

# Classroom Rules and Consequences

Chapter 2 (pp. 115–139) in *CHAMPS* or Chapter 5 in *Discipline in the Secondary Classroom*

Classroom rules tell students you have specific expectations for behavior. This informs students up front that certain behaviors are not acceptable and will result in corrective consequences. The following are key characteristics for effective classroom rules:

- Typically rules are designed to address the most *frequent* and/or irritating misbehaviors.
- Decide whether you want input from the students. Research shows there is no difference in effectiveness if the teacher or the students develop the rules. If you want student feedback, realize that there won't be rules prepared for the first day of school.
- Having 3–6 rules is preferred.
- Rules need to be specific and observable—something you can see, hear, say, and feel.
- Attempt to state most of the rules in positive terms (sets high expectations and a positive tone).
- Rules need to be posted in a prominent place. This allows you to refer to them and reduces the personalization of the correction by focusing on the rule compliance and also having less eye contact.

## Sample Class Rules

- Arrive on time with all materials (pencil, notebook, textbook, paper).
- Keep hands, feet and objects to self.
- Follow directions the first time they are given.
- Stay on task during all work times.
- Do not use profanity.

## Consequences for Your Class Rules

- Consequences for rule violations need to be planned ahead of time and shared with students.
- If student input was sought in establishing class rules, decide if you want to seek student input on consequences.
- There must be a *mild* consequence for breaking a class rule. Sometimes teachers select consequences that are so harsh that they are unwilling to always implement them when a rule is broken (“Sam, stop that because I don't want to give you a detention”).
- Never use a corrective consequence that humiliates or ridicules the student. Also avoid using academic consequences (e.g., writing an essay or doing extra problems).
- Realize that consequences will be effective only if the teacher's classroom management plan incorporates the other components of STOIC: structure for success, teach and review the expectations, observe/monitor behavior, and interact positively with students. These proactive parts of STOIC make mild consequences effective.

- During the first week of establishing classroom rules, view violations as “honest mistakes” and respond by re-teaching/reviewing the rules. Possible consequences here include verbal reprimand, proximity management, positive practice and discussion. After a week, move to consequences that provide a penalty for the rule violation (e.g., timeout, time owed, etc.).
- Once a consequence is selected for a rule violation, use it for all misbehavior associated with the rule and with any student who violates the rule. The severity of the consequence remains constant (like a parking ticket). This will promote consistency and fairness.
- We recommend against having a progressive hierarchy of consequences for rule violations because such a system requires careful recording and tracking. It also lends itself to inconsistent application because the teacher may want to avoid assigning the final (and often most severe) consequence for a minor misbehavior (e.g., tapping a pencil on the desk). Progressive consequences (like speeding tickets) are more effective when responding to chronic misbehavior.
- Consequences must be delivered consistently each time a rule is broken. Don’t allow your emotions to control when consequences are delivered. Otherwise, a student could feel satisfied that he/she broke a rule and did not receive a consequence.
- When delivering the consequence, simply state the rule and consequence. Do not explain or justify, even if students request it; such attempts are typically an effort to sidetrack the teacher by engaging in an argument or power struggle. Consequences must also be delivered unemotionally. For some students, it can be very reinforcing to see the teacher angry and/or frustrated. By reacting emotionally, a teacher is giving the student a sense of power.
- Identify mild consequences that work for you and are easy to deliver every time a student breaks a rule. The following MILD consequences for rule violations can often be effective.

## **Consequences for Rule Violations the First Week**

### **Verbal Reminder/Reprimand**

- There are several types of verbal reprimands, including one-liner, instructional, humor, and appeal to a relationship.
- Reprimand should include a statement of the desired, positive behavior.
- Refrain from asking the student if he/she was misbehaving.
- Deliver calmly and remain emotionally neutral by lowering your voice, saying the student’s name, and putting your hand on the desk if the student doesn’t see you.
- Remember that you are teaching, teaching, and teaching; believe that the reprimand will work.
- Keep the message brief (less than 15 seconds) and deliver when physically close by the student (within 3–4 feet). Do not invade the student’s personal space.
- Move away from the student about one to two seconds before finishing in order to avoid a negative response from the student.

Keep the class engaged by being concise and brief. Quickly return to the lesson. Create the impression of privacy without the class being involved.

### **Proximity Management**

- Move near the student as you are teaching and/or circulating.
- Don't talk to the student. Your close physical presence (and eye contact, if needed) should be enough to stop the misbehavior.
- Be careful not to invade the student's personal space.

### **Positive Practice**

- This is an appropriate consequence to use when the student is engaging in misbehavior that is easily practiced appropriately, such as running in the hall.
- If the student runs in the halls repeatedly, he/she might be required to spend some recess time or free time practicing walking in the halls.

### **Discussion**

- Should be held at a later, neutral time (e.g., at the end of the period or day). If it is done immediately at the time of the incident, the student may be embarrassed and become overly defensive and emotional in front of the other students. In addition, the teacher may be overly frustrated and emotional, which will inhibit using an effective communication style. Also, if the conference takes place immediately, the discussion could actually reinforce the student by providing intense attention.
- Discuss other alternatives or choices the student could have made. Also discuss needs for future orientation—focus on how the student can change his/her behavior the next time.

