

SELF GOVERNANCE MEETINGS IN RESTRICTIVE SETTINGS FOR STUDENTS WITH INTENSE EMOTIONAL BEHAVIORAL DISORDERS

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The effectiveness of any program depends on adult attitudes of mutual respect and concern for the long-range effects of their interactions on students. Self Governance meetings can provide a specific opportunity to model adults and for students to practice cooperation, mutual respect, responsibility, and social skills in a natural manner. These are also other important long-range goals for the Self Governance Meetings.

- Teachers receive assistance from students in rationally addressing classwide or individual problems occur. If a student comes to the teacher with a problem, if appropriate to the problem being presented, the teachers can simply request that the problem be put on the class meeting agenda. This alone often is enough of an immediate solution to give the student satisfaction, while providing for a cooling-off period before trying to solve the problem.
- Students are often able to solve problems using the Self Governance structure. This is an important social goal for most students in the TIERS model classroom. They learn to develop ideas and receive the encouragement and guidance to express them appropriately.
- Because the students are intensively involved in solving problems of high interest, engagement is achieved and they learn listening skills, further language development, cooperation skills can be learned, memory skills can be enhanced, critical reasoning skills developed and the logical consequences of behavior learned. These skills can then generalize to other settings and classroom activities,

The following cautions should be reviewed, prior to reading further on how to have a successful Self Governance Meeting (SGM) with students who have intense Emotional and Behavior Disorders.

- **Caution: Do not use the meeting as a lecturing and moralizing opportunity or as a guide to exert excessive controls beyond the TIERS Token Economy Motivation System.**

It is essential to be as objective and nonjudgmental as possible. This does not mean you cannot have input into the meetings. You can still put items on the agenda and give your opinion and have a vote in the process.

- **Caution: Do not schedule the meetings too infrequently or too frequently.**

Meetings should be held at least once or twice a week, but not more than that on a regular basis. If the agenda is becoming lengthy, or high priority items are on the agenda, a more frequent schedule may be adopted on an as needed basis. If meetings are not held with appropriate frequency to the situation, students will be discouraged from putting items on the agenda, because it will take too long to get to them.

- **Caution: Do not attempt to deal with a problem in a Self Governance Meeting too soon.**

A cooling-off period of a few hours or days is recommended before discussing a problem. However, it is discouraging to have to wait much longer than three days. (A shorter cooling-off period is recommended for younger students. For example, in TIERS Model classes for early elementary students, two hours may be enough.

- **Caution: Final decisions are made by a majority vote.**

This does not cause feelings of division in a SG meeting when a positive atmosphere has been created. It provides an opportunity for students to learn that everyone doesn't think and feel the same way they do. Students also learn that it is impossible to have everyone agree, but they can still cooperate and negotiate to a mutually acceptable outcome.

Teachers need to run well structured meetings so that the majority vote is acceptable.

Since all decisions must adhere to the respectful, related, reasonable rule, safety is assured even though the majority rule standard for consequences is in place.

Explaining the Self Governance Meeting to Students

Several ideas must be explained and discussed with students before actual agenda items are addressed. During the first meeting, get the students involved as much as possible while teaching them the purposes of class meetings, the importance of mutual respect, how to give compliments, how to solve problems with logical consequences, how to use the Three Rs of Logical Consequences, how to use the agenda, and the importance of a cooling-off period.

Purposes of A SG Meetings in TIERS model classrooms is four fold:

1. To help each other
2. To solve problems
3. To give compliments
4. To plan events

For problem solving purposes of a SG Meeting, if a restitution is suggested for a problem, three rules apply which must be taught to the students, with multiple examples, before developing an agenda and beginning the SG Meeting process. New students will require

coaching prior to the next SG meeting so they too are on equal footing and misunderstandings are avoided.

