



WHAT YOU MUST KNOW ABOUT... Discipline

BY GINA ALFONSO

While there are no hard and fast solutions to this age-old problem, here are some tips for effective classroom management.

Discipline is a fundamental component in managing a creative but orderly learning environment, and in developing well-rounded students. Here we will discuss some basic practices that are both preventive (instilling self discipline) and rehabilitative (actual disciplining).

POSITIVE DISCIPLINE

Positive discipline entails understanding children and the beliefs that motivate their misbehavior in order to prevent it. Here are two preventive techniques:

1. Encouragement

This is the cornerstone of positive discipline and the key to changing behavior. Encourage an encouraging atmosphere in the classroom by doing the following:

- Put up a classroom banner that says, "People do better when they feel better." Invite students to talk about times when they felt good about themselves and how they behaved while feeling that way. Point out to your students that saying helpful things to one another is appropriate any time.
- Model encouragement; avoid hitting or throwing chalk at students. Before reaching try to understand the reasons why he or she may be disinterested or misbehaving.
- Set up "class meetings" where children can give and receive compliments, bring up and solve class problems, and plan fun events together.

2. Empathy

Students who have empathy and so-

cial interest are less likely to hurt their classmates. They are aware that the world doesn't revolve around their needs and therefore are more likely to look for solutions that satisfy everyone. Here are some ways to teach empathy:

- Involve students in discussions of classroom, community, and government problems. Some of these issues may even be integrated into subject matter if related. Help students see that they have the power and responsibility to address large issues, human rights concerns, and environmental issues in their own small way. Encourage them to plan and carry out projects that can make a difference.
- Model empathy through your own compassionate responses to others. Model social interest through your own concern for all people and for the environment.

CLASSROOM PROBLEMS

Of course, we can't always prevent discipline problems from happening. The key to addressing these is to involve the entire class in conflict resolution. This will have a greater impact on teaching positive behavior and attitudes. It also allows for shared responsibility among all class members. The teacher is not solely responsible for addressing issues and problems. Here are some techniques you can use:

1. Bullying

- Hold a class meeting about bullying. Hearing the opinions of classmates on bullying will usually help the bully understand better the effect

of his actions. Discuss reasons why people, including adults, use bullying behavior and talk about how people usually react to bullies. When they learn to change their response to bullying, it is likely to stop.

- Read stories or assign readings where some characters bully others. Witches, trolls, dragons all disintegrate when other characters stand up to them; note that force or violence is not necessary to deflate those who seem powerful.
- Role-play assertive responses to bullying.



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2. Cheating

- When a student is involved in cheating, speak to him directly. Begin the discussion by naming the behavior you observed (“I noticed you cheated on this test”) instead of trying to trick him into a confession. Then invite him to work with you on a solution so that he can succeed without cheating.
- If possible, avoid giving tests that require memorization of facts that will be forgotten in a year (or immediately!) Let students test each other (when ready) on subjects that require memorization, such as multiplication tables.
- Hand out a test guide in advance so children know what to study; if they experience success, their confidence will get an extra boost and you lessen the chances of cheating.

3. Fighting

- Teach students that there are respectful and non-violent ways of handling conflicts.
- Intervene in a fight by asking the parties fighting if they want to put their issue on the class meeting agenda.
- Ask if those in a fight

would like some time to cool off their heads. Designate a cool off area where they can sit and regain self-control.

- Offer fighting students the option of sitting down to discuss the issue with you as facilitator.
- After the students have cooled off, ask “how” and “what” questions leading towards “what ideas do you have for solving this problem?”
- If real danger is imminent, just act. If a student is about to throw a rock at another student, for example, move quickly to stop the throwing and send for help. Save the dialogue for later.

Designate a “time-out” corner to allow fighting kids to cool off.

4. Insults

- Invite the students who have been insulting one another to collect data on the number of times they give or receive put-downs. By objectively gathering information, the children can gain perspective. If a student claims, “he always puts me down,” the teacher may ask, “how often is always? Once a day, once an hour, once a minute?” By learning the facts, both students may realize that the problem is smaller or bigger than they had supposed.
- Facilitate a problem-solving meeting with the students involved. Are put-downs being used to gain attention, to show power, or to intimidate a classmate? Using this information, brainstorm for possible solutions.
- Teach that words can hurt. When someone makes a comment that feels mean or hurtful to the person being addressed, it isn't funny. True humor doesn't cause pain.
- Invite the class to look for examples of put-downs in movies, TV shows, books, and magazines, and to share and discuss them with the class. Ask students: “Is this funny or hurtful?” “Why or why not?”

“What's the difference between funny and hurtful?”

5. Stealing

- When something is stolen, share with the class how this makes you feel and give students a chance to share their feelings about the theft.
- Give the student a chance to return what she took by announcing that the class isn't interested in blame; the class just wants the item to be replaced. Announce that you'll wait for the item to be replaced by end of day.
- Invite students to brainstorm on why a classmate might steal. Does this person need friends? Does he need help figuring out how to get what he wants without stealing? This kind of discussion can be enlightening to children who steal.
- Don't ask set-up questions. “Did you steal this?” invites a lie or some other defensive behavior. If you are sure you know who stole something, you might say, “I know you took a wrist watch that didn't belong to you, and I'd like to work on some solutions with you.” You can also say “This doesn't belong to you. Would you like to put it where it belongs, or would you like me to?”
- Remember that stealing doesn't define a person, turning her into “a thief.” Stealing is something a person does, and behavior can be changed.

As teachers, we know that our roles in the classroom are not limited to sharing information with our students. A big part of our role as educators is modeling and teaching children the values essential to being responsible, caring, peace-loving and self-sufficient individuals who are able to face life's challenges. ★

Reference: Positive Discipline, A Teacher's A-Z Guide. By Nelson, Duffy, Escobar, Ortolano and Owen-Sobocki. Prima Publishing, 1996.

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