

“Keeping Kids Good”:

Ideas and Beliefs on Classroom Management in a Third Grade Classroom

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## KEEPING KIDS GOOD

Although delivering instruction is a very important part of teaching, it can be severely hampered by student misbehavior. Teachers must have specific plans for how they will run their classrooms, including both how they will encourage positive behavior and deal with negative behavior, before they begin the school year, and continue to be consistent with their rules throughout the year. I believe that all students can behave appropriately and can be “kept good”; however, consistency in expectations, the freedom to make rules for the classroom, and a classroom culture of respect are important factors in promoting good behavior. In this paper, I will address my beliefs about classroom management and my plans for managing a third grade classroom.

Behavior management in schools is important both to promote positive behavior and also to eliminate negative behavior to contribute to a classroom climate where all students feel accepted, enabled to learn, and free to take risks in learning. Behavior management does not only mean addressing negative behavior that distracts from learning; it also means encouraging and promoting positive behavior. Teachers should encourage positive behavior by recognizing it and commending students who make good choices in their words and actions. This may be especially meaningful in instances where it is obvious that a student made a difficult decision to make a positive choice, but it is important to recognize instances of good behavior as often as possible to reinforce behavior that is expected. Addressing negative behavior is, of course, also necessary, especially when it is disruptive or dangerous. Teachers should have plans in place to address different kinds of behavior, and students should be aware of the expectations of the classroom and the school and the consequences that will result if they do not follow the rules.

The importance of behavior management is, in essence, to make sure that students are successful in learning. One aspect of this is to be sure that students are not disrupted in their

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work and also that they feel safe and accepted in the classroom. Students should feel free to take educational risks, such as exploring new subjects and venturing new ideas, without fear of being ridiculed or chastised. However, this is another reason why a framework of expected behavior in the classroom is important, so that students know exactly what risks are encouraged (such as proposing a new idea) and what risks are disruptive or dangerous (such as playing with scissors). Overall, students must feel that they are free to learn and that they can and will learn. Without these basic beliefs, students will not be engaged and may even contribute to behavior problems as a result.

Students receive the very best education when they, their parents, their teachers, and their school are all engaged in partnership to do what is best for the student's learning and growing as a person. To this end, all four components of the partnership are necessary for student growth and, as a part of that, for classroom management.

Teachers set the tone of the classroom environment and deal with day-to-day decisions about how the classroom should be managed. Therefore, it is the teacher's job to promote a positive classroom environment at all times. It is also important for the teacher to be forthright with students about the consequences of misbehavior and to be consistent in carrying out the promised consequences when the need arises. Furthermore, it is important for teachers to communicate well with students, so that all students feel accepted and understand what is happening, as well as to communicate with parents, so that parents feel welcome in the school setting, understand what is happening in their students' classroom, and take part in encouraging and helping students. However, teachers should be aware that not all parents have the ability to help their students or communicate well for a variety of reasons. Teachers also need to communicate with the school, which controls the broader context of the classroom environment

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and has resources that are often not available to an individual classroom teacher, such as special resource teachers, testing, and special programs.

Although parents play an important role in contributing to classroom management, many parents may not realize this fact on their own. Students take cues from their parents about the importance and proper behavior in regards to schoolwork, behavior, and relationships, so if parents are uncooperative and unenthusiastic about school, then their students very well may act in the same manner. Therefore, it is vital that parents feel welcome to contribute to their child's learning. Parents should recognize that their role as supporter, encourager, and role model is very important to their children. Parents can be involved in several ways, including communicating with the teacher, participating in school events, if possible, and talking to their children about school and, if possible and necessary, helping their children complete school assignments.

Schools need to recognize their importance to classroom management as a cohesive unit. Classrooms do not exist in isolation; they are connected to the rest of the school in hallways, special classes, and outside activities. Therefore, the school administration should set expectations for the rest of the school in those areas that are shared, such as hallways, the cafeteria, and the playground; these expectations should be generally held in a consistent manner by all teachers and administrators. For example, if students are not to talk in the hallways, all adults in the school should be ready and willing to ask students in the hallway to stop talking and to praise students who are walking or waiting quietly. Schools can also set a positive tone by publicly displaying work, recognizing students throughout the school who are doing good work and making positive choices, and having routines that unite the student body, such as morning announcements and assemblies.

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While students may not see themselves as important contributors to classroom management, they are the very reason why management is important. Students should see that their actions have a direct effect on the classroom climate. Having students make decisions that pertain to their daily lives, as well as allowing them to outline rules for acceptable behavior, will help them to understand why appropriate behavior is important and strive to higher standards. Students can also encourage their classmates to make good decisions and take an active role in ensuring that everyone works together for a positive and successful learning environment.

It is very important to me that my students treat each other well, with kindness, respect, and acceptance; this is essential to having an environment where students learn well. If students do not feel accepted, they will not be willing to take risks in their learning, and they will probably never be excited to learn. I also believe that an excitement for learning is very important for students' success and growth as people. I love to learn and I get excited about learning new things, and I want to pass that love on to my students. I want them to be ready to ask questions about things they do not know and be willing to try to find the answers to their questions.

Another very important quality in my classroom is mutual respect among students and teachers. Students must have respect for their teachers (and other school authority figures); otherwise, there will not be a structured order for the classroom. In addition, it is imperative that teachers have respect for their students as individual people with needs and rights. While students must have respect for their teachers as authority figures, teachers should have respect for students and remember that they are people with value and dignity. It can be easy for teachers to forget the individual needs of each student and focus on the classroom as a whole, but

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teachers should remember that their students are children with feelings and beliefs and have value as human beings.