The 3 Rs of Logical Consequences to review with students prior to any discussion on problem solving:

1. **Related** to the problem that occurred
2. **Respectful** of all parties and bystanders
3. **Reasonable**, not excessive to address the problem that occurred

TIERS Model classroom teachers start every meeting by asking the students,

- “What are the two main purposes of class meetings?-The two main purposes are to help each other and to solve problems”.
- “What other purposes are there for a Self Governance Meeting? To give compliments and possibly to plan events.”

SOME OF THE GOALS OF SELF GOVERNMENT MEETINGS

Teaching Mutual Respect

Review the meaning of mutual respect by having a discussion of the following questions:

1. **Why is it disrespectful when more than one person talks at the same time?** (We can't hear what everyone is saying. The person who is supposed to be talking feels others don't care, and so on.) This is essentially a behavior on the token economy motivation system. The teacher is facilitating cognitive understanding of the importance of this rule.
2. **Why is it disrespectful to disturb others?** (“They can't concentrate and learn from what is going on, it disturbs them and can lead to problems or misunderstandings”.)

3. Why is it important to raise your hand (or use another gesture that has been agreed upon) and allow the SG leader to grant permission to speak before speaking in a SG meeting? (“To achieve order and remember whose turn it is, to practice an important skill needed in less restrictive environments”.)

4. Why is it important to listen when others are speaking? (So that we can learn from each other, to show respect for each other, and because we like to have others listen to us.)

TIERS Model Classrooms have the rules on a visible poster and review them orally prior to each meeting beginning:

- **Raise Your Hand and Wait for a Turn**
- **Take Your Turn**
- **Listen When Others Are Speaking**
- **Be Respectful to Everyone in the SG Meeting**

Teach How to Give Compliments

Spend some time with students exploring the meaning of compliments prior to the first SG meeting. This can be done immediately prior to the first meeting, but will need to be reviewed before each subsequent meeting as well. Remember, these are students with intense support needs who may never have been successful in the past, or have never or rarely attempted to give compliments to others. This will require multiple models. Be sure to give non-examples and examples to aid in discrimination. For example, “I would like to compliment John for helping me with my assignment on our team during math” Non example, “I would like to compliment John

for finally being nice to me on our team during math.” Do not assume this discrimination is within the student’s repertoire of skills.

All compliments in a SG meeting are for one of three purposes:

- Academic or Behavior Accomplishments
- Helpfulness
- Sharing or Appropriate Social Engagement

Have students brainstorm for specific examples in each of these areas. Then teach them to use the following script to use within the SG Meeting,

“I would like to compliment (*a person’s name*) for (*something specific that person did.*)”

Using these words helps students stay on the task of recognizing what others *do*, rather than what they wear, or a new tattoo, or haircut. In classrooms where the prescribed phrasing is not used, the complements tend to be less specific and more superficial. Maintain fidelity in this area.

At first many students might say, “I would like to compliment Jill for being my friend.” Let this go for a while during the learning process, but eventually the group could again brainstorm on how to be specific about what a friend *does* that we would like to recognize and appreciate.

The teacher may start by giving several compliments read from notes the teacher and/or paraeducator has taken during the day, when noticing things students did that would merit recognition.

TIERS Model Teachers are expected to give positive gestures or words both contingently, and generally at a ratio of approximately ten positives to one correction in the

classroom. This is a modeling opportunity for the students, and should be implemented faithfully. In fact, students with more intense needs may need a higher ratio of positive to negative or corrective statements. In other words, their behavior needs “shaping.” That is, staff should be reinforcing closer and closer approximations to an end goal. The more problems a student has, the more frequently positive behavior should be noticed. Once a student has developed skill fluency in giving and receiving compliments, an important achievement has been attained that increases their social acceptability and increases potential for eventual movement to less restrictive environments.

During the first meeting, have everyone give at least one complement to make sure they know how to do it. If anyone has difficulty, have the class help by asking if anyone has any ideas on something that happened to this student during the day that he could compliment someone for, like socially engaging during a break or sharing an item. After this, compliments can be optional in any SG meeting, but on occasion the leader may want to specifically ask, “Who has a compliment? Or, “Let’s have 3 or 4 compliments before we move on.” When properly run, students are actually interested in the compliment segment of an SG meeting.

