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Tools for Rules and Procedures

A Point to Ponder



Contrary to conventional wisdom, the main problem in the classroom is *not* the lack of obedience on the part of students. Rather, it is the lack of clearly established and consistently enforced rules and procedures on the part of teachers. This is not to say, however, that teachers with clearly established rules and procedures have no discipline challenges. They do. It is to say, however, that teachers with rules and procedures have *far* fewer discipline challenges than their counterparts who lack a clear system of rules and procedures. In fact, the very best teachers, although they do have discipline **challenges**, rarely have discipline **problems**. That's because they know how to avoid letting the challenges ever **become** problems. Their secret? Clear and consistent rules and procedures!

We continue to find that many teachers do not know the difference between a rule and a procedure. Allow us to both clarify and simplify:

- ◆ A *rule* regulates a serious offense, and there must be a consequence *every* time it is broken.
- ◆ A *procedure* is simply a way that you want something to be done—the same way, every time.
- ◆ When a student breaks a rule, the student is punished.
- ◆ When a student does not follow a procedure, you simply practice the procedure with the student.
- ◆ You will never want to have more than five rules.
- ◆ You should have many procedures.

- ◆ An example of a rule (remember that a rule is something to regulate a serious offense) is *We agree not to hit anyone*. If the rule is broken, there is a definite consequence, and the students know this in advance.
- ◆ Examples of procedures are how to walk in line, what to do when you have a question, what to do when you need a pencil sharpened, how to get into and out of groups, etc.

Now the problem occurs when teachers confuse the two. On the "Rules Chart," they put statements such as "I will not talk out of turn." Well, talking is actually not a *serious* offense. An aggravating offense? Yes. A serious offense? No. Therefore, it should fall into the category of "procedure." The procedure may state, "We agree to raise our hands and be recognized before speaking." So what do you do if a student talks out of turn? You simply remind him of the procedure and practice again if necessary. In #19, we will discuss what to do if you have a "chronic" talker who does not respond to your little "reminders."

So here it is, plainly and simply: You practice when they forget a procedure, and you punish if they break a rule. That's it.

Classroom Solution/Strategy



Rules

Decide what you would consider to be serious offenses in your classroom. We gave you one example: "We agree not to hit each other." Notice two things: (1) *Hitting someone is a serious offense*. None of us want students displaying any acts of violence in our classrooms. (2) *The rule is stated in a positive way*. Again, try to limit your rules to no more than five. Now introduce your rules to your students, discuss why they are important, and explain the consequences of not following the rules. And then be consistent in enforcing them. Not mean, but consistent.

Procedures

You will not want to establish all of your procedures at one time. This is far too overwhelming for students. Instead, begin with the most important ones and then add a few at a time. In establishing any procedure, there are six simple steps:

1. State the procedure and discuss its importance.

2. Model the procedure. Show your students exactly what it "looks like."
3. Practice the procedure with your students. (Note that this is not something reserved for elementary-level students. Professional football teams practice procedures every day!)
4. Praise them when they follow it and remind them of the procedure when they "forget."
5. Continue to calmly practice the procedure with students when they forget.
6. Remain consistent with your procedures.

If you're going to try this, we suggest that you implement the most important procedure first. Do you know the most important procedure that any teacher can and must have? The most important procedure you can and must have is a **consistent way of securing your students' attention** every time you need it. It is so essential because if you cannot secure their attention, you cannot teach them. So we ask you, "What's the one thing you do every time you want your students' attention?" Do you have one procedure, such as a signal for requesting your students' attention? Do they know what your procedure is and do they respond to it? Or do you try several things such as putting your finger to your lips, then saying "Shhhh" or "I need your attention," or flicking the lights, or a host of *many* other things that teachers do to no avail? There is no "one" correct way of getting your students' attention. However, there are some things that *never* work. Begging, threatening, and warning are ineffective. Whatever your procedure, it needs to be consistent; it must be practiced with your students time and again, and you must never appear "bent out of shape" while using it. (We know a few teachers who literally bend their bodies and their faces out of shape when they get upset. Not a pretty sight!)

Bottom Line



Contrary to the beliefs of far too many teachers, having a good discipline plan, including clear rules and procedures, is not simply about being *nice vs. mean*; but rather it is also about being *consistent vs. inconsistent*! You see, if you're **nice and inconsistent**, your students will "like" you, but you will not be able to manage them, and therefore you won't be able to teach them. If you're **mean and inconsistent**, you're doomed! If you're **mean and consistent**, you're a little less doomed but still doomed! But if you

are both **nice and consistent**, you'll have excellent classroom management. And the fact is that without good management, you cannot teach.

So get your rules and procedures straight, be consistent and don't negotiate, and good behavior will surely await!

A Point to



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