



## **11 Techniques for Better Classroom Discipline**

Here are eleven techniques that you can use in your classroom that will help you achieve effective group management and control. They have been adapted from an article called: "A Primer on Classroom Discipline: Principles Old and New" by Thomas R. McDaniel, Phi Delta Kappan, September 1986.

### **1. Focusing**

Be sure you have the attention of everyone in your classroom before you start your lesson. Don't attempt to teach over the chatter of students who are not paying attention. Inexperienced teachers sometimes think that by beginning their lesson, the class will settle down. The children will see that things are underway now and it is time to go to work. Sometimes this works, but the children are also going to think that you are willing to compete with them, that you don't mind talking while they talk, or that you are willing to speak louder so that they can finish their conversation even after you have started the lesson. They get the idea that you accept their inattention and that it is permissible to talk while you are presenting a lesson.

The focusing technique means that you will demand their attention before you begin. It means that you will wait and not start until everyone has settled down. Experienced teachers know that silence on their part is very effective. They will punctuate their waiting by extending it 3 to 5 seconds after the classroom is completely quiet. Then they begin their lesson using a quieter voice than normal. A soft spoken teacher often has a calmer, quieter classroom than one with a stronger voice. Her students sit still in order to hear what she says.

### **2. Direct Instruction**

Uncertainty increases the level of excitement in the classroom. The technique of direct instruction is to begin each class by telling the students exactly what will be happening. The teacher outlines what he and the students will be doing this period. He may set time limits for some tasks. An effective way to marry this technique with the first one is to include time at the end of the period for students to do activities of their choosing. The teacher may finish the description of the hour's activities with: "And I think we will have some time at the end of the period for you to chat with your friends, go to the library, or catch up on work for other classes."

The teacher is more willing to wait for class attention when he knows there is extra time to meet his goals and objectives. The students soon realize that the more time the teacher waits for their attention, the less free time they have at the end of the hour.

### **3. Monitoring**

The key to this principle is to circulate. Get up and get around the room. While your students are working, make the rounds. Check on their progress.

An effective teacher will make a pass through the whole room about two minutes after the students have started a written assignment. She checks that each student has started, that the children are on the correct page, and that everyone has put their names on their papers. The delay is important. She wants her students to have a problem or two finished so she can check that answers are correctly labeled or in complete sentences. She provides individualized instruction as needed. Students who are not yet quite on task will be quick to get going as they see her approach. Those that were distracted or slow to get started can be nudged along.

The teacher does not interrupt the class or try to make general announcements unless she notices that several students have difficulty with the same thing. The teacher uses a quiet voice and her students appreciate her personal and positive attention.

#### **4. Modeling**

McDaniel tells us of a saying that goes “Values are caught, not taught.” Teachers who are courteous, prompt, enthusiastic, in control, patient and organized provide examples for their students through their own behavior. The “do as I say, not as I do” teachers send mixed messages that confuse students and invite misbehavior.

If you want students to use quiet voices in your classroom while they work, you too will use a quiet voice as you move through the room helping youngsters.

#### **5. Non-Verbal Cuing**

A standard item in the classroom of the 1950’s was the clerk’s bell. A shiny nickel bell sat on the teacher’s desk. With one tap of the button on top he had everyone’s attention. Teachers have shown a lot of ingenuity over the years in making use of non-verbal cues in the classroom. Some flip light switches. Others keep clickers in their pockets.

Non-verbal cues can also be facial expressions, body posture and hand signals. Care should be given in choosing the types of cues you use in your classroom. Take time to explain what you want the students to do when you use your cues.

#### **6. Environmental Control**

A classroom can be a warm cheery place. Students enjoy an environment that changes periodically. Study centers with pictures and color invite enthusiasm for your subject.

Young people like to know about you and your interests. Include personal items in your classroom. A family picture or a few items from a hobby or collection on your desk will trigger personal conversations with your students. As they get to know you better, you will see fewer problems with discipline.

Just as you may want to enrich your classroom, there are times when you may want to impoverish it as well. You may need a quiet corner with few distractions. Some students will get caught up in visual exploration. For them, the splash and the color is a siren that pulls them off task. They may need more “vanilla” and less “rocky-road.” Have a quiet place where you

can steer these youngsters. Let them get their work done first and then come back to explore and enjoy the rest of the room.

