will make him late for the next class.
5. Don't remove a student from your room by having him sit in the hallway or another unsupervised location.
6. Don't take student misbehavior personally and don't respond to it emotionally.
7. Don't back a student into a corner. This only invites the unexpected.
8. Don't plead with a student or bribe him into compliance. Tangible rewards for good behavior usually don't work long term.
9. Don't exaggerate the wrongdoing.
10. Don't bring unrelated events into the discipline situation at hand.
11. Don't have double standards or play favorites.
12. Don't ignore misbehavior. If you think an action is wrong, address it.
13. Don't enforce some rules but not others. Be consistent.

14. Don't degrade, embarrass or insult a student.
15. Don't talk about the misbehavior of one student to other students.

Sample Elementary School Discipline Plan

Rules and Consequences

1. Follow all school rules as published in the handbook
Consequence: See school handbook
2. Raise your hand to speak and wait to be called upon
Consequence: First Offense: Warning
Second Offense: Miss recess or other privilege
Third Offense: Stay after school
3. Ask for permission to leave your seat
Consequence: First Offense: Warning
Second Offense: Miss recess or other privilege
Third Offense: Stay after school
4. Always do your own work
Consequence: First Offense: Warning
Second Offense: Stay after school
Third Offense: Referral to the office
5. Be polite. Rude behavior is prohibited
Consequence: First Offense: Warning
Second Offense: Miss recess or other privilege
Third Offense: Stay after school
6. Keep your hands and feet to yourself
Consequence: First Offense: Warning
Second Offense: Miss recess or other privilege
Third Offense: Stay after school
7. Do not make fun of other students or try to exclude them
Consequence: First Offense: Warning
Second Offense: Stay after school
Third Offense: Referral to the office

Sample Middle School Discipline Plan

Rules and Consequences

1. Follow all school rules as published in the handbook
Consequence: See school handbook
2. Be to class and in your assigned seat on time
Consequence: First Offense: Warning
Second Offense: Stay after school
Third Offense: Referral to the office
3. If you wish to speak, raise your hand and wait to be called upon
Consequence: First Offense: Warning
Second Offense: Stay after school
Third Offense: Referral to the office
4. Do not leave your seat without permission
Consequence: First Offense: Warning
Second Offense: Stay after school
Third Offense: Referral to the office
5. Do not embarrass or exclude another student
Consequence: First Offense: Warning
Second Offense: Stay after school
Third Offense: Referral to the office
6. Do not bring drink or food to the classroom
Consequence: First Offense: Food or drink discarded
Second Offense: Stay after school
Third Offense: Referral to the office
7. Do not use combs, brushes or make-up during class
Consequence: First Offense: Warning
Second Offense: Stay after school
Third Offense: Referral to the office

Preventing Classroom Misbehavior

In the perfect classroom, discipline problems don't occur and all students earn straight A's. Recognizing that the perfect classroom does not exist, this chapter provides you with some ideas on how you can keep discipline problems to a minimum. It is essential that you institute some good preventative measures. Sometimes, simply good teaching skills will keep misbehavior to a minimum.

Your Discipline Plan at Work

There is little doubt that a good lesson plan, content mastery and excellent execution will prevent most discipline problems. Additional preventative action can be taken by effectively implementing your classroom discipline plan.

Make your discipline plan work for you by being clear about your expectations and consistent with how you address and correct misbehavior. It is important that you review your posted discipline plan with your classes every three or four weeks. Don't forget about new students. Classroom rules and procedures need to be covered with them if you expect consistent compliance.

When implementing your discipline plan you should address problems promptly and confidently as they arise. To do otherwise will only cause additional problems. Don't ask your students for compliance. Make a straightforward statement that is to the point and that addresses the behavior. For example, don't say "Bob, don't you think it would be a good idea if you stopped being such a chatter box?" Instead, be direct: "Bob, stop talking now. You are interfering with the lesson." With this statement you have directed him to stop what he is doing and provided a reason why it is wrong to be disruptive.



Your discipline plan also works best by modeling expectations. For example, if one of your classroom rules states that all students must be in class before the bell rings, make certain *you* are never late. Students learn more about rules and standards by watching you than by reading the rules you have written.

Applying classroom rules fairly and consistently is a must if you want good student

discipline. If you reprimand Bob for talking, then you must do the same for all other students who talk without permission. The fastest way to have students lose respect for you and your rules is to be a poor role model.

A Positive Approach

How you view yourself and your students greatly influences how they see and react to you. If you are an up-beat person who believes in yourself and your students the chances are good that they will follow your lead. Teachers who are pessimistic and don't believe that students can be successful rarely affect their students in a positive way. Students do best when they are led by a positive and a forward-looking person.

You can be a positive influence on students in a number of ways. Try to create meaningful and inspiring lessons, be aware of different learning needs, have high standards and still demonstrate compassion. Start with knowing every student's name. Then use their name when calling on them. A good way to start is by asking them what name they would like to be called. Does Matthew prefer Matt? Does Madeline prefer Maddy?

Discover your students' interests. Does Matt like playing baseball and soccer? Does Maddy enjoy painting or cheerleading? By maintaining an interest in a student's broader life you help to open lines of communication. When students believe you know them and care about their lives beyond the classroom, they are more likely to talk with you about the trouble they're having with math or science.

If you ask most people what they liked best about their favorite teacher they often say that she was "understanding." If you probe further and ask them to describe what they mean by "understanding," they offer such explanations as:

1. "He knew me as a person."
2. "There was a connection."
3. "He treated me with respect."
4. "She was there for me when I needed someone to talk to."
5. "She challenged me but never made me feel inadequate."
6. "He recognized and reinforced me when I did well."

This list could go on but you can see what we are getting at here, it is important to accept your students for who they are and provide encouragement for them to do their best.

Don't forget to recognize the whole class when things are going well. Stop for a

moment and recognize the efforts of the group. You can begin a lesson by saying, “Before we start our new lesson today, I wanted to tell everyone how pleased I was with the way this class grasped what we learned yesterday. I really appreciated our class discussion yesterday, it was awesome, thanks.”

And when students do get off task, use positive language to help teach the desired behavior. Don’t say, “You did a poor job of finding the adjectives in this paragraph.” Instead say “Here are some more examples of what an adjective is. Now let’s try again finding them in the paragraph. I know you can do this. I’ll come back and check in a few minutes.” This type of language motivates students to do better rather than discourage them from trying again.

Finally, build a sense of community within your classroom. The most powerful reinforcement comes from peers. There needs to be a common expectation that “in this class, we only encourage each other to act in ways that are positive for ourselves and for the others.” Peer influence can be as powerful and perhaps even more powerful than your own positive influence in class. Having students pull together for the common good should be one of your goals as a teacher. This occurs by treating students fairly, respectfully, and professionally on a consistent basis.

When there is a sense of community, students are more likely to achieve self-esteem. Self-esteem is defined as what our unconscious believes to be true about how worthy, lovable, valuable and capable we are. Self-esteem is closely related to self-confidence. If students feel good about themselves they will have the confidence to do their best work, cooperate with others and display their best behavior.



When, How and From Whom to Seek advice with Discipline

Whether you are a new teacher or a veteran, discipline problems can be trying. At times even a thorough self-analysis will be of little help. It is at this time that you should look to find help.

You probably already know someone on staff who handles student discipline well. If you have identified such a person then ask if you can observe him at work in his classroom. The colleague will probably be flattered.

When making your observation, watch how the lesson unfolds and how the teacher talks with students. Does the teacher display confidence? Does she ask for student opinion? Are students called by their names? Is the teacher up-beat and does she treat all students with respect? Is the lesson within reach of all students? Does the teacher vary the pace of the lesson? Are there several activities built into the lesson? Does the teacher establish eye contact with her students? Is she fair and consistent when handling misbehavior? Are there clear expectations for behavior? Do students seem to know the established procedures? When there is misbehavior, does she address it immediately? Does she keep herself from becoming emotionally involved and avoid making threats?

