

"5 Strategies for Preventing Behavior Problems: A Pro-Active Approach to Behavior Modification"

by Angela Powell

Excerpted and adapted from ["The Cornerstone: Classroom Management That Makes Teaching More Effective, Efficient, and Enjoyable"](#).

The key to maintaining order in your classroom has nothing to do with tangible rewards. You don't have to give food, toys, stickers, and pencils as rewards for children, or spend any money at all, in order to gain their cooperation. In fact, teacher control can and should be replaced whenever possible by student self-control. How is this possible? The key is preventing problems before they start:

- 1) Have a routine in place for EVERYTHING and practice procedures, not punishment.
- 2) Have a very SIMPLE, positive whole-class reinforcement system and use individual modification plans for kids with behavioral issues.
- 3) Have a low-maintenance method for regular communication with parents about behavior.
- 4) Make general rules and consequences that are related and logical, and enforce them in ways that are appropriate for individual children.
- 5) Show kids the power of their influence on how the classroom is run and make a clear connection between the way THEY behave and the way YOU behave.

1) Have a routine in place for EVERYTHING and practice procedures, not punishment.

Know all of your rules and procedures to the tiniest detail, and if a child stretches those rules even a tiny bit, call them on it. You can get a little more laid back as the year goes on, but make no exceptions for any class rules at the beginning of the school year. Not only do students have to learn your expectations, they have to UNLEARN those of their previous teachers, since everyone has different standards and routines.

It will take weeks to get your students to where you want them to be, and you will have to continually reinforce their behavior all the way through June. Sure, you would think that by the second or third (or twelfth!) grade kids would automatically put the correct heading on their papers or behave a certain way in the hall, but the fact is, they don't do it without positive reinforcement. Please don't get frustrated in September because your kids still ask where to turn their papers in—keep practicing! It's NORMAL. Don't ease up and allow kids to get sloppy. Having your procedures firmly in place will make teaching easier and more effective throughout the entire year.

2) Have a very SIMPLE, positive, whole-class reinforcement system and use individual modification plans for kids with behavioral issues.

I believe that the most effective whole-class plans are based on positive reinforcement for appropriate behavior. This is in direct contrast to punitive systems that use the 'descending levels' model and provide increasing consequences or punishment for misbehavior.

Typically, a whole-class plan that provides incentives for good behavior is enough to motivate the majority of children in your class and creates a much more supportive learning environment. The needs of more challenging students can be met through individual behavior modification plans which provide additional structure.

There are classes that have an inordinate amount of troubled students, and those groups will need a highly structured whole-class system in addition to individual plans. But I encourage you to determine whether the behavior management system you use is meeting the needs of YOUR class, or if you're just doing it because everyone else in your school uses it. Just because something is popular doesn't mean it constitutes best practice.

3) Have a low-maintenance method for regular communication with parents about behavior.

If the majority of your class is well-behaved, you may not need an ongoing communication system with parents. When there is an incident that you feel a parent should know about, a great solution is to send home the child's own reflection on what happened. Filling out problem solving sheets will document misbehavior (which is important for conferences, office referrals, child study meetings, and so on), and more importantly, helps students reflect on their choices and responsibilities. Children can fill the out the sheets themselves or can dictate to you if they are unable to write independently. You can fit problem solving sheets into any behavior modification system you are using (whole class or individual): just add completing the sheet to the consequence for a certain type or level of misbehavior.

There are lots of strategies for communicating with parents about behavior. One way I've communicated with parents is through daily reports, in which I signed off on children's agendas or notebooks each day. Another method is weekly evaluations, in which I tracked students' behavior throughout the week, marking off misbehavior and missing work as problems occurred, and then summarizing them on the weekly evaluation. Some years, I did those solely to document student behavior and work habits for my own purposes and to update parents. One year with a more difficult class, I also used it as a whole-class behavior management system, letting the kids know how many checks they had and giving rewards (Fun Friday) or consequences (missed recess) based on their performance.

4) Make general rules and consequences that are related and logical, and enforce them in ways that are appropriate for individual children.

Behavior	Related Consequence
Playing around during group work	Finish assignment alone
Ripping up class materials	Not allowed to use them
Loses crayons	Can't color
Talking during instructions	Sit by yourself
Pushing at recess	Can't play that day
Name calling	Write an apology letter
Disrespecting teacher	Sent to another teacher's room for a short time*

**Students should lose access to whatever they show disrespect towards, whether it's a place, thing, or person. It is a huge punishment for most kids to work in another classroom.*

The chart shown here is NOT a list of hard-and-fast rules that should be hung up in the classroom. Every incident should be handled on a case-by-case basis, because each child and situation are different. However, there should be a common thread running throughout and all kids should see a clear connection between what they do and the resulting consequences. Taking away recess or centers isn't necessarily effective when the child wasn't having problems at recess or centers. I recommend tying the consequence directly to the child's action whenever possible.

5) Show kids the power of their influence on how the classroom is run and make a clear connection between the way THEY behave and the way YOU behave.

Students' cooperation or lack thereof has a remarkable effect on both the direction and outcome of a lesson. The problem is that children don't realize the power of their influence unless you point it out to them.

Students must be led to understand that when they follow the rules, you smile a lot, you give them privileges and additional freedom, and you trust them with fun activities. Similarly, they must learn that when they don't contribute to an orderly classroom, you have no choice but to pull in the reins. This must be taught EXPLICITLY at first—students do not automatically make the connection between what they do and what you do! And once you've taught them that their behavior affects how the classroom is run, you must reinforce this understanding throughout the day by responding CONSISTENTLY to behavioral infractions.

Learn more about each of these five strategies in [The Cornerstone book](#)! You'll also learn what to do when you're not seeing results: how to determine which of 2 problems you've got and remedy the situation immediately!