It is also a good idea to teach students to say thank you after receiving a compliment. You may have several class meetings just for compliments while the students learn this process. Many teachers of students with intense EBD have shared that complements alone have been significant in creating a more positive atmosphere in their classrooms. After the initial awkwardness, students love looking for, giving, and receiving positive recognition

Teach Logical Consequences That May Arise in an SG Meeting

Teach the students to use logical consequences before trying to solve any problems in an SG meeting.

1. First, give the following examples of natural consequences by asking what happens in the following circumstances:
 - If you stand in the rain? (You get wet.)
 - If you play on the freeway? (You might get killed.)
 - If you don't sleep? (You get tired.)
 - If you don't eat? (You get hungry.)

2. Next explain that logical consequences are things that can be done to help others learn to be responsible for their behavior, when it is not appropriate to let them experience a natural consequence. Explain the Three Rs of Logical Consequences. Logical consequences must be 1) related, 2) respectful and 3) reasonable. Review the poster with these rules.

3. Have students brainstorm and discuss logical consequences for the following problems and then continue the list, adding their suggested consequence after the problem:
 - Someone who writes on the desk
 - Someone who won't pass the ball in basketball
 - Someone who doesn't do their work during class time
 - Someone who is late for school

Note: It is much easier to give the students practice by working on hypothetical situations, so that there is a lack of emotional involvement.

4. After receiving as many suggestions as possible, go over each one and have the students see how well they fit the criteria for the Three Rs for Logical Consequences. Have them discuss their reasons why they think each suggestion is or isn't *related*,

respectful, reasonable. Also have them discuss whether each suggestion will be helpful to the person, or will it be hurtful? Have the class decide which suggestions should be eliminated because they do not meet the guidelines of the Three Rs or because they are in some other way hurtful.

5. Remember, the SG meeting is occurring within the context of all other Level 1 interventions. Therefore, the loss of points and levels is an existing consequence for problem behavior. Additional consequences then, would be to further address a problem. For example, a student was caught bullying a classmate. That will result in consequences of point loss in the classroom Motivational System. If addressed in the SG meeting, the related, respectful, reasonable decision by majority vote might be for the two students to do something together, showing cooperation and respect, give an apology, or other action beyond that which is inherent in the token economy motivation system in the classroom.

Note: When any of the Three Rs of Logical Consequences are not present, the Three Rs of Punishment in the SG Meeting process will likely sabotage the teacher's efforts to make SG meetings an effective teaching opportunity for responsibility, mutual respect, and how to cooperate. There are two side effects of punishment, fight and flight. When consequences do not adhere to the related, respectful, reasonable guidelines, these side effects will likely occur. This manifests as cognitive errors or side effects likely to be observed or expressed following the SG meeting:

1. **Resentment and planning social withdrawal** FLIGHT response
(“This is unfair. I can’t trust adults or my peers.”)
2. **Plotting revenge** FIGHT response

(“They are winning now, but I’ll get even”)

3. Plotting evasion tactics to avoid being caught combined with social withdrawal

FLIGHT response

(“They won’t catch me again.” “I don’t care about them.”)

4. Internalized self rejection thoughts and planning social withdrawal or injury to self

Flight response

(“I am a bad person.” “What’s the point of being here? I’m just not sure I should go on living”)

HOW TO CONDUCT AN SELF GOVERNANCE MEETING IN TIERS MODEL CLASSROOMS

Using the Agenda

Introduce the agenda to the group.

Keep a sheet of paper on a clipboard where it is easily accessible for all to enter items.

Explain to the students that you are going to teach them to solve problems rather than trying to solve all of them by yourself or require adults to solve them for you. From now on, instead of coming to you with problems, they can put their name on the agenda, followed by a few words to help them remember what the problems are about. For example, Sean (the student) wants to discuss who gets to play chess (He has a complaint about another student. Do not allow the entry to be: Sean, wants to discuss Tom’s lack of sharing chess games.