I would love to teach in a classroom (and possibly a school) with a high level of diversity of all kinds. I enjoy learning about different cultures, religions, and beliefs, and I think it brings a certain richness to the classroom setting and valuable experience to the students who are able to learn about different cultures and backgrounds. I will take the opportunities I have, whether they are holidays, books, or students' questions, to teach the students about different cultures and backgrounds. As an ELL teacher, I am especially excited about having linguistic diversity within my classroom and I look forward to learning words in many different languages to help me relate to my students. If I am teaching in a general classroom, I would especially like all of the students to learn words in other languages, since they may not have much exposure to other languages.

It is important for students in a class to set rules for appropriate behavior. During the first week of school, I will have daily discussions with students about their expectations for the school year, including how students should behave in the school setting. I will give them a chance to explore their feelings on behavior through structured and unstructured writing assignments, small group discussions, and whole group discussions; all of these activities would be with the goal to present their feelings on rules and behavior to the whole class. At the end of the first week of school, I will have a meeting with the students, and each student would be asked to speak about one rule that he or she feels is important for the class. Even if another student has already said a particular rule, I want every student to share so that all students have input. I will make a list of all of the rules, and then we will go through the list to combine rules that are similar and make a good working model for our classroom. As the teacher, I will also have a say in establishing the

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rules, as well as veto power for rules I find unwise, and I will add my own rule: “Respect others.” I will allow students time to discuss the proposed rules and voice any concerns they have about them, and then think about them over the weekend.

At the beginning of the second week of school, the students and I will have another meeting to make any final changes to our list of rules. I will print them on a large poster and put it on a bulletin board, and then we will hold a solemn ceremony in which all students will individually sign their names on a slip of paper as their pledge to follow the rules, and then attach that paper to the bulletin board. I want to make this ritual an important one for the students in order to impress upon them that these are the rules that they are agreeing to uphold and be held to throughout the year.

I expect that the students will include rules that are fairly standard for classroom behavior, including “do not talk while others are talking,” “do not steal or lie,” “do not get out of your chair without permission,” and “do not run.” However, depending upon the past experiences of the students, I expect that I may have a variety of rules presented to me. I think it is important to hear what students have to say and what is important to them, and to remember that what seems like a common sense rule of living to me, like “do not steal someone else’s property,” may not be a rule that is commonly practiced or seen in some children’s lives outside of school.

Along with having students make a list of rules for the classroom, I will have them talk about possible consequences for breaking the rules. Although this list will not be codified, having students talk about appropriate consequences will help them to understand the difficulties of deciding what to do and may also help them to understand why they receive consequences

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when they have done something wrong. (As the teacher, I will reserve the right to have the final say in all consequences, and I will require all of my students to turn to me for consequences and not attempt to mete them out themselves.) Periodically, I will have a classroom meeting and have students talk about the rules and suggested consequences as a class. Students will have the right to bring up new rules, suggest ideas for amending existing rules, and also suggest ideas to replace or amend consequences. This will help students be reminded of the classroom rules and also encourage them to keep good behavior, as they remember why they decided upon the rules they did.

I will promote positive behavior in my classroom by recognizing it often and encouraging my students to recognize each other's good behavior. I hope to use positive praise, both written (in the form of private notes to students and parents) and verbal, as a main means of reinforcement, but I recognize that not all students respond to praise in the same ways, and I may use a reward system that features earning some sort of tokens or making progress along a path if my students require that kind of encouragement.

My strong emphasis on having respect for others will help my students to make positive choices, as well. If they recognize that their classmates are distracted from learning by inappropriate behavior, and that misbehavior is not only disrespectful to the teacher, but also to other students, students will think about the choices they are making and be more inclined to make positive choices.

Lesson planning is also an important factor in keeping positive behavior in the classroom. I will do my best to plan lessons that flow smoothly into one another so that there is little "down time" in between activities. I will have all materials prepared for each activity and will also have



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back-up plans in case technology fails. Additionally, I will have lesson extenders and plans for finishing work later, so that there will be plans in case the lesson ends early or students need extra time.

Teachers must account for unexpected interruptions and changes in schedule while keeping students engaged. I plan to have a daily schedule, so that students will always know what is coming next, and also have contingency plans for early release and late arrival days. I also plan to train students in a reading routine that is simple: students will read whenever there is nothing else to do. If they come back from a special class or assembly and do not have instructions right away, they are to read. If they finish their work early and have no other work to make up, they are to read. If I am occupied with something for a few moments, they are to read. With this plan in place, students will get a lot of reading done throughout the day and will always know what is expected of them. Finally, I will set up procedures for common issues, including bathroom and water breaks and broken pencils, so that all students are familiar with what is expected and will not interrupt the class or their peers' work by asking the same basic questions repeatedly. Students will also develop independence and responsibility for their own actions by knowing the expectations for their work during the day.

In recognition of the fact that students need the freedom to move around, I will provide multiple opportunities each day for students to move. I will try to have interactive activities like songs with movements to help students learn and also let them get out of their seats. I will also allow students to just get up for a few minutes for quick reviews or other short activities so that they can move around before having to sit and focus on their work again. For example, I may have a true or false review game and have students touch their toes if they think the answer is false and stretch their arms up high if they believe the answer is true. Even just a short activity

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like this that lets students move around will relieve tension and stress from having to sit for long periods of time and help students who like to move a lot.

I firmly believe in including all students in the classