

## Logical and Positive Discipline Methods

Many experienced teachers fall back on verbal corrective behaviour methods that don't really work. They keep using them because they're easy, they're familiar, and they don't take much thought. And ... they don't work very well!

For example, a teacher might say: "*If you can't treat the laptops carefully, you'll just have to sit and watch while we do this project*". Teachers say this kind of thing all the time. I know I do. In fact, sometimes it's how you can tell that someone is a teacher. "Honey, if you keep eating with your mouth open, I'm not going to give you your dessert". Most husbands know what's good for them, and will pay attention!

Unfortunately, students have heard it all before, and they tune out. But what's worse, there is *no motivation for the students to stop the undesired behaviour*; they'll just keep on doing it until the teacher says something else. And then do it some more. What's the worst that can happen?

Eventually the teacher *may* ask them to stop work and sit on the side. But more likely what will happen is that the teacher will remind them a few more times, and then the period will be over, and so why bother listening to what she says, anyway? (or the teacher may get so frustrated that she rips the computer out of the kid's hands and yells a lot. That could be exciting ... it might be worth waiting for!)

Clearly there has to be a better way. Instead of constant nagging, with the threat of something that may or may not materialize, leaving the kids free to ignore you for as long as they think they can get away with it, there's an alternative. Here's what the teacher should have said, right at the beginning of class: "*All of those who can handle the laptops carefully are welcome to join us in the project*".

Do you see the difference? In this case, the comment is positive. It presumes that all students will want to follow the rules. It puts the onus on the students; if they participate, they are signalling that they are choosing to follow those rules. It empowers them, and they are more likely to do what is expected of them. Being part of the class activity is a privilege, and they must accept the responsibility for following the rules if they want to join in.

Most importantly, it's *not a negative statement*, and it's not the same old nagging. This technique works especially well at the Elementary level.

Here are some more examples.

The traditional teacher comment:

*"Please be quiet. It's time to begin".*

The positive alternative:

*"I'll be glad to start as soon as you show me that you are ready".*

This puts the onus on the kids to do something. You're waiting for them, and won't start until they're all ready; it's important to wait for quiet before beginning a lesson.

Here's another example.

The traditional teacher comment:

*"I'm not going to line you up until everyone is quiet".*

The problem? What's the incentive for the kids to stop talking? None. And it's a negative statement.

The positive alternative:

*"I'll be lining people up as soon as it is quiet".*

When the teacher says this, it's clear that she's waiting. The difference is subtle, but this is a positive statement about what the teacher intends to do. It's much more effective.

Want more examples?

The traditional teacher comment:

*"Don't you come back into this room until you can show some respect!"*

All the kid hears is 'Don't come back'! And what if the kid *doesn't really want* to come back? You've just shot yourself in the foot!

The positive alternative:

*"Come back to the room as soon as you are calm".*

The message here is that the teacher wants the student to come back. And once again, the onus is clearly on the student.

One more:

The traditional teacher comment:

*"Don't talk to me in that tone of voice!"*

The negative message the kid hears is 'Don't talk to me'

The positive alternative:

*"I'll listen as soon as your voice is as calm as mine".*

The positive message is 'I'm ready to listen'.

Here's my favourite:

The traditional teacher comment:

*"Don't be late for class".*

The positive alternative:

*"All of those who arrive on time will get to leave class on time".*

Again, positive ... with the hidden suggestion that students will be kept longer to make up time for being late. This may be too subtle for a grade one classroom. High schoolkids get it, especially if you're ever kept the class past the buzzer in the past.

One final example:

The traditional teacher comment:

*"You're not going to stay in this group if you act like that".*

The positive alternative:

*"You may stay with us in the group if you can improve your behaviour".*

Once again, the difference is subtle. But kids quickly catch on to the fact that you have expectations of them. Learning is a privilege that they will be allowed to enjoy, but only if they follow the rules.

Instead of proper behaviour being demanded by the teacher, it's proper behaviour that students know they must exhibit if they want to join in and learn with the others.

Rather than using ineffective traditional 'teacher talk' that kids have heard over and over, use positive phrasing that makes your expectations clear, and puts the onus on the kids to change their behaviour.

Try it. It works!

Additional note:

Kids, especially at the Junior High level, quickly learn that they don't really have to follow the rules if teachers don't follow up and supply consequences.

For example, we had a 'no hats in school' policy similar to many other schools. Some students like to wear their hats in school. A typical lunch break will see a student wearing their hat in the hallway, and a teacher telling them to take it off. And they always do. No big deal.

But the next day, the same student is seen walking down the hall wearing his hat. The same teacher tells him to take it off. He does.

This will go on forever, just like an infinite geometric sequence. (Sorry, I'm a math teacher!) Day after day. There is no consequence for the student. The worst that will happen is that he will have to take his hat off. In the meantime, he gets to keep wearing it. On some days, maybe no-one will notice, and he'll get to wear it for the whole lunch break!

If we want the student to learn that it is rude to wear a hat indoors, or that we expect him to follow the school rules, then there *has to be an immediate consequence*; one that will motivate the student to respect the rules.

The simple answer? The second time the teacher has to remind the student, he takes the hat! The student gets it back at the end of the day. The third time it happens, the hat disappears for a week!

Some students will object. "*It's my hat. You can't do that*". Well, of course you can! If the student is irate enough at losing his hat, he will complain to

his parents. If the parent calls, that gives me an opportunity to talk about rules and why I am disappointed that his son isn't following them. Most parents will support you on this. So will the Principal, although this policy should be discussed in a meeting first; if only one teacher does it, things get messy.

What's important is that the student quickly learns that there are consequences if rules are ignored. The unacceptable behaviour stops.

*You may leave this page and do something else as soon as you've read every word.*