### **7. Low-Profile Intervention**

Most students are sent to the principal's office as a result of confrontational escalation. The teacher has called them on a lesser offense, but in the moments that follow, the student and the teacher are swept up in a verbal maelstrom. Much of this can be avoided when the teacher's intervention is quiet and calm.

An effective teacher will take care that the student is not rewarded for misbehavior by becoming the focus of attention. She monitors the activity in her classroom, moving around the room. She anticipates problems before they occur. Her approach to a misbehaving student is inconspicuous. Others in the class are not distracted.

While lecturing to her class this teacher makes effective use of namedropping. If she sees a student talking or off task, she simply drops the youngster's name into her dialogue in a natural way. "And you see, David, we carry the one to the tens column." David hears his name and is drawn back on task. The rest of the class doesn't seem to notice.

### **8. Assertive Discipline**

This is traditional limit setting authoritarianism. When executed as presented by Lee Canter (who has made this form a discipline one of the most widely known and practiced) it will include a good mix of praise. This is high profile discipline. The teacher is the boss and no child has the right to interfere with the learning of any student. Clear rules are laid out and consistently enforced.

### **9. Assertive I-Messages**

A component of Assertive Discipline, these I-Messages are statements that the teacher uses when confronting a student who is misbehaving. They are intended to be clear descriptions of what the student is suppose to do. The teacher who makes good use of this technique will focus the child's attention first and foremost on the behavior he wants, not on the misbehavior. "I want you to..." or "I need you to..." or "I expect you to..." The inexperienced teacher may incorrectly try "I want you to stop..." only to discover that this usually triggers confrontation and denial. The focus is on the misbehavior and the student is quick to retort: "I wasn't doing anything!" or "It wasn't my fault..." or "Since when is there a rule against..." and escalation has begun.

### **10. Humanistic I-Messages**

These I-messages are expressions of our feelings. Thomas Gordon, creator of Teacher Effectiveness Training (TET), tells us to structure these messages in three parts. First, include a description of the child's behavior. "When you talk while I talk..." Second, relate the effect this behavior has on the teacher. "...I have to stop my teaching..." And third, let the student know the feeling that it generates in the teacher. "...which frustrates me."

A teacher, distracted by a student who was constantly talking while he tried to teach, once made this powerful expression of feelings: "I cannot imagine what I have done to you that I do not deserve the respect from you that I get from the others in this class. If I have been rude to you or inconsiderate in any way, please let me know. I feel as though I have

somehow offended you and now you are unwilling to show me respect.”  
The student did not talk during his lectures again for many weeks.

### **11. Positive Discipline**

Use classroom rules that describe the behaviors you want instead of listing things the students cannot do. Instead of “no-running in the room,” use “move through the building in an orderly manner.” Instead of “no fighting,” use “settle conflicts appropriately.” Instead of “no gum chewing,” use “leave gum at home.” Refer to your rules as expectations. Let your students know this is how you expect them to behave in your classroom. Make ample use of praise. When you see good behavior, acknowledge it. This can be done verbally, of course, but it doesn’t have to be. A nod, a smile or a “thumbs up” will reinforce the behavior.

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## Techniques that Backfire



If you haven't already been there, check out Discipline Techniques on this website. These 11 techniques for better discipline can be useful in managing a positive and comfortable classroom.



There are some techniques, however, that should be avoided. Linda Albert surveyed dozens of teachers, asking them what methods have backfired for them. Here they are as she has presented them in her book *A Teacher's Guide to Cooperative Discipline*, (American Guidance Service, 1989).

After 27 years in elementary and middle school classrooms, I can honestly say I have tried most of these techniques. Linda is right. They may work a few times, but not over the long haul. Techniques that backfire include:

- raising my voice
- yelling
- saying "I'm the boss here"
- insisting on having the last word
- using tense body language, such as rigid posture or clenched hands
- using degrading, insulting, humiliating, or embarrassing put-downs
- using sarcasm
- attacking the student's character
- acting superior
- using physical force
- drawing unrelated persons into the conflict
- having a double standard — making students do what I say, not what I do
- insisting that I am right
- preaching
- making assumptions
- backing the student into a corner

- pleading or bribing
- bringing up unrelated events
- generalizing about students by making remarks such as “All you kids are the same”
- making unsubstantiated accusations
- holding a grudge
- nagging
- throwing a temper tantrum
- mimicking the student
- making comparisons with siblings or other students
- commanding, demanding, dominatin
- rewarding the student

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## Stages of Discipline



You would never think of setting up a math or reading program in your building that treated every student exactly the same. You would not expect all students to use the same reader. You would not place an entire school in the same math book. If you did any of these things, your school board and your community would demand an immediate explanation. Yet, we set up discipline systems in our schools that treat all students exactly the same. In fact, everyone expects us to do just that!