Warn them that at first they may forget and still come to you for solutions, but you will remind them of what can be managed in SG meeting. Eventually they will stop coming to you for solutions and will remember to put problems on the agenda. These problems will then be solved during the SG meetings.

Especially in classes with behavior problems, the interventions have to not disrupt the flow of instruction. When all instruction comes to a halt in order to address one problem after another, the students are deprived of academic instruction. The SG meeting gives ample practice in social emotional reasoning and is a core component of education for student with EBD and provides a structure that reduces the need to deal with each problem as it occurs, and thus facilitates the maintenance of the flow of instruction.

Students often come up with good solutions and are then willing to cooperate because they were involved in the decision. When solutions do not seem to work, i.e., are not yet meeting the 3 Rs, point that out to the students, and then table the discussion. Simply put the problem back on the agenda for more discussion and problem solving in a cooperative atmosphere a day later. When you yourself put items on the agenda, be sure to *own* the problem, rather than trying to place blame. For example, “I have a problem getting the lessons covered when we are interrupted by disruptive behavior. This week I think it has happened about 10 times. Yes, there is the individual consequence of lost points, but is there anything we can do as a class to help me out?” Students often feel good about helping you with your problem if you have a positive and supportive relationship with each student.

The items on the agenda are to be covered in chronological order in the amount of time allotted. Any problem that is not finished before the end of the meeting will be continued the next day. Quite often, by the time an agenda item comes up for discussion, the person who put it on the agenda will say that it has already been resolved. Say, “Fine,” and go on to the next item, or ask the student how resolution occurred if that seems appropriate.

Using the Cooling-Off Period

Explain why problems can't be solved when people are upset. With older students you can ask them why. With younger students, explain that the purpose of waiting a few hours or a few days before solving problems on the agenda is to give people a chance to cool off and calm down so that problems can be solved respectfully.

Meeting in a Circle

It is important that students sit in a circle for SG meetings. Remaining at their desks not only creates physical barriers, which impedes the process, but also creates a likelihood of disengagement and playing with items in their desks.

Take time to train students to move their desks with as little noise and confusion as possible. Expect that the movement to a circle with everyone facing each other to take between 15 seconds and one minute. Many classes take pride in their efficient desk moving with reinforcement. Training can involve several steps. First you might ask the students what they think they need to do to move with as little noise and confusion as possible. They will usually come up with all the things necessary for a smooth transition, but there is greater investment because they suggested the components. . Then ask them how many times they think they will need to practice before they can implement their good ideas.

Some teachers like to assign seats. On the first day they have one student at a time move his or her desk and put the chair into the assigned space. This will depend on the nature of the group dynamics. Other teachers have a few move at a time, by row or by team. If they are noisy and disruptive, have them practice until they solve the problems. Once they have learned to do it quietly, they can move at once.

Class-Meeting Structure

The steps listed below were developed by Frank Medder and are helpful guidelines teachers can use for successful class meetings. Without these steps, many class meetings fail because there is not enough structure. Without structure, students are not immediately impressed with what the teacher is trying to accomplish and will become disruptive. The teacher then “gives up,” commenting to the student, “Well, obviously you don’t want a class meeting now. We’ll try again later when you are ready.” In other words, without adequate structure, the teacher ends up blaming the students rather than effectively managing the procedure.

1. Begin with compliments. Students who want to give someone a compliment will raise their hand and the teacher or student leader should go around the circle and call on everyone who has raised a hand. Go around the circle once and call on everyone who has a hand raised. For students at Natural Consequences stage in the Classroom Motivational System, being the SG meeting leader is a powerful and often desired role. When going around the circle it is important to start and stop at the same place. This avoids the accusations of “unfair” when a teacher or SG leader calls on students at random and arbitrarily chooses when to stop.

