



Hot Tips on Classroom Management

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• Invest in relationship building from the beginning, accumulating a “psychological bank account” with your students. Remember the adage, “They don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” This does not mean trying to be their “buddy.” It does mean treating each student with dignity and respect. Show interest in their lives as you chat before and after class. Sure, it takes time, but much of the success of outstanding teachers, such as Jaime Escalante, the celebrated real-life role model for the film, *Stand and Deliver*, can be understood in terms of the caring relationship they developed with their students. It is a case of “You can pay me now or pay me later.” You’ll either spend time building a mutually respectful relationship or you’ll spend it later in a classroom power struggle. If you’ve made regular deposits to the “psychological bank account” you can make withdrawals later when you ask students to comply with your demands. They’ll also be more likely to forgive your mistakes than to capitalize on them.

• Expect to be tested by some students to determine the boundaries of acceptable behavior and your competency to respond. While such tests are usually minor infractions (whispering, note passing, etc.), they do constitute a challenge to your classroom control. It is essential to react immediately, calmly, and appropriately to these infractions, but it is vital not to overreact.

• Preserve your classroom momentum at all costs. “Momentum” means every student is on-task, the lesson is rolling along smoothly. Most discipline problems do not occur during periods of momentum, but rather during those periods of chaos – when something has broken the momentum of the lesson. These classroom interruptions may sometimes be beyond our direct control: announcements over the P.A., a knock at the door, a fire engine passing the building, or the custodian riding by the window on a power mower. However, sometimes teachers may unwittingly break their own momentum – because they didn’t have the necessary audio-visual equipment ready, by hunting for misplaced items in the middle of the lesson, or by stopping to reprimand an offending student.

Note what happens when momentum is lost: the class goes from 95 or 100% on-task behavior to 0% on-task. Now you are faced with the challenge of regathering everyone’s attention and getting all students back on task. Pay special attention to effecting smooth, orderly transitions from one activity to another.

• It may sound cliché, but the best way to prevent classroom misbehavior is to deliver an interesting, fast paced, organized learning experience, particularly ones which actively engage students in the lesson. A dull lesson is an invitation to misbehavior. Much student acting out is simply a reaction to boredom. While the best, well-prepared teachers occasionally have behavioral infractions in their classroom, they are less frequent and less severe. Additionally, it is less difficult to recapture students attention and get them back on-task.

• Be sure your rules and expectations are clear. Many teachers have had success with using a class meeting at the beginning of the year to have students formulate rules for the class.

Some teachers haven’t given much thought to what they do want, but only to what they don’t want. Such negative focusing is inefficient.

Don’t assume students will correctly guess what you expect of them. Also develop high expectations of your students, of their academic performance, as well as classroom conduct. Students will not always meet your expectations, but seldom will they exceed them.

• It is also better to have a few, rather than many rules. Remember you have to enforce them. You have a right to be in control of your classroom, but do not become obsessed with control. Rules should also be conspicuously displayed in the room.

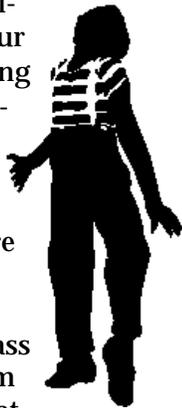


• Avoid causing students to lose face in front of their peers. Avoid needless public confrontations. You will almost always lose in the long run; kids can, and do, get even. Whenever possible, reprimand privately; avoid giving your perpetrator an audience.

• Keep your eyes moving. Eye contact is your most powerful tool in maintaining classroom control. Probably 80% of potential classroom misbehaviors can be “nipped in the bud” through timely, direct eye contact. Continually, keep your eyes moving to scan the entire room at least once every minute or less. You actually don’t have direct eye contact with every single student every minute, but rather focus upon clusters of four or five students at a time. Hold that gaze for four or five seconds and then move on to another group. Remember that most teachers have less eye contact with students sitting in the furthest corners of the room, and that is exactly where most troublemakers choose to sit!

• Continually monitor what is happening in your classroom. Some researchers refer to this as “having eyes in back of your head.” Always know what’s going on in your classroom. Avoid standing or sitting with your back to the class. For example, when working in a small group sit so you are facing the rest of the class. It is also difficult to monitor all of the class if you are sitting at your desk in front of the room. It is generally better to pace around the room during whole class instruction. Effective teachers seem to develop a sixth sense in anticipating potential problems and appropriately intervening to nip them in the bud.

• Practice the principle of “escalation.” This means don’t go after a fly with a baseball bat; if you have a small problem use a small tool. If your initial strategy doesn’t work you can always escalate to a more potent strategy. You can always go up, but you can never effectively go down to a lower level strategy if a more confrontational one does not work. Direct eye contact might be the lowest level of challenge. If the student does not correct their behavior then escalate, perhaps by moving into their body space, standing near their desk. Next might be a non-verbal gesture. All of this can occur while you are still teaching the rest of the class, without directing everyone’s attention to ward the



transgressing student. You’ve not broken your own momentum.

• Use the power of silence. Follow your behavioral directives with a pause while maintaining direct eye contact. Silence is power; use it constructively. After each behavioral directive it is a good idea to pause and take two slow, deep breaths. Not only does it give time for compliance, but the breathing also helps you to remain calm. You don’t want to convey either fear or hostility. If you must escalate to the next level of confrontation, pause again for two deep breaths. Say no more than absolutely necessary. Avoid haranguing or degrading the student. You’ll only fuel resentment and create sympathy for the offender among the rest of the class. You don’t need to get drawn into a power struggle.

