

Strategies for Faculty: Understanding and Reacting to Student Behavior

Top Ten Recommendations for Classroom Management

1. It's Easier to Get Easier

Many teachers make the mistake of starting the school year with a poor discipline plan. Students quickly assess the situation in each class and realize what they will be allowed to get away with. Once you set a precedent of allowing a lot of disruptions, it can be very hard to start better classroom management and discipline techniques. However, it is never tough to get easier as the year goes on. While you don't have to follow the adage, "Never smile until Christmas," it does have its merits.

2. Fairness is Key

Students have a distinct sense of what is and what is not fair. You must act fairly for all students if you expect to be respected. If you do not treat all students equitably, you will be labeled as unfair and students will see no reason to follow your rules. Make sure that if your best student does something wrong they too get punished for it.

3. Deal with Disruptions with as Little Interruption as Possible

When you have classroom disruptions, it is imperative that you deal with them immediately and with as little interruption of your class momentum as possible. If students are talking amongst themselves and you are having a classroom discussion, ask one of them a question to try to get them back on track. If you have to stop the flow of your lesson to deal with disruptions, then you are robbing students who want to learn of their precious in-class time.

4. Avoid Confrontations in Front of Students

Whenever there is a confrontation in class there is a winner and a loser. Obviously as the teacher, you need to keep order and discipline in your class. However, it is much better to deal with discipline issues privately than cause a student to 'lose face' in front of their friends. It is not a good idea to make an example out of a disciplinary issue. Even though other students might get the point, you may have lost any chance of actually teaching that student anything in your class.

5. Stop Disruptions with a Little Humor

Sometimes all it takes is for everyone to have a good laugh to get things back on track in a classroom. Many times, however, teachers confuse good humor with sarcasm. While humor can quickly diffuse a situation, sarcasm may harm your relationship with the students involved. Use your best judgment but realize that what some people think as funny others find to be offensive.

6. Keep High Expectations in Your Class

Expect that your students will behave, not that they will disrupt. Reinforce this with the way you speak to your students. When you begin the day, tell your students your expectations. For example, you might say, "During this whole group session, I expect you to raise your hands and

be recognized before you start speaking. I also expect you to respect each other's opinions and listen to what each person has to say."

7. Overplan

Free time is something teachers should avoid. By allowing students time just to talk each day, you are setting a precedent about how you view academics and your subject. To avoid this, overplan. Write additional activities into your lesson plans just in case your main lesson run short. When you have too much to cover, you'll never run out of lessons and you will avoid free time. You can also fill up any left over time with mini-lessons.

8. Be Consistent

One of the worst things you can do as a teacher is to not enforce your rules consistently. If one day you ignore misbehaviors and the next day you jump on someone for the smallest infraction, your students will quickly lose respect for you. Your students have the right to expect you to basically be the same everyday. Moodiness is not allowed. Once you lose your student's respect, you also lose their attention and their desire to please you.

9. Make Rules Understandable

You need to be selective in your class rules (no one can follow 180 rules consistently). You also need to make them clear. Students should understand what is and what is not acceptable. Further, you should make sure that the consequences for breaking your rules are also clear and known beforehand.

10. Start Fresh Everyday

This tip does not mean that you discount all previous infractions, i.e. if they have three latenesses, then today means four. However, it does mean that you should start teaching your class each day with the expectation that students will behave. Don't assume that because Julie has disrupted your class everyday for a week, she will disrupt it today. By doing this, you will not be treating Julie any differently and thereby setting her up to disrupt again (like a self-fulfilling prophecy).