There is likely to be one student who claims he didn’t get called on. Some teachers have their students pass a beanbag or small fuzzy ball, instead of raising their hands. The person who has the object in his hands may either speak or pass it on.

2. Read the first item on the agenda. Ask the person who wrote the item if it is still a problem.

If s/he says no, go on to the next item. If another person is involved, ask that student to explain his or her side of the story.

3. Ask the person “accused” of causing a problem if s/he has a suggestion for a solution.

If s/he does, ask the group to vote on the suggestion given. If the majority vote agrees with the suggestion, go on to the next item.

4. If a solution is not suggested or if the majority vote does not go along with the suggestion, go around the circle twice for comments and suggestions. Start with the person who wrote the item on the agenda and end just before this person after going around the circle twice.

5. Write down every suggestion exactly as it is given. This role can be assigned to a student, or SG leader, or teacher. You will find suggestions on what to do if students are being hurtful rather than helpful (by suggesting true logical consequences) under “Common Questions” at the end of this handout.

6. Read all the suggestions before asking for a vote. Instruct students to vote for only one suggestion. Read the suggestions again one at a time and write down the number of people voting for each suggestion.

7. When the final vote has a majority, if the vote entails a logical consequence, ask the person for whom the solution was suggested when he would like to do it and give two possibilities to choose from, such as today or tomorrow, or during recess or after school. There is some psychological benefit in giving students a choice of when they would like to complete the consequence. It gives them a sense of positive power and commitment.

This method provides a process that can be followed step by step. However, it is not so rigid as to eliminate room for teacher individuality and creativity. Some teachers do not feel comfortable with a majority vote. After all the suggestions are in, they ask the student

whose behavior is of concern which suggestion he or she thinks would be the most helpful. These teachers claim that the student usually chooses the most logical, even when it is not necessarily the easiest. Other teachers say this does not work for them, because their students choose the easiest and it does not seem to help change the behavior.

After observing a SG meeting where a student was asked to apologize in front of the class for a misbehavior that was put on the agenda, one adult objected. She felt it was humiliating for the student. When the teacher then invited her to ask the student and other members of the class if it bothered them to apologize in front of everyone. The class unanimously agreed that it did not bother them. It is important for each teacher to be aware of the student's developmental levels and comfort with various consequences, rather than assuming all students and groups respond similarly.

Teacher Skills

We previously discussed many of the skills students need to learn for successful class meetings. There are also several teacher skills that greatly enhance class meetings. It is most important to model what you are hoping the students will learn mutual respect and cooperation.

1. Courtesy statements

Teachers **should model courtesy statements**, such as *please, thank you, you are welcome*, and so on. TIERS model teachers can say to their students, "One reason you are in this class is likely to be that you have not shown respect to others in an acceptable manner, or with acceptable frequency. I know that if a person isn't respecting others, it means they themselves have not experienced respect from others

at a high frequency. In this class, I am committed to showing you respect frequently and skillfully so that you will know what it feels like, and you will then be more likely to show that respect to others. I am committed to do this not only when everything is going well, but also during any problems that occur in the class.”

2. Open-ended questioning

One of the most important skills that both models mutual respect and allows students to develop their capabilities is **open-ended questioning**. Any statement you might like to make can be put in the form of a question. If you want to let students know you think they are being too noisy, ask, “How many of us think it is getting a bit too noisy in here?” It is especially effective if you ask the question both ways. If you ask how many think it is okay, also ask how many think it is not okay. The less you let your own biases show, the more you allow students to think. It is amazing how often students come up with the same kind of lecturing and moralizing statements they reject when they are spoken by an adult.

3. Non-judgmental

Be as **non-judgmental** as possible. When students feel they can discuss anything without being judged, they will bring many things out in the open for discussion and learning.

That means in your body language and words. Also, do not censor agenda items.

Some teachers want to censor items on the agenda that they consider “tattletale” items.

What may seem like a tattletale item to you is a real concern to the student. Other TIERS model teachers want to eliminate items if a similar problem has been discussed before.