Just as students function at different levels in reading and math, they also function at different levels, or stages, of discipline. It is possible to set up a consistent system for classroom discipline that will be appropriate for students functioning at all stages and at the same time encourage them to work their way up to higher stages.

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There are many experts telling us how to handle discipline problems in our classrooms. Yet these experts do not always agree. Thomas Gordon, creator of *Teacher Effectiveness Training* staunchly opposes Lee Canter's *Assertive Discipline* concept. Yet, both have enjoyed a great deal of success all across America. Trying to decide who is right and who is wrong seems quite difficult. Instead, let us assume that both of them are right, that they just are not talking about the same students!

If we look at the work of Lawrence Kohlberg, we find the piece that will put this puzzle together. For many years Kohlberg studied stages of moral and ethical reasoning in youngsters from the United States, Taiwan, Mexico, Turkey, and Yucatan. One important fact that surfaced in his research is that everyone, regardless of culture,

race, or sex, goes through these stages. Although the progression from stage to stage is the same, the rate varies from person to person. It is for this reason that we need to be prepared to address discipline in our classrooms at different levels. Our students are functioning at different stages on the road to self-discipline. Let us look at these stages and see how youngsters behave.

### **Stage 1: Recalcitrant Behavior** **The Power Stage: Might Makes Right!**

Students functioning at Stage 1, the lowest stage, are typically recalcitrant in their behavior. That is, they often refuse to follow directions. They are defiant and require a tremendous amount of our attention. There is a heteronomous morality: they have few rules of their own, but out of fear of reprisal, may follow the rules of others. Most youngsters have progressed beyond this stage by age four or five, but a few older students still function at this level.

This is the **power stage**. What makes it work is the imbalance of power between the child and the person in authority. When the child is young, the imbalance of power between him and his parent is significant. If the child is never taught a higher stage, the imbalance of power diminishes as he grows up. The parent then tells us that she can no longer control her child. He will not mind. He challenges authority constantly.

Fortunately, very few of the students we see in our classrooms function at this stage. Those who do, follow rules as long as the imbalance of power tilts against them. Assertive teachers with a constant eye on these students can keep them in line. Turn your back on them, and they are out of control.

If these students want something, they usually just take it. They show very little concern for the feelings of others. They seek out extensions of power. Pencils, scissors, and rulers become weapons in their hands.

Schools that use *The Honor Level System* find that the students who function mainly at this level are chronically on **Honor Level Four**.

### **Stage 2: Self-Serving Behavior** **The Reward/Punishment Stage: "What's in It for Me?"**

Students functioning at Stage 2 are a little easier to handle in the classroom. They also represent only a small percent of the youngsters we teach. Kohlberg would classify them as having an *individualistic morality*. They can be very self-centered.

This is the **reward and punishment stage**. These students behave either because they will receive some sort of reward such as candy, free time, etc., or because they do not like what happens to them when they do not behave. Most children are moving beyond this



stage by the time they are eight or nine years old. Older students who still function at this stage do best in classrooms with assertive teachers.

There is very little sense of self-discipline at this stage. Like the power stage children, these youngsters need constant supervision. They may behave quite well in your classroom and then be out of control in the halls on the way to their next class.

Because we expect so much more of our students, these children are often on **Honor Level Three** and **Honor Level Four**.

### **Stage 3: Interpersonal Discipline** **The Mutual Interpersonal Stage: "How Can I Please You?"**

Students functioning at Stage 3 make up most of the youngsters in our middle and junior high schools. These kids have started to develop a sense of discipline. They behave because you ask them. This is the **mutual interpersonal stage**. They care what others think about them, and they want you to like them.

These children need gentle reminders. You ask them to settle down and they do. Assertive discipline works with these students because they understand it, but they rarely need such a heavy handed approach to classroom discipline.

Quite often you find students in your classroom that are in transition from Stage 2 to Stage 3. Perhaps you will know of a student that gets into lots of trouble in other classrooms but not in yours. This child is just learning to trust others and build the interpersonal relationships that are more common with his classmates. You need to let him know that his good behavior is important to you not only in your classroom, but in others as well. Nurture this youngster and you will see quick progress. Be unnecessarily assertive and he will slip back to Stage 2.

