

## EFFECTIVE CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE

by  
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### A Short Philosophy Of Discipline

Education cannot proceed without good discipline. Not only is good discipline imperative for the establishment and development of your successful teaching career, but it is also imperative to the success of your entire school. Students encouraged to lawlessness by one weak teacher make the work of their other teachers just that much more difficult.

Good discipline requires more than a "bag of tricks"; it requires a basic philosophy from which specific techniques emerge. Good discipline is best thought of as being positive, not negative; of helping a student to adjust rather than as punishment for their not having adjusted; of turning unacceptable conduct into acceptable conduct. Discipline is largely a matter of morale, of classroom atmosphere, of inter-personal relationships.

As a working definition, then, good discipline may be described as the absence of distractions, frictions, and disturbances which would interfere with the optimum functioning of the student, the class, and the school. It is also the presence of a friendly yet business-like rapport in which students and teachers work cooperatively toward mutually-recognized and mutually-accepted goals.

Experience tells us that not all groups or all individuals are likely to become completely self-disciplined within the school years, yet that ultimate goal should be one toward which we teachers consciously and constantly work. Any philosophy of discipline which does not strive to teach and instill the ideal of self-discipline within both the group and individual will eventually prove weak and ineffective.

### Techniques For Disciplining The Group

1. Begin your class on time. If you expect your class to be prompt and business-like, you must first set the tone.
2. There is no substitute for good lesson plans. Classes usually sense the indecision of the teacher who does not know what to do - or what to have the class do - next, or who does the same thing for too long. Lack of preparation is an open invitation for widespread problem behavior.
3. Teach students what is meaningful to them. Stress the relationship of what you teach to the students' own welfare. No matter how well you have organized your content, materials, and procedures, if they are not geared to the maturity and interests of a particular class, they invite problem behavior.
4. The whole field of motivational techniques is intimately related to discipline. Thoroughly motivate your classes and individual students by every technique at your command, and keep them motivated, because well-motivated classes and students are far less likely to present discipline problems. Prevention of problems is far better than cure.
5. Every new class ascertains at the outset the standards of behavior which the teacher will maintain. It is, therefore, better to start the year with definite imposed controls, which should then be relaxed

gradually, as the class exhibits the necessary responsibility. It is always easier to slacken control than it is to "tighten up", after control has been lost. It is sometimes good practice, especially in the 9th or 10th grades, for classes to draw up their own codes of conduct (with the teacher as "adviser", if necessary) early in the school year.

6. Whatever your individual room standards may be, make sure they are reasonable, kept to a minimum, well understood by the class, and fairly and consistently enforced.
7. Be an actor if necessary. However timid, unsure, and ineffectual you may feel inside, a good performance of acting assured, confident, and capable for the job at hand will go a long way toward success in achieving good discipline.
8. Insist on the general rule of only one voice at a time in your classroom (except in special cases, as when the class is divided into working committees). Even in a democracy, if progress rather than chaos is to reign, students must learn to be recognized before they speak; then, recognize students fairly. This aspect of ordinary courtesy needs cultivation in every classroom.
9. In general (although there are exceptions), avoid predicting or threatening specific punishments either to the group or to the individual. However, if you do predict a certain punishment for a certain situation, be sure that it can be, and is, carried out (e.g., expulsion from class). Idle threats become meaningless and impair, rather than increase, your effectiveness.
10. Don't make an issue of everything. Sometimes it is best not to see every little misdemeanor that goes on in your class. The important thing is to spot real trouble and to "nip that in the bud" before it becomes a major issue. Use discernment.
11. Identify yourself with your class; then an offender is hurting their fellow students, not you, as you defend the group's best interests. Don't let a discipline case become a head-on collision involving a student and their peers against an isolated you.
12. Don't punish the whole group because of the misbehavior of one or a few individuals. This is unfair to the innocent, and it is unrealistic if you hope that the group will further punish the miscreant (s). Such action on your part only arouses the justified resentment of those who support you need.

After a fair warning, it is not unreasonable to require chronic disturbers to make up time after class for each minute wasted, perhaps at the pre-announced ratio of five- or ten-to-one.

13. Understand students' fads and don't belittle them. An individual teacher is not going to change the adolescents' world. Let the administration pronounce which fads are unacceptable; then, once school policy has been established, enforce it faithfully and consistently.

14. Don't argue with your class. Explanations are often desirable, but never argument. If you are merely enforcing a school rule, there is no need for argument.
15. Don't make "deals" with your class (or with an individual student). If you must resort to deals, the implication is that the class is running you. (On the other hand, genuine student-teacher planning is often desirable; there's a vital difference.)
16. Reject undesirable student behavior, but never reject a class (or an individual). The distinction is crucial. If a group thinks you don't like them as people, you're in for trouble. Pupils are entitled to the encouragement that can be gained from knowing that you still have confidence in them.
17. Your creation to a class of a good group "image" encourages good group conduct. Be sure to compliment your class (on anything) when it is warranted. Students appreciate teachers who are as quick to praise as they are to find fault. (This technique also works with individuals.)
18. Without trying to be a professional comedian, show a natural sense of humor. Some classroom incidents are funny, and you can't avoid them. Don't be afraid to laugh with the class and/or at yourself. Create a light touch occasionally with your own wit. "The class that laughs together will work better together." (This also applies to your dealings with individual students.)
19. Don't try to be "one of the gang." Act your age. Be friendly always; but there is a basic difference between friendliness and familiarity, for "familiarity breeds contempt," especially for younger teachers. (This is also true for your relationships with individuals.) You can think as a student and understand students without becoming one of them. In your classroom you are always the friendly teacher doing a professional job.
20. Make it a point to associate with your students in school activities outside the classroom. Pleasant associations (at social, athletic, and Christian action activities, or at the office) in which students view you as someone other than a classroom teacher, help students to discover that you really are human, just as they. Such association of interests carries over into healthy classroom rapport.
21. When in error, don't be afraid to apologize or to make corrections; but don't be in error too often.
22. Generally speaking, it is an important part of your job as a teacher to solve your own discipline problems. Don't become one of the 10% of the teachers who send 90% of the discipline cases to someone else to handle. When you need advice for handling a group or an individual, consult a fellow teacher, or an adviser, and don't wait too long.

