

CORRECTING MISBEHAVIOR: BASIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Recognize that minor misbehavior is developmentally normal for children and adolescents. Hold high behavior expectations, but understand that such expectations will not always be met. Don't expect perfect behavior.

Be patient. Understand that rarely do behaviors improve immediately, and that the development of self-discipline takes a long time.

Recognize that thoughts, emotions, and behaviors are interrelated. When correcting misbehavior, consider how thoughts and emotions influence, and are influenced by, one's behavior.

Closely examine environmental factors that might have contributed to the misbehavior. Reflect upon how the curriculum, your teaching, and other classroom (and school) factors might be adapted to improve the student's behavior.

Be sensitive to cultural and racial differences. Respect the feelings, thoughts, and dignity of *all* students.

Do not argue: speak calmly, firmly, and respectfully.

Focus on how the behavior is to improve.

Use the occasion as an opportunity to develop social and moral problem-solving skills and emotional competencies (e.g., ask the student to identify the problem and its consequences, express feelings, identify his/her personal goals, consider thoughts of others, think of and evaluate alternatives, and develop and try a plan).

Include the student in developing intervention plans. Allow for student input and negotiation, where appropriate.

Reinforce effort and achievement, not obedience.

Recognize the multiple limitations to the use of punishment (see Chapter 2) **and the student's right to due process when certain types of punishment are used** (e.g., suspension).

Before correcting misbehavior, try to make sure that the student is actually responsible for the misbehavior, especially when correction entails the use of punitive techniques. Students are entitled to the right to due process.

Make sure that students understand what they did wrong, why it was wrong, and what they should have done differently.

Intervene early, before the misbehavior escalates.

Do not model aggression, either verbally or nonverbally. If you're very angry or upset, wait until you calm down. Or, have someone else deal with the misbehavior.

Avoid public humiliation. If the misbehavior requires more than a mild verbal correction, make every attempt to handle the correction privately.

Be fair. Consequences should be consistent with the severity of the misbehavior.

Be consistent. The same consequences should be used when the same behavior is exhibited under the same circumstances.

Be aware of, and responsive to, all laws and school regulations and policies that govern school discipline.

Make sure your expectations and standards for improvement are clear, reasonable, and realistic.

Convey a sense of optimism and trust that the student's behavior will improve and meet your expectations.

Use the least amount of external control necessary to bring about a change in behavior.

Work to establish and maintain a positive teacher-student relationship. If the relationship is harmed due to the use of correction, work to restore it by demonstrating warmth, caring, and support.

Support a positive self-concept:

Focus on the behavior, not the person.

Respect the student's need to feel a sense of belonging. Thus, avoid public humiliation.

Respect the student's need for autonomy. Give choices, where appropriate. Emphasize that you are trying to *help* the student.

When feasible, point out the student's strengths and progress.

View the correction of misbehavior similar to the correction of an academic problem: The problem presents an opportunity for the student to learn and practice important skills.

Use "induction." That is, your message should not focus solely on the consequences of the misbehavior but should:

Arouse empathy and perspective taking, but not anger.

Focus on the impact of the behavior on others.

Emphasize the values and moral reasoning that underlie the inhibition of inappropriate behavior and exhibition of prosocial behavior.

Emphasize responsibility for one's own actions.

Involve parents, especially when correction needs to be repeated. Establish a support system to help the student improve his behavior.

Don't hesitate to seek assistance and support from others, including fellow teachers, administrators, school psychologists, and counselors.

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Additional Resources:

Koenig, L. (2000). *Smart discipline for the classroom: Respect and cooperation restored* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

Lewis, R. (2001). Classroom discipline and student responsibility: The students' view. *Teaching & Teacher Education*, 17(3), 307-319.

http://ronpartin.com/pdf_files/discipline.pdf: Hot Tips on Classroom Management
<http://www.pgcps.pg.k12.md.us/~elc/managebeh.htm>: Managing Behavior.