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**What Every Teacher
Should Know About**
Classroom Management
and Discipline



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1

Old-Fashioned Discipline

“The old theory, we can make ‘em work; all we have to do is get tough, has never produced intellectual effort in the history of the world, and it certainly won’t work in this situation.”

—Glasser, cited in Gough,
The Key to Improving Schools, 1987

Behavior models of the past were based on a system of rewards and punishments intended to change negative actions to positive. Students were rewarded for good behavior and were punished for poor behavior. Reaction to discipline problems were often more knee-jerk than planned and were not necessarily based on what was best for the student. The prevailing attitude was too often, “My way or the highway.” Students responded in kind, by often choosing the highway. Students who were punished frequently tended to leave school early for jobs that did not require a high school diploma, or they became a part of the problems of the street. Today, federal and state laws prevent students from dropping out of school early. We know that the model of the past that was based on

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“my way or the highway” does not work with today’s students, and that sending students to the streets leads to a significant waste of lives and resources. Glasser (1986) says, “Prior to WWII, we didn’t have specific discipline programs. We maintained order in schools by throwing out the unruly and flunking out the unmotivated. Now we keep those students in school and try to find ways to keep them quiet.”

Models of the past that were based on stimulus/response or reward and punishment techniques worked for students who were motivated to learn, but they were a dismal failure for those students whose needs were not being met or who learn differently. Curwin and Mendler (1988) define the models of the past as the “obedience models” because they were built on teachers’ gaining power over students through intimidation and punishment in order to coerce obedience. Curwin and Mendler say, “In the short term, obedience offers teachers relief, a sense of power and control, and an oasis from the constant bombardment of defiance. In the long run, however, obedience leads to student immaturity, a lack of responsibility, an inability to think clearly and critically, and a feeling of helplessness that is manifested by withdrawal, aggressiveness, or power struggles.” Burke (1992) adds, “Not getting caught supercedes everything else in the game of teacher versus student.”

Teachers today know that the obedience model not only does not work for about half of the students, it is also not brain compatible for changing negative behavior and in building emotional intelligence. The Master Teacher (2002) says that any classroom management program today should include three teacher actions.

First, any discipline program should include provisions for teaching students self-discipline processes. Master Teacher explains, “We can’t assume that our students will learn appropriate behavior simply by pointing out inappropriate behavior. Neither can we assume that criticizing, reprimanding, and punishing students for inappropriate behavior will make them change.”

Second, students must know, in advance, our expectations in terms of both academics and behaviors. Unfortunately, what is acceptable in one classroom is not necessarily acceptable in another, so we must specifically teach students the expectations. To the extent possible, these rules should be kept brief, written in the positive, and displayed in the classroom.

Third, the expected behaviors should fit the situation. For example, behavior that is acceptable when students are reading silently is not the same as behavior expected when students are working in small groups. By the same token, behavior in the classroom is not the same as behavior in the lunchroom or in the gym. The more that teachers and administrators can come to consensus on behavior expectations for the school, the smoother the transition from one situation to the other will be. In the classroom make sure that students understand the expectations for different learning situations. For example, a class rule such as “no talking” does not make sense in light of a brain compatible classroom where students are encouraged to interact at various points in the learning.

In the chapters to follow, we will look at a model for building emotional- and self-awareness in students so that students are responsible for their behavior and for their learning as well. We will examine the characteristics of good classroom management and how to build self-management in students. A process for helping to prevent off-task behavior while keeping yourself under control, as well as guidelines for solving more difficult discipline problems will be included. In Chapter 6, a step-by-step guide for setting good discipline management standards is provided to get you started on a plan for your classroom.

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Dealing With Difficult Students

While the ideas provided in the previous chapters work most of the time, there are always those times when we need to move to Plan B. Not all off-task problems in the classroom are minor. While there are many reasons for student behavior, most writers place the types of negative behavior into basic categories for discussion. Let's look at some of the categories of negative behavior and the characteristics that usually accompany those behaviors.

STUDENTS WHO WANT ATTENTION

Students who are not getting the attention that they want (or need) through normal means may resort to off-task, attention-getting behavior to accomplish their goal. Some of the ways in which they exhibit this behavior include:

- Being late for class
- Speaking out without permission

- Making noises
- Talking out of turn
- Getting up from their desks or chairs to walk around or to go to the pencil sharpener, trashcan, and so forth, for the third or fourth time
- Intentionally breaking the rules

When needs are not met, the behavior may escalate to:

- Shouts and verbal attacks
- Defiance of authority

You will know this behavior by the effect that it has on you, the teacher: “When attention is the reason for the misbehavior, you will generally feel annoyed” (Master Teacher, 2002).