Again, it may be similar to you, but unique to the student. The important thing to remember is that the process is even more important than the solutions. Even if the item

seems the same to you, the students may solve it differently or more quickly or more quickly because of their past experience with the process.

4. Find positive intent

Finally, it is important to be able to **find the positive intent** behind every behavior.

This enables students to feel validated and cherished, an essential prerequisite to changing behavior. For example, if someone is caught cheating on a test, and it comes up in a SG meeting, the teacher/leader would ask, “What did you hope to achieve by looking at the spelling words during the test?” The student is likely to state s/he wanted to get a good grade. That opens the discussion about achievement, and results in a productive discussion that began with a problem behavior. It also increases the likelihood the offending student will accept the consequence because her positive intent, the end goal, was acknowledged, even though her means of attaining that end goal was faulty.

COMMON QUESTIONS

Question: *Don't students need immediate solutions to their problems? I don't think my students could wait for their problems to come up on the agenda.*

Answer: Teachers often feel they need to deal with every problem immediately. In fact, allowing a coll down, even up to one to three days actually can work better. Just writing the problem on the agenda can be perceived as a solution by the student.

Question: *What if a consequence that has been decided on doesn't work effectively?*

Answer: The decision should stay in effect until someone puts it back on the agenda.

Question: *What if someone feels that a consequence is unfair?*

Answer: *They can put it on the agenda.*

Question: *What do you do if students suggest punishment instead of logical consequences?*

Answer: *Eventually, when students become familiar with the process, they will usually work it out. To help teach the process, you might try asking students to state how they think their suggestions will be helpful and if it meets all Three Rs of Logical Consequences by being related, respectful, and reasonable. This is especially effective if it is required for every suggestion rather than just those that seem “suspicious.” Teachers should write down each suggestion given, and then the students decide which suggestions fit all the criteria of helpfulness and logical consequences before they vote.*

Question: *What if students start to “gang up” on a particular student?*

Answer: *This does happen sometimes, even after the students have learned to be positive and helpful most of the time. Remember, these are students with social emotional deficits. Redirect them through effective questioning. In one middle school SG meeting it seemed obvious that the student being discussed felt he was being ganged up on. The teacher asked the students, “How many of you would feel you were being ganged up on if you were in Bill’s position right now?” Most of them raised their hands. The teacher then asked “How many of you would be willing to imagine yourself in the other person’s position when making comments and suggestions?” They all agreed they would and admitted it was funny they hadn’t thought of that before. The students in this classroom had already decided that everyone would put their head down and close their eyes while voting, so that no one could be influenced by the vote of others or be worried that someone would get mad at them for their vote. Voting can also be on small slips of paper.*

Question: *How do you stop ‘tattletales’ from being on the agenda?*

Answer: *You don't. These are so often the kind of problems that are real to students. If teachers censor agenda items, students will lose faith in the process. Also, when students use the SGmeeting process, these problems lose their "tattletale" connotation because students are trying to solve them in helpful, rather than hurtful, ways.*

Question: ***What do you do when a few students monopolize the agenda?***

Answer: *Put it on the agenda and let the students solve the problem.*

Question: ***Can students put the teacher on the agenda if they have a complaint?***

Answer: *If teachers have captured the spirit of the class-meeting process, they will feel comfortable discussing their own mistakes as an opportunity to learn. This is excellent modeling for the students.*

Question: ***What do you do when students won't admit they did whatever they have been accused of?***

Answer: Once an atmosphere of trust and helpfulness has been established, it is rare that students don't feel free to take responsibility for their actions. Before this atmosphere has been established, you might ask if anyone else in the class saw what happened. Some teachers have the students role-play what happened. The role-playing usually gets so humorous that everyone is laughing. This sometimes inspires the reluctant student to tell how it *really* happened.