These students are almost always on **Honor Level One** and **Honor Level Two**.

### **Stage 4: Self-Discipline** **The Social Order Stage: "I Behave Because it is the Right Thing to Do."**

Students functioning at Stage 4 rarely get into any trouble at all. They have a sense of right and wrong. Although many middle school and junior high school students will occasionally function at this level, only a few consistently do. These are the youngsters we enjoy working with so much. You can leave these kids alone with a project and come back 20 or 30 minutes later and find them still on task. They behave because, in their minds, it is the right thing to do.

This is the **social order stage**. These students are almost always

on **Honor Level One**.

Even though they may never tell you, students who function at this level do not appreciate assertive discipline. They are bothered by the fact that other students force teachers to use so much class time dealing with discipline problems.

Although most of our students do not usually operate at this stage, they are near enough to it that they understand it. Cooperative Learning activities encourage students to function at this level. The teacher who sets up several groups within the classroom gives students a chance to practice working at this level while he waits close by, ready to step in when needed.

### **Working Through the Stages**

Kohlberg describes additional stages of morality and ethical reasoning that go beyond what we discuss here, but they are not usually seen in school age children. In fact, many adults do not progress much further than these.

Keep in mind that all of us work our way through these stages in this order as we grow up. When you identify the stage at which a student is functioning, you can then help that youngster work to the next stage. It is a mistake to try and skip stages. Insisting that a Stage 1 student “straighten up and start acting right” (like a Stage 4 student) is not a reasonable expectation. It simply isn’t going to happen! Instead, set your goal on Stage 2 and you will be less frustrated. You may be pleasantly surprised when you start to notice improvement.

It is important to remember that for many reasons, any child is fully capable of regressing every now and then. When you really get to know your students and are used to them functioning at a stage, it is important to look for a reason when one of your students regresses. Problems with family members, friends, alcohol, or drugs may be behind a shift in behavior. It simply might be tiredness or the onset of illness. Whatever the cause, it is worth taking the time to talk with the student and see what’s going on.

### **Picking Up the Pieces**

You may feel that you do not have the time to walk these kids from stage to stage. You may be concerned about covering the material in the book or getting to all the objectives, but what do you teach? Is it English? Math? Science? Such a response is the one others expect of us, but the real answer is: **“I teach children.”** When you get used to thinking of your job in that way, it is easier to find the time needed to help a youngster with behavior problems.

Learning self-discipline is just like learning anything else. Your students aren’t always going to get it right the first time. So, you find yourself “picking up the pieces.” You help them some more, and when you think they are ready you give it another try.

If you have a math student who is not quite ready to handle long division, you spend more time on subtraction and multiplication. If you have a student that isn't ready for Stage 3 or Stage 4, you spend more time working on Stage 2. Where other teachers may see a kid who is still a discipline problem, you may be able to see one who is making progress. Seeing that progress, as slow as it might be, makes greeting that youngster each day a pleasure that his other teachers may never enjoy. Soon you will be opening the doors to the mutual inter-personal stage and really make a difference in his life.

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## Routines and Procedures for Managaing Your Classroom

by K.J. Wagner, M.A.

Effective classroom teachers spend more of their time in the first few weeks of the year teaching classroom routines and procedures as opposed to academic content. Why? Because routines and procedures are the key to a well-managed, organized classroom.

Research shows that most behavior problems result from *lack of classroom routines and procedures*. Moreover, the number of interruptions to academic instruction are reduced and the class flows more smoothly.

Points to remember:

- Have a copy of your routines and procedures to hand to each of your students on the first of school. (Keep extra copies on hand for new students who arrive later in the year.)
- Do not simply hand out the list, go over it once, and expect the students to comply.
- Teach the most important, key procedures over a period of days, one or two at a time.
  - Explain the rationale behind the routine or procedure.
  - Model the routine or procedure for the students.
  - Give the students non-examples of compliance.
  - Have the students (or one student) model the procedure.
- Teach the less important routines and procedure by simply stating the routine or procedure, monitoring it, and reinforcing it when necessary.
- *Be consistent* . Don't give up after a few days. The time spent teaching, monitoring and reinforcing routines and procedures during the first three weeks of school will pay tremendous dividends. If the routines and procedures are established at the beginning of year, the entire rest of the year will be more enjoyable and productive for both you and your students.