• Don’t overreact. When you lose your composure in front of the class, they, not you, are in control of your behavior. Some student’s will test you to discover your “hot buttons,” what behaviors will cause you to lose control. Also, remember that most of the things students do in our classrooms to annoy us are not evil, dastardly deeds. They are simply inappropriate; they are not acceptable in that situation. Of course, if a student’s misbehavior is potentially harmful to others or destructive of property, then we must employ the necessary strategy to deter that behavior. This might mean getting immediate help from other adults. When you correct a student’s behavior, don’t dwell excessively. Nagging will only alienate the student.

• Develop selective hearing. Learn to ignore some minor infractions, particularly when you suspect that student’s motive is to bait you into a confrontation. Of course, potentially harmful or disruptive outbursts must be handled. And even things which are ignored during class can be dealt with after class. This also is a way to buy time if you’re not sure what to do about a behavior.

• Divide and conquer. If you have two or three people who sit next to each other and frequently collude to disrupt the classroom, rearrange the classroom seating arrangement to separate the offenders. Sometimes this can be done subtly without revealing your true intent. For example in forming groups you can count off so that the perpetrators are in different groups. As you assign groups to different areas of the room you can assure that the troublesome ones are seated as far apart as possible.

• Never argue with a student in front of the class. Decline to argue the issue now, but offer to discuss it privately with the student later. Public arguments inevitably lead to someone losing face in front of the class—you or the student. Either way, you lose!

• Quiet reprimands are much more effective than loud ones. Indeed, some research suggests that loud reprimands are actually more disruptive. Avoid shouting at students! It reveals your loss of control. However, your tonality and non-verbals must be congruent. If your body language is too non-assertive, students will receive a mixed message that you aren't really serious.

• When you do discuss a student's misbehavior, make it clear that you find the behavior, not the student, unacceptable. Remain firm, yet compassionate. If possible praise what they do well, but encourage improvement in their erroneous ways.

• Understand the school's student behavior code. What disciplinary measures are to be taken for serious infractions (e.g., fighting, drugs, alcohol, truancy). What is the procedure for reporting such problems? Is in-school suspension or detention used? If so how? How are parents involved in correcting misbehavior?

• Reinforce positive behaviors. A great many students go through school generally being ignored, as long as they don't "step out of line." They may not be the greatest students, but they don't usually create trouble. They may receive little of the teacher's time or attention. Find ways to show recognition and appreciation of their gains, even when small. Reward appropriate behavior, don't ignore it. "Catch the student being good." This involves a different kind of attitude, a new, more positive outlook on the world.

• Use praise effectively. While verbal praise can be effective in encouraging positive behaviors, it is often used ineffectively. To be most constructive praise should be specific, rather than general. Rather than "good job" offer specific information on what you liked about the students work: "Excellent paragraph transitions" or "Your use of color in this picture was very unique." Also, be aware that public praise does not work for everyone. It may backfire when used with some adolescents; they'll be ribbed by their peers (Aw, teacher's pet!). However, private encouragement still might be influential with such students.

• Use group contracting to reward good performance, both behavioral and academic. This can be done informally (e.g., "As soon as we all have put away the art supplies, we'll go out for recess.") or in a more structured, formal contract (See examples on the following pages). It allows the group to earn a group reward, which might be free time to play an educational game, no homework for a night, a field trip, or special treat.



• When you use rewards they must be varied to be effective. The same reward used over and over quickly satiates, losing its value to motivate. Variety and novelty are powerful reinforcers.

• Early in the year develop classroom routines. Carefully explain how students are to handle the details of daily classroom activities: taking attendance, procedures for making up missed work, distributing and collecting materials, going to the bathroom, leaving for lunch, etc.

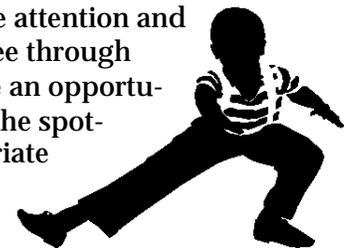
• Be cautious of touching students when they are very angry. It can stimulate a violent response in some students.

• Be aware of concealment activities occasionally employed by students (For example, covering their mouths when whispering, hiding behind their desks, standing books on edge to hide other reading material). Moving about the classroom discourages such strategies.

• Avoid branding a student a "failure" because of one mistake. Help your students recognize that we all make mistakes, but we also have a responsibility to learn from our mistakes.

• Avoid punishing the whole class for the misbehavior of one student. It is simply unfair and will be perceived as so by the innocent students. It will only turn the whole class (and probably their parents) against you.

• Try to find acceptable means for students to receive the attention and approval they often see through misbehavior. Provide an opportunity for them to earn the spotlight through appropriate behavior.



- Always have a couple of “sponge activities” (e.g., small group brainstorm, word puzzle, review game) available which you can use when the unexpected happens (the projector bulb burns out, a visitor comes to the door, or a student becomes ill in class) or when some students complete seat-work or tests ahead of others.

- Don’t be too quick to send students to the principal’s office or to call their parents. If done too frequently it suggests that you have a problem with classroom management. Involve others only for serious or persistent misbehavior.

- Don’t send students out into the hallway as a punishment. Aside from potential liability problems, for many students the hall is a pretty exciting place to be—especially if the class is boring.

- For persistent, serious problems with a student use the private teacher-student conference. Explain in non-blameful language exactly what behaviors you find inappropriate and why. Avoid verbally attacking the student and do listen to their view. Push them for a plan for correcting their behavior in the future and to make a commitment to follow through with that plan.

- If you feel overwhelmed by a student’s challenging behavior don’t be afraid to consult other professionals: your principal, experienced teachers, school psychologist, or counselor. They have likely confronted the same problems. Or ask several persons for a variety of opinions. Allow yourself to learn from their mistakes and successes. A secondary benefit is that they will probably be flattered that you came to them for advice.

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