

How to Have an Effective Discipline Plan

If you are a new teacher developing your first discipline plan, this part of teaching probably is difficult. You come however, with knowledge of what your teachers used, and the knowledge of plans cooperating teachers used. This is YOUR chance to decide what will work for you. True, you don't know what will work for you until you try it. So below I have some guidelines.

Rules: Your way of setting limits on how far students can go.

- Have no more than 3 to 5 posted in the room.
- Rules have consequences, and they should also be posted

Consequences: What happens if rules are broken

- Normally in the jr. high, middle school and high school levels, the school has its own set of consequences. Be sure you understand the system and know thoroughly how it works.
- You do not need to post school rules & consequences in the room and most administrators don't mind if you have your own consequences in addition to the school's. For example; you may take away privileges, instead of having students coming in for detentions.
- Consequences can be positive (rewards) and or negative (penalties)
- Make sure consequences are logical and reasonable
- Be careful that what you perceive as a consequence is not seen by students as a reward. Spending their recess with you inside, for some is a reward and not a consequence and you will be seeing more disruption and more of this type of student during recess. (Fair does not always mean equal.)

When a Disruption Occurs: Students will test you! Be ready to call on them when they do not follow the rules.

- As a wise professor once told me, "At all cost, keep teaching." Students want to get

you to stop teaching. Don't let them!

- Do not stop the lesson in order to penalize a student. You need to decide ways to let students know without wasting time, that you know they have misbehaved and will get the consequences.
- You could work out hand gestures: maybe point at the student and hold up the number of fingers of the rule they broke.
- There is also the old fashioned method of putting student's name on the board then have checks that all indicate more severe consequences.
- Use proximity control: get close to the student who is misbehaving. Give them eye contact a smile or straight face. If it won't be too disruptive, you can whisper to the student a warning or let him know he just received a consequence.
- Use student names in discussion. Do not always call on the trouble makers, but let them know you are watching them. For example: "Say, Johnny is walking down the street and he sees a helicopter..." Johnny is probably looking at you now, forgetting about what he was doing.

Students Who Escalate a Situation: Often when students know they were "caught" they deny it.

- Don't let students take more teaching time away from the class
- Students might say things like, "What are you picking on me for?", "Why me?", "What did I do?", or "Everybody else is doing it!"
- If student persists, respond simply, "Because, you chose to break the rule." Say it several times, same tone of voice with no expression on your face. After a week, or month or so, students will start answering for you.
- If a student refuses to settle down, and it is obvious that he/she wants to make a scene, send him/her out of the room.

Give Positive Feedback:

- Do your best to mention names of students who are behaving the way you would like.
- As a new teacher, I was overwhelmed at how much time my "problem" students took. Meanwhile the majority of the class is behaving correctly, and yet the only one who gets attention are the ones who misbehave. Keep this in mind when developing your discipline plan.
- Example: "Thank you, Cindy, for sitting quietly." (This type of positive feedback works better at the elementary level than at the secondary.)

Rewards: Wongs' book suggests using rewards as part of your discipline plan. I want to warn you against using rewards.

- Yes, they work; they work extremely well. However, students then begin asking, "What will you give me, if I do this?"
- Rewards teach students that they should always get something in return for anything they do. This is not a healthy belief.
- As a high school teacher I hear proof of this all the time. "Can I get extra credit if I do more than the assigned exercises?" or, "What do I get if I do this?" I simply reply, "I'll give you a smile!" And I still have students who will go ahead and go the extra mile without any extrinsic rewards.
- Intrinsic rewards: By the time students get to the middle and high school levels, teachers can talk about what motivate them and what the best methods of motivation are.

Be Consistent: This is so much easier said than done.

- If you make a rule, stick by it. Students know when you are not serious about a rule.
- Don't keep warning students about consequences; give them! Too many warnings, mean you are not serious, and students will soon run your classroom.
- If you are going to make an error, make it an error on the side of being too strict, NOT to lenient.
- Once you've relinquished your control to the students, you will not get it back. You can always lighten up. I don't know anyone who has successfully re-claimed power back from students.
- Do not feel guilty about handing out your consequences. Students want a well controlled classroom and they know that means when rules are broken there are consequences.
- And remember, THEY CHOSE to break the rules, it has nothing to do with you. Do not take bad behavior personally.

Get Support: With a group of people backing you, you have much more of a chance to be successful.

- Administration: Talk to your administrator about the discipline plan you have decided on. Take any suggestions that he/she gives seriously. They need to know your plan, and not come to you later with a student in the office questioning why the student was sent.
- Parents: Make sure they understand the discipline plan in your classroom so when problems come up, they know the rules and consequences and you can stick by your line of, "He/she chose to break the rule."
- Coaches/ Club sponsors: Get to know as many extra curricular advisors as possible. I was amazed how well students begin behaving once they know you are in

communication with a coach, sponsor or advisor. If there is someone a student really looks up to, this is a connection you need to make. It helps to maybe mention it once in a while too, "I wonder what your coach would think about you not coming to class prepared?" Watch the response!

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