

Discipline That Works

Classrooms where there are well-defined rules for behaviour that students have helped to create, and where everyone tries to follow the rules, are classrooms where real learning can take place.

There are ways you can help your students remember to follow the rules.

*First, here are some techniques that poor teachers use that **don't work**:*

- raising your voice to get attention ... all the time
- yelling
- insisting on having the last word
- using confrontational body language ... clenched hands, or hands on hips
- using 'put-downs' or sarcasm
- using physical force
- double standards - making students do what you say, not what you do
- bribing students for good behaviour
- making unsubstantiated accusations
- holding a grudge
- nagging
- making comparisons with siblings or other students

Techniques That Work

These are some techniques that good teachers use. They work.

Getting the Attention of the Class

Don't start your lesson until every single student is quiet and listening. Beginning teachers and student teachers sometimes think that by starting to talk to the class, students will settle down and pay attention. Some will. But the ones who *don't* will learn that they always have a little longer to finish their conversations before you have to raise your voice to 'really' start. You are *reinforcing their bad behaviour*.

Instead, insist on total attention from everyone before you begin, *and then wait five seconds*. Start talking in a voice quieter than normal. Students will learn the importance of quiet.

Introducing the Lesson

Students will be better behaved and will stay on task if they know exactly what they'll be learning. Explain what will be happening. Write it on the board. Set times for completion of activities.

Monitor Behaviour When Students Are Working

Experienced teachers know that students who are having trouble with the work will not be able to stay on task, and may start bothering others. Behaviour problems are almost always a result of disengagement with the lesson. Spend a lot of time circulating around the room, making sure everyone knows how to start, helping students as necessary, and letting them know that you are keeping an eye on them.

Remember that when you are helping one student, you must keep monitoring the rest of the class. This is a skill you must practice. Teachers must be good at multitasking!

If possible, try not to interrupt the whole class unless you find a task that several are having difficulty with.

Modeling

Teachers who model good behaviour get it from their students. This includes being courteous, enthusiastic, patient and organized. It also includes using a quiet voice while students are working.

Positive Discipline

Your classroom rules should be positive. Rather than '*No running in the room*', the rule should say '*We walk in our classroom*'. Rather than '*No talking to others during work time*', instead use '*Help your classmates to learn by being as quiet as possible*'. Use praise every time you see good behaviour. This doesn't have to be verbal; once your students get to know you, a smile, a nod or a 'thumbs up' will do just as well.

Your Classroom

Areas of your classroom should be exciting, full of posters and displays that promote curiosity and learning, and which are changed frequently.

Other parts of your room should be quiet areas where students can work or read without distractions.

Include personal items on your desk ... family pictures, or things you have made. Students want to get to know you as a person. Once they do, getting through to them will be much easier.

Intervening Immediately When There Is Misbehaviour

A common technique that *poor* teachers use is to continually threaten punishment over and over again for the same repeated misbehaviour ... usually 'being sent to the office'. When the teacher has finally had enough and *does* send the student, the result is a conversation like the following:

"Barbara, why did the teacher send you to the office?"

"I dunno ... all I did was turn around and ask to borrow Davey's eraser!"

Barbara really doesn't understand. She doesn't realize that it wasn't that particular incident that triggered the office trip, but the whole series of disturbances that led up to it. Like all the students in the room, *she has been conditioned to ignore the teacher's threats about sending them to the office, because they have learned it won't happen until lots of warnings have been given.*

The solution? First of all, the school you are in will expect you to solve your own discipline problems, unless the problems are major. If you are continually sending students to the office for behaviour problems that you should have dealt with yourself, it's *you* who are likely to get into trouble!

As a teacher, you need to expect good behaviour, and deal with problems immediately when they arise. This means stopping your lesson momentarily while you have a quiet word with the offending student.

State your expectations positively. For example, say *"I want you to keep your hands on your desk"* rather than *"Stop tickling Michelle"*.

You might want to be more expressive in your message. Try including how the behaviour makes you feel. For example: *"When you tickle Michelle while I'm teaching, I have to stop so I can talk to you. This makes me sad, because it's an exciting lesson"*.

Continue the lesson only when you are sure he or she understands what is expected.

If you start the year this way, and spend a lot of time correcting problem behaviours as they occur, after a few weeks everyone should 'get it', and things will go more smoothly.

If you continue to experience difficulties with a particular student, and your quiet talks don't seem to be doing any good, there are more things you can do. Begin to document the bad behaviour. Write it down, with the time and date, and describe how it affected the learning of the rest of the class. Talk to your administrators; they will give you suggestions about what to try next. You should also talk to the parents; that's where your documentation will be useful. It will help them to see the full sequence of bad behaviors.