

INITIAL GUIDELINES FOR CLASSROOM AND SCHOOL-WIDE BEHAVIOR CODES

If behavior support programs are to be effective, classroom discipline strategies must be coordinated with school-wide strategies. Administrators need to know what has been tried by the teacher before students are sent to their offices. Similarly, teachers need to know that they have administrative support, and need to know what actions will be taken when a student is sent to the office. Thus, all discipline plans need to be jointly formulated and approved between classroom teachers and the responsible administrator.

COMMUNICATING RULES

The first step in setting up a discipline program is to clearly communicate the rules or codes of conduct. Educators too frequently assume that they have communicated the standards, or that the students should know how to behave. Furthermore, standards are frequently taught indirectly rather than directly, and consequently, students often learn the standards by trial and error.

Student Involvement

There are several actions educators can take to increase the likelihood that rules will be clearly communicated. First, students should be involved in the development of classroom rules. Similarly, both parents and students should be involved in the development of school-wide rules. Rules tend to be more acceptable and understood when all parties involved have participated in their development.

Positive, Instructive and Brief

When classroom rules are developed, the final listing should include **no more than about five or six rules**, and should also be coordinated with the school-wide policies. Keep the list simple and to the point. Also, rules should be stated positively, not negatively, since positive listing provides students with a guide as to how to behave in preference to how not to behave. This is more instructive, educative, and less suppressive. Once developed and approved by the responsible administrators, a copy of the rules should be filed in the central office, posted in the room and often posted on an individual student's desk if an individualized program to increase rule-following behaviors is being utilized. Daily report cards may also reference these rules.

Presentation Components

Rules should be presented both visually and verbally to promote communication and reduce misunderstandings. Classroom rules can be prominently displayed on a poster, printed as a handout or students can copy the rules in their notebooks. School wide rules can be printed in a student handbook. Classroom and School wide rules should be actively taught with students participating in identifying which behaviors are rule-following and which behaviors are not acceptable as the day unfolds. Periodic review is critical with constructive changes made when necessary.

Parent Support

Classroom and School-wide rules need to have parental support, and thus, need to be communicated to parents. At the classroom level, this is usually accomplished by a letter (describing the classroom rules) sent home by the classroom teacher. It is also helpful to request that the parent sign the letter

Adapted from: Consultation materials used in "Constructive Discipline: Building a Climate of Change," An ESEA Title IV - C Innovative - Developmental Grant, 1983.

to indicate that they agree to the rules and have discussed them with their youngsters. By this form of communication, it is then clear that the parents have received a copy of the rules and that they have agreed to support them. At the school level, even though some parents have been involved in developing the rules, a letter to the home describing the school rules can clarify these rules, help avoid misunderstandings, and can solicit increased parental support.

SELECTING CONSEQUENCES FOR FOLLOWING RULES

Recognize

After the rules have been jointly established and posted, students should be positively recognized for following them. Rules are not routinely followed by all students unless there are consequences for both following them and for violating them.

Conseque/Cue

When rules are consequted, objects, people, and events in the environment acquire discriminative or cueing properties. For example, individuals learn to behave differently in different settings due to the varied experiences, or consequences, in those settings. Students learn to raise their hands in Mrs. Smith's classroom and to speak out freely in Ms. Adam's classroom. Staff members learn that it is fine to discuss topic "X" with Bob but not with Tom. These discriminations develop due to the consequences individuals experience in the presence of their teachers and friends. As a result of such consequences, each environment acquires its own unique cueing properties.

Reinforce

When rule-following behavior is reinforced, the environment will soon cue the individual to behave in accordance with the rules. The environment signals that if you "raise you hand" in Mrs. Smith's classroom you are likely to receive reinforcement. Thus, when reinforcement is provided for following rules such as hand raising, that behavior becomes the accepted pattern, or habit, in that particular setting. However, if rule following behavior is not reinforced or recognized, it will eventually cease. Periodically reinforcing non-rule following behavior, such as calling on or recognizing a student who blurts out at a time when hand raising is expected assures continuing problems with blurting out will occur in the classroom.

Variety

A variety of potential reinforcers for classroom use is available. At the school level, reinforcers such as special assemblies, field trips, pop corn or ice cream at recess, tickets to sporting events, certificates, point auctions, award assemblies, special movies, extra free play periods, dance time at recess, and special honors or jobs on campus have been successfully used.

The actual selection of consequences, whether they be positive or negative, should involve students. Several studies have shown that when students are involved in selecting their own reinforcers for following the rules, and in selecting their own consequences for rule violations, they participate more and report more of the rule violations than when the consequences are determined by educators or parents. Parents too, of course, should be involved in the selection of consequences at the school level to promote additional support and (improved) school-home communications.

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