You could take this opportunity to ask some questions about why students might feel reluctant to admit they did something, such as, "How many of you would want to admit you had done something if you thought other people might want to hurt you, instead of help you?" "How many of you have had other people accuse you of doing something when you did not think you had done anything?" Many teachers have found it effective to ask the students if they would be

willing to take the person's word that they didn't do it this time and put it on the agenda if it happens again.

Question: *What do you do if students use the agenda as revenge? My students go to the agenda and if their name is on it, they put the person on the agenda who put them on.*

Answer: This may happen in the early stages of implementing SG meetings, before students learn and believe that the purpose of the agenda is to help each other, rather than to "get" each other. TIERS Model teachers can solve this problem by using a shoebox for the agenda, rather than a clipboard. They have students write their problem on different colored paper for different days of the week, so that they can tell which problems are the oldest. Some teachers also have students put written compliments in the box. These written compliments are read before the oral compliments are given. Most teachers who use the shoebox at first start using the open clipboard agenda as soon as they feel their students are ready for it.

Question: *What should I do about students gathering at the agenda on their way into the classroom after recess or break?*

Answer: If students are gathering at the agenda when coming into the classroom, making it difficult to start lessons, have a rule that the agenda can be used only when leaving the classroom. Sometimes just waiting until the next recess or break is enough of a cooling-off period for the student to decide that something wasn't serious enough to put on the agenda. Some teachers start out with this rule and then later, when the students can handle this without being disruptive, they allow them to use the agenda anytime.

Question: *Is it really necessary to have class meetings every day? I'm not having that many problems and hate to take so much time?*

Answer: *The main reason for having class meetings every day is to teach a process. Many students do not really learn the process if there is a time span of a week between meetings. TIERS model teachers will wish to begin the SG process by holding the SG meeting every day initially. This can make the difference between success and failure. Students learn and trust the process when it was done every day. The atmosphere of a class changes because the students learn positive skills, which they continue to use throughout the day. This is not a detractor from curricula, this is an important content for students with emotional and behavior disorders.*

It is better to have SG meetings every day to every other day and if there are not any problems on the agenda, use the time after compliments for planning or discussing other issues.

Question: ***What if an item on the agenda involves a student who is absent?***

Answer: *If the absent student is the one who put the item on the agenda, cross it out and go on to the next item. If the absent student is the accused, skip it, but leave it on the agenda as the first item to be discussed when the student returns. This reduces the possibility that absences are because of the agenda. However, if you suspect that students want to be absent because their name is on the agenda, this should be discussed in a class meeting so that the class can decide what they need to do to make sure people know they want to help each other, rather than hurt each other.*

Question: ***What if parents object?***

Answer: *The parents have agreed to the placement in the restrictive classroom. This is a part of the curricula to address their child's social emotional problems. Some students may feel they can get special attention from their parents by complaining about being "picked on" in class meetings. Even when students try to describe SG meetings accurately, parents may misperceive the content. If you wish, put this on the agenda. The*

class may elect to draft a description of the SG meeting for their parents as a result of tackling the problem as a class in the SG meeting.

Question: *What if students don't want to participate?*

Answer: Students should not have a choice in this matter, just as they do not have a choice regarding their participation in math or any other class activity.

Question: *How does this process work with very young students with intense social emotional disturbance, such as first or second-grade students?*

Answer: Great! Often these children will surprise their teacher with their skill in using the same vocabulary and the same problem-solving skills. These young students are receiving timely instruction in prosocial skills through the SG meetings and other components of the restrictive setting!

Younger students may need more help with the agenda, however. The TIERS model teachers will probably need to have the students come to them or an aide and dictate what they would like to put on the agenda. Alternatively, you can have the students write their name and draw a picture to remind them of their problem. In these early grades, half the problems are often solved because the student can't remember what happened by the time their name comes up on the agenda. Younger students may need a little more direction and guidance, so the teacher may need to be more actively involved than for older students. At the beginning of each meeting, Have these young students with intense E/BD recite the goals:

- 1. To help each other*
- 2. To solve problems*

Then have them recite the three rules:

- 1. Don't bring any objects to the circle*

2. *Only one person can speak at a time*

3. *All six legs must be on the floor (two human and four chair).*

OTHER SUGGESTIONS TO AUGMENT THE SG MEETINGS

Secret Pals

Some teachers may wish to consider using a Monday SG meeting for each student to draw the name of a secret pal for the week. The Friday class meeting is then used for each student to guess who his or her secret pal was by sharing what nice things that secret pal did for him or her.