## **Consequences for Rule Violations After the First Week**

### **Time Owed**

- The student loses time from a favorite activity.
- Decide first when the time owed will be paid back; it needs to be a time that the student values (e.g., leaving the class at class change for secondary students or recess for elementary students).
- Decide how much time will be owed for each infraction. Keep it short so you will always follow through—consider no more than a minute for elementary students or 15–30 seconds for a secondary student.
- Decide ahead of time how much total time can be taken away from the activity and identify what alternative consequence will be delivered once the maximum amount of time is reached.
- Establish what the student will do during the time owed. It is recommended that you have the student do nothing because the attention can be reinforcing.

### **Loss of Points**

- Students start the day with a certain number of points (you can also use stars or any other symbol or object). For example, each student starts the day off with 5 points. The goal is for the student to keep all of his/her points. However, the student loses a point for a rule violation.
- For this approach to be effective, make sure there is an incentive for keeping points each day. For example, each point that is left at the end of the day is recorded and can be “cashed

in” for a special privilege (e.g., extra computer time, lunch with the counselor or administrator, 5 minutes of free time, the right to keep the class stuffed animal at his/her desk for 30 minutes, name put into a drawing for classroom prizes and celebrations, etc.). Remember to always provide positive verbal feedback when a student keeps all of his/her points for the day or week. Sending a note home to the parents when the student keeps his/her points can also be effective.

- For secondary students, behavior grading is a version of the loss of points. Behavior grading can be an effective strategy for middle or high school where students can use behavior grades for class credit, incentives, or class rewards. (NOTE: In some states, behavior grades can’t be used as part of the course grade.) Students start the week with a certain number of points (e.g., 15), with a maximum of 20 that can be earned weekly. During the week, the student can earn more points for displaying positive behavior while losing a point for a rule violation. Make sure the students get feedback on the total number of points they earn each week. Earned points can be used to award credit, incentives, rewards, or privileges. (For more information, see pages 333–337 in *CHAMPS* or Chapter 2 in *Discipline in the Secondary Classroom*.)

### **Demerits**

- Demerits are essentially negative points that result in the loss of a privilege or the imposing of a negative consequence.
- For example, each time a student breaks a classroom rule, he/she receives a demerit; the demerits add up on a daily or weekly basis.
- At the designated time (daily or weekly), the demerits will result in a prearranged consequence if they total a certain predetermined amount. For example, four rule violations in one day for talking could trigger a referral to after-school detention.
- If using time owed or loss of points, don’t use a demerit system.

### **Restitution**

- If the student engages in misbehavior that causes damage, having him/her repair the damage can be effective.
- Restitution is identifying something that will “make it right” without focusing on blame.
- If the student engages in misbehavior that causes damage to property, having him/her repair the damage can be effective. Restitution can also be effective with chronic and purposeful misbehaviors that involve damage to social relationships.
- Restitution requires planning and analysis by student and teacher.
- Characteristics of good restitution:
  - Requires effort on the part of the offender.
  - Seen by victim as adequate compensation.
  - Does not encourage further misbehavior.
  - Is relevant to the misbehavior and strengthens the offender.
- Examples of restitution include cleaning up a mess in the classroom, purchasing a new pen, writing a letter of apology, etc.

## Timeout

- Locate in a low-traffic part of the classroom—for example, a chair off to the side of the room. You could call it the “attitude adjustment area.”
- Inform the students that if they go quietly to timeout and complete their time without disruption, they can rejoin the class and there won’t be any other consequences. If the students view timeout as being too elementary, use the hockey example of a player being sent to the penalty box for a rule violation.
- Establish your expectations for how the student should look and sound while going to timeout and while in timeout. Explain and teach these expectations ahead of time.
- Assign a short period of time to serve in timeout. Consider 3–5 minutes for elementary students or 5–10 minutes for secondary, with the understanding that timeout doesn’t start until the student is seated and quiet. Don’t forget to keep track of the time by looking at a clock or watch. The student does not take work to the timeout area.
- Timeout in another classroom is a more serious form of timeout. It can be effective because the student may be less likely to show off for students he does not know. Arrange this consequence ahead of time with a nearby teacher who has fairly mature students. Research indicates this can work if it is voluntary and collaborative. Typically select no more than one grade above or below the student’s current grade placement. Have a designated chair in a low-traffic spot for the student to sit in. The receiving teacher should continue teaching and have his/her class ignore any student sent in from another class. Have a preset amount of time for the student to stay in timeout in the other teacher’s classroom. Consider limiting timeout to a maximum of 10–15 minutes for elementary students or 15–30 minutes for secondary. Decide ahead of time if having the student complete class work will be part of the timeout; do *not* assign work at the last minute as part of the consequence.

## Problem-Solving/Debriefing

- Have the student describe the problem and what he/she could do differently. Using a form to help structure this activity can be helpful. See the sample at right. Have the student describe the situation and specify what he/she will do differently next time. Have both the student and teacher sign form.

Behavior Improvement Form	
Name _____	Date _____
Describe your behavior: What could you do differently? What do you need to do next? Will you be able to do it? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
_____ Student	_____ Teacher

## Teaching Your Class Rules and Consequences

- You need to show the students what you mean by the rule. Teach the rules by giving both negative and positive examples
- If you can’t demonstrate or teach the rule, the rule is too general.
- Best to review the rules for 2–3 weeks at beginning of the year and also review them before and after major breaks—Teach, Practice, and Review (TPR)