On the other hand, there are occasions when thus dispatching a chief troublemaker can have a most salutary effect upon a whole class, and it is a function of the Central Office to back you in every way possible when there is genuine need for real help.

23. Much of the good morale and good discipline of the best classrooms is to be found in the inexplicable chemistry of personalities as they interact day by day. There is no one ideal personality for all teachers to emulate; you have to be your own best self. But the elements of fair play, friendliness, sincerity, firmness-with-kindly-patience, consistency, partnership-with-a-purpose, and the ability to laugh with students--all these seem to be highly desirable for the creation and maintenance of good classroom discipline.

#### Techniques For Disciplining The Individual Student

1. Good group discipline and good disciplining of the individual student supplement each other. Even a normally well-behaved individual is tempted to exhibit improper behavior when something goes wrong with control of the group of which they are a part. As you perfect your group discipline, individuals who are potential behavior problems are more likely to fall into line and to work constructively.
2. Judicious seating arrangements are a specific tool for good discipline. They can both prevent and cure certain discipline situations.
3. Never threaten or punish an individual (or a group) in anger. Their apprehension over the outcome can itself have a salutary effect. You might then ask the student what they would do if they were in your position. Be sure they understand the purpose and the justice of the punishment, if punishment is necessary.
4. Try to get at the cause of antisocial behavior. Some of our best guidance is done by classroom teachers whose empathy and sympathetic concern encourage students to talk with them and unburden their troubles. The teacher may be able to identify with the student from personal experience, or at least help the student to analyze their own case objectively. Hand-in-hand fulfillment of an improved student "image" could be the turning point in a student's life. There have been cases where a teacher was the only real friend a student had, and such students have been known to be eternally grateful.
5. It has been known to happen with a chronic offender that when the teacher has unexpectedly done something especially nice for them, they have been so taken by surprise that they stop antagonizing!
6. If unacceptable behavior is widespread in your group, concentrate on the ringleader, if there is one (there usually is). If you can win him/her over, you may regain control of your class.
7. It is sometimes effective to give an individual student responsibility for remedying among their fellow students the very offense for which they were remiss. Creation within the student of a proprietary interest in their class is sometimes achieved by getting them to accept any responsibility for the class as a whole.
8. In general, refrain from using penalties which are personally and publicly humiliating to a student. (However, after adequate warning, good-naturedly having chronic gum-chewers stand at the back of the room and chew all period often cures them.)



9. Since each student is different from every other student, not all students respond in the same way to the same technique. Be sure that your approach (and punishment, if necessary) fits the offender as well as the offense. This requires sensitive insight. (Since you should also avoid favoritism, this can be a real dilemma. Use your best judgment.)
10. Action is often more effective than words. For example, when students try to catch up on their reading or are writing letters, etc., in your class, simply take the "foreign" material without comment. The student must then come to you after class to get back their book or letter. This can be more effective than having them listen to a "lecture" from you while they are surrounded by sympathetic peers.
11. Try silence as a means of checking a misbehavior in an otherwise well-disciplined group. Stop dramatically in the middle of a sentence and wait for them and the group to sense the reason for your pause. Then go on without comment. This alone is sometimes sufficient.
12. You may wish to communicate by letter or phone call with the parents of chronic misbehavers. Parents are sometimes more cooperative than you expect (and sometimes less so). It is advisable to discuss such communications with the Central Office before proceeding, not only because they should know of your action but also because they may have helpful background information about the student for you.
13. In extreme cases, a visit by the teacher to the home where a face-to-face conference is held with the parents, student, and teacher can be both revealing and helpful. The purpose is to achieve understanding, agreement, and improvement, not to win an argument. It is best to clear such teacher-initiated conferences with the Central Office.
14. Good discipline, with either a group or an individual, is seldom accidental. It requires "know-how" and planning. The following is a suggested sequence of steps, a sort of "defense in depth", for handling difficult individual pupils:
  - a. Call a student on unacceptable conduct if it is a significant breach. Don't delay unduly in the case of an individual's behavior which is constantly annoying to the group and to you, for that which is annoying today may result in havoc tomorrow.
  - b. If such breaches recur, move the student during class, if necessary. Speak to the offender privately after class to achieve their understanding of the situation and their intention of doing better. (When it is necessary to reprimand a student severely, it is usually best to do it in private. To do so in front of their classmates may elicit sympathy on their behalf and/or build their prestige among their peers.)
  - c. If breaches of good conduct continue, move the student to an isolated seat in the rear of the room until they are ready to be "readmitted" to class.
  - d. By now you should make a point of getting all the information that is available about the student. Make use of guidance and department files. Consult counselors, former teachers, and/or advisers.