Some preliminary teaching is important for this to be effective. First, have the students brainstorm on things they could do for a secret pal, such as leaving nice notes for him, sharing something with him, helping her, playing or socially engaging with him, smiling and saying hello every day, or leaving a piece of candy in her desk. After several ideas have been listed on the board, have each student write down at least five that they would like to do. They can tape this list on to their desk and cross off an item after they have done it. This reduces the possibility that some students will be overlooked. This has the likelihood of significantly increased positive feelings of friendship in many classrooms. Remember, students with E/BD often do not socially engage others, or misperceive other's intentions. These techniques may sound corny, but in fact, secret pals has been used in many corporations with adults!

SG Meeting Chairperson

Many teachers rotate chairperson and secretarial duties. One student will be the chairperson *for* a week and will follow the format. The secretary is the person responsible for writing down all suggestions and final decisions.

Planning

There are certain decisions students cannot be involved in, such as curriculum or procedures in a TIERS Model classroom that are integral to the program. Where and how to turn in homework, however would not be a critical component, and could be discussed in an SG meeting. There are many areas where students could participate in planning decisions. When students are invited to participate and help make the decisions, they are more highly motivated to cooperate in the fulfillment of those decisions. This concept of “shared controls” where students have a voice with the adult in determining certain actions has long been used with students of all ages and is especially valuable when interacting with students with E/BD.

Most classrooms have rules and procedures posted somewhere in the room. The rules are the same for each TIERS model classroom: Safe, Respectful and Responsible. Procedures however have some variability. As procedures are developed, post them under the heading “We Decided.” Teachers should use the SG meeting prior to a field trip to increase success. Have the students discuss all the things that could go wrong on the field trip to make it a bad experience and decide on solutions to these potential problems. They can then discuss what they need to do to make it a pleasant field trip.

SG meetings have also been helpful in making the substitute’s job easier. Have a discussion about substitutes. Ask the students what they could do to “bug a sub.” After they discuss this, ask them how a substitute might feel when being “bugged.” It is amazing how many students never consider the substitute’s feelings. Ask for ideas on how to make things pleasant for the substitute. Then ask how many are willing to help instead of hurt. When SG meetings are a regular part of classroom procedures, student misbehavior is reduced when there is a substitute

because self discipline and cooperation increases. When students forget, misbehavior is reported on the agenda.

How to End Class Meetings

When class meetings are effective, students often get so involved that they would like to continue beyond a reasonable time. This problem is eliminated if meetings are held just before lunch or recess. It is rare that students want to continue into lunch or recess time.

Enforcing Consequences

It is not necessary for the teacher to enforce the consequences decided upon by the group. The students will be very aware of what happens, and if another student should “forget,” he or she will be reminded, or it will go back on the agenda.

Things Often Get Worse Before they Get Better

Remember this point so that you won't become discouraged. Students quite often don't trust that adults are really willing to listen to them and take them seriously. It may take some time for them to get used to this. At first they may try to use this new power to be hurtful and punishing, because this is the model they have come to expect. Keep your long-range goals in mind and maintain the courage to be imperfect. Teachers have been tempted to quit before they make it through the rough part. Use the TIERS model support member to assist you, observe an SG meeting and provide the encourage you need. These are students with emotional and behavior disorders that will not evaporate over night. When a new student joins the class, be sure to teach that student how the SG meeting works. Provide a SG buddy who leans over and interprets what is going on in the SG meeting to the student so s/he quickly is assimilated into the process and learns that trust, respect and community building are the norms in this environment, not harmful or hurtful interactions.