

DISCIPLINE

What do you do about noisy, unruly classes?

Is there some way to get discipline problems under control?

Suggestions:

1. The most frequent cause of discipline problems is a lack of adequate planning on the part of teachers and leaders.

Good planning takes into account the needs, interests, and abilities of each student. Take the time to get acquainted with the class members on an individual basis. Learn their names and enjoy visiting with each one. Let each student know that you value him or her as a person. Then the likelihood of discipline problems is diminished right at the start. If we care enough about the class and its progress, we will take very seriously the need for writing good lesson plans that will make provisions for getting students involved.

A teacher should work long enough on a lesson plan to be able to say: "This is interesting stuff. If I were a student in this class, I'd enjoy being present" By going into the classroom really prepared for the day's work, the teacher is free to meet students at their own levels of interest. He/she can be a warm, caring human being instead of a worried, anxious teacher who wonders inside, "What will I do next? How can we fill up the time today?" Students feel much more secure with teachers who are prepared: Security is a vital ingredient for maintaining discipline of the best sort.

2. Students are much happier and cooperative in situations where they have taken some personal responsibility for what happens.

Another way to put it is to say that a class needs to belong to students -to belong to them in the sense that it is their class and not just the teacher's idea. Teachers are still in the leading role, but not everything should depend on them.

One way to go about helping students to own their classes is to have small group meetings. Be sure all the members eventually become involved in evaluating and making suggestions for the classes. Let the students respond freely to this question: "What do you like about your class?" Make a list on a chalkboard, accepting every serious response.

Then a second question: "What would you like to see us do to make the class better than it is?" Act quickly on the students' suggestions. This is one sure way of helping them to feel that their own ideas count. The class can become a significant example of how to plan and change the groups to which we belong.

3. In spite of all our efforts to plan and to make classes into pleasant place, there will still be individual students and even small groups within classes who turn out to be disinterested.

They deliberately spoil things for teachers and other boys and girls. Keep in mind that sometimes students are "prisoners" of their own records. They are expected to behave badly because they have done so quite often in the past. If teachers can look on each class meeting as a special time, bearing no grudges for past performance and trying instead to reinforce good behavior (through praise and personal encouragement), some new patterns of behavior may emerge.

When all else fails, the best thing to do is to isolate the problem students, one by one. Take them out and say something like this: "You are making it hard for the other students to enjoy the work we're doing. I believe you are capable of helping this to be a good class. When you are ready to come back and try, you can return, but you must not spoil the class for other people." Leave the offenders safely with an adult until they indicate they are ready to go back. This quite often works well. If it does not work the first time repeat the process until the students get the clear idea that you adhere to standards set for classroom behavior. It is vital that students know what to expect and what the limits are.