A teacher who is successful in the above areas would be a good role model for any new teacher. When you go back to your classroom you should try to implement some of the skills you observed. Don't try to do everything in one day. You might work on two or three of the areas you want to implement. Once you are successful with these skills work on a few more. The chances are good that you will find your class improving within a couple of weeks.



If you feel awkward about observing another teacher, you might plan to conference with a colleague about classroom discipline. Explain the areas you are working on and ask for advice about how you might improve. The person you are consulting with probably has experienced the same or similar problems during her career. Most teachers find solutions to teaching and discipline hurdles. Listen to the advice and try a few of the suggestions. If they work, try a few more. Make certain you thank your colleague and mention that his suggestions paid off for you.

If your discipline problems are minor, you might consider making an appointment to meet with one of your school administrators. You certainly don't want to give the impression that you are lost when it comes to managing students. That is why it is best to seek advice with a trusted colleague if you need more than tweaking your skills.

Another good source of information about school discipline is available by attending discipline workshops. There are many professional discipline workshops offered by experienced educators. Often the fees for these programs are reasonable and there is an opportunity for audience participation and questions. Colleges and universities in your area may offer a credit course in student discipline.

There are also many good publications on the subject. Check websites of professional organizations such as the National Educators Association (<http://www.nea.org>), or Regional Educational Laboratories (<http://www.relnetwork.org>), to see if discipline information is available. Often it is.

Suggestions for Writing Discipline Referrals

As has been mentioned, not every classroom discipline problem is preventable. When they do occur, some need to be referred to the administration. The following suggestions may be of help when you need to write a Student Discipline Referral. How you write a Student Discipline Referral can make the difference between an ineffective and an effective outcome. Well written documents can assist the accurate, timely and proper processing of discipline referrals. Poorly written referrals can delay action, create confusion, yield the wrong results and reflect negatively on you.

Most Discipline Referral Forms have three parts:

1. Who?
2. What?
3. When?

Many referral forms also include space for the teacher to state what action has been taken previously with the student regarding misbehavior. Good documentation in this section will impact student consequences. If for example, you forget to document that you have spoken to this student twice before about being late to class and have held him after school once, then the administrator may treat case like a first time offense.

Bad Example

“Ellen refused to stay after school for me today.”

Good Example

“On two occasions Ellen refused to stay after school as requested by me. She received a classroom detention on 10/1/05 for being late to class. She failed to appear for the detention. I talked with her and made a phone call home. On 10/3/05 she was then given a 40 minute classroom detention to make up for the detention she didn’t report to. Again she failed to appear.”

Who

Be certain that you provide accurate information about the identity of the student. If others were involved provide their correct names as well. Indicate who the instigator was if possible. Place yourself in the position of the principal or the dean. Make it

easy form them to find the responsible parties.

What

The section of the referral that asks for a description of what occurred is the most important. Here it helps to think like an attorney: If this incident happens to result in some sort of legal action, the narrative will be the focal point of the inquiry. Write neatly and clearly and create a specific description of the behavior you witnessed. What you write should be factually correct and void of emotional statements such as, “this was really a stupid thing for Tom to do,” or “Bobby is nothing but a liar.”

Think about the following examples when you write a referral.

Be factual, to the point and unemotional.

Bad Example:

“John was extremely rude and disrespectful. I don’t want him back in my class until he learns how to behave.”

Good Example:

“While a student was answering a question I had asked, John kept yelling out the answer and then said to the other student, “what do you know about the food pyramid, you’re fifty pounds over-weight!” As the teacher I find this behavior unacceptable.”

Bad Example:

“Steve has been bad again! I can’t take it any more. It seems like every day he does something to bother everybody. The whole class is tired of him and so am I. Maybe he needs to be removed from my class.”

Good Example:

“Steve got out of his seat three times today. He got out of his seat to look out the window, then to talk to another student in the back of the room, and finally to push the books off the top of our bookshelf. He was warned twice to stay in his seat. I held Steve in from recess twice this week for bothering others.”

Make Discipline Referrals Meaningful

It is important that you use discipline referrals sparingly. Use the following guidelines before you write the referral:

1. Have you made an effort to stop the misbehavior?
2. Have there been repeat offenses of the same nature?
3. Is the behavior significant such as fighting, drugs, threats or disobeying?

Other than for these reasons, you should try to handle the problem yourself. Handling it yourself may also include conferencing with the student or conferencing with the student and his parents.

If you have tried your best to resolve the problem and have good documentation then a referral is proper. You don't want your principal to think that you can't handle your own discipline problems. This is why it is important to have good classroom procedures, a good discipline plan and offer engaging lessons—these measures prevent most discipline problems.

Your referral should also include the student's name and grade. Make certain to include the date, time and the location of the incident. If there were other students who witnessed the violation, make sure to include their names, but do so on another sheet of paper. Then attached it to the referral. If all of the students in your class were witnesses then you wouldn't need to list all the names. Many schools prefer you keep "witnesses" or "informants" names off the official referral form.

Bad Example:

"Tracy Hinkle told me she saw Tim Davis and Sharon Baker steal money from Steve Smith's locker."

Good Example:

"It was reported that Tim Davis and Sharon Baker stole money from Steve Smith's locker during the lunch period. (See attached statement from student witness)".

When you write a referral for a student who used inappropriate language you want to be clear about what the student said. Administrators need to know the facts, not guess them. Some schools will ask that you spell out each inappropriate word used. Others will ask you to use abbreviations. Don't

hesitate to ask for guidance on this. Again, treat each referral you write as having the potential of becoming a legal document should there be a need for some type of discipline hearing.

Bad Example:

“Sue called Lynne a bad word.”

Good Example:

“Sue called Lynne a ‘b—ch.’”

When

It is important to get your discipline referrals to the office as soon as possible after the problem has occurred. One of the most important tenants of student management is timeliness: the sooner the problem behavior is discussed and punished, the greater the chances for an effective outcome. Some teachers mistakenly attempt to handle a problem by writing a referral and then placing it on their desk and telling the student “...the next time you misbehave I’m sending this referral to the office.” Put yourself in the principal’s shoes and picture this conversation:

Principal: “This referral says you were late to class. Why were you late?”

Student: “I can’t remember. That was three weeks ago.”

Principal: “Three weeks ago?”

Student: “Yes, today I forgot my pencil.”

Principal: “Oh.”

You can see the problem here. This is why it is important to handle problems as they occur — not weeks later. And it is important to refer problems one at a time — not all thrown together in one behavioral lump sum.

Although the Who, What and When are important in writing your referrals, there is nothing as important as the interventions you implement to prevent having to write a referral in the first place. Before writing that first referral make certain you have exhausted all possible solutions.

1. Have you discussed the problem with the student?
2. Have you conferenced with the student’s other teachers? How are they handling

the problem? Is it working?

3. Have you discussed the problem with the dean, counselor or the social worker?
4. Have you contacted any of the student's teachers from last year?
5. Have you looked at the student's permanent record or folder for clues?
6. Have you tried to remove a privilege like computer time or recess?
7. Have you tried an after school classroom detention?
8. Have you called the parents?
9. Have you had a parent conference?

Remember, solving most of your own classroom discipline problems without administrative intervention will help you create a more positive learning environment in the classroom and earn you the respect and confidence of the school administration. Keep in mind, however, that it is not expected of you to solve such discipline problems as fighting, smoking, gross disrespect, possession of dangerous objects or drugs, etc. on your own. This is the job of the school administration.

Constant use of discipline referrals diminishes your effectiveness in the classroom. Students will quickly assess where the power lies. It's your classroom and you must be the person in control and in charge. If students ever sense you are not, the void will be quickly filled.