While there is no single solution to the attention-getting behavior of some of our students, examining some of the reasons for this behavior may help in finding solutions. These students are often kinesthetic learners or highly visual learners who have difficulty in a classroom where the dominant teaching method is auditory. By bringing in visuals, models of the learning, and providing movement, the classroom teacher may be able to solve this dilemma. Boredom often causes off-task, attention-getting behavior. Ask yourself, is this student being challenged? Have students been required to sit and listen for long periods of time? Brain researchers agree that our brain is not wired to attend to lecture-type formats for long periods of time. For students 15 years old through adult, 20 minutes seems to be the maximum time that we will pay attention in one segment. For students under 15, their age is a good measurement. For example, an eight-year-old will listen for about eight minutes before fading out. Have you been in a meeting in which someone talked to you for an hour or more? Did you notice yourself drifting in and out of the meeting even if the information was something of interest to you?

Help attention seekers to find fulfillment of their needs by providing feedback and lots of praise when they are working

well. These students are like those people who pour quarters into video games—they do better when they have immediate feedback and instant gratification. These students also must be explicitly taught how to use the metacognitive system more appropriately, especially in regard to following through on tasks.

When working with students who want attention, it is important to remember the following points to turn the behavior around:

- Be direct and to the point. Tell them exactly what they did wrong, what the consequence is, and why.
- Lighten up. Smile or use humor when dealing with these students.
- Use negotiation when appropriate. For example, tell them that you will not lecture for more than ten minutes at a time and that you will provide opportunities for movement and for talking with other students through small groups or pairing of students at the end of each ten-minute segment. (This is a much more brain-friendly way to teach, anyway.)
- Provide opportunities for students to move during the class time. If working in groups is not appropriate to the learning, provide times when students can stand and stretch.

STUDENTS WHO SEEK POWER

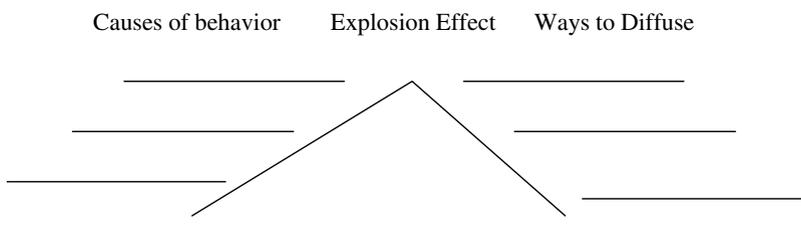
Characteristics of students who seek power may include some or all of the following:

- Demonstrates anxiety
- May be tired often or have headaches
- May try to use guilt to get control
- Nags and complains often
- Tries to control the teacher or others in the classroom
- Has an authoritarian attitude

“When power is the reason for the misbehavior, you will generally feel threatened” (Master Teacher, 2002).

The play for power is usually made out of fear—fear of failure, fear of not being accepted, fear of consequences, and more. The teacher is usually the one with the most power in the classroom. After all, in the eyes of the students, this is the person who can give detentions, call parents, take away points, and give extra work. Interestingly, these are sometimes students who are very structured and who feel that the classroom does not provide enough structure or that discipline is not being maintained. These students will literally take over if intervention is not made promptly. Some ways that the classroom teacher can deal with this behavior is first to have very specific structures in place for work and behavior and to be consistent in their enforcement. Second, the teacher who provides choices for students and who involves students in classroom decisions is less likely to have this type of problem in the classroom. Getting into a power play with a student is a lose/lose situation. Even if you win, you will probably come across as a bully. A more powerful way to deal with these students is to listen to their concerns, acknowledge their feelings, and deal with the issue in private. If they complain loudly about you, let it go in one ear and out the other. Do not give in to the urge to get into a power struggle in front of the class. Help this student to see other choices in the situation. Payne (2001) says in working with inner-city students to have them write down other choices and which choice they will take next time. Glasser (1986) says students sometimes feel the need for power in the classroom because they feel that no one is listening to them. Students who are not doing well academically will especially feel that they are unimportant to the system. Burke (1992) uses a graphic model to help analyze conflicts with students who seek power. For older students, this tool could be used as the basis of a discussion to help them see their behavior and to help analyze those factors that will help to diffuse the situation (see Figure 3.1).

When working with students who seek power, the following guide may help to diffuse the behavior:

Figure 3.1 Phases of a Power Struggle

- Use direct honesty. Tell them exactly what the behavior looks like and sounds like. If you beat around the bush, they will know.
- Be factual. This is what you are doing and here are the indicators. These students do not want “I think and I feel”; they operate on facts.
- Refer back to the rules. These students usually like perimeters and rules and they like for them to be carried out. More than any other group, this group needs to see the rules and needs any disciplinary action to follow the rules.
- State the problem, the rules, and the consequences—in writing.

STUDENTS WHO WANT REVENGE

Some characteristics of students who seek revenge include:

- Critical of the classroom, other students, or the teacher
- Argumentative
- Questions why often
- Aloof or withdrawn, may even daydream
- Snobbish
- May do things his or her own way instead of the way that was assigned
- Critical of the rules, especially if they are inconsistent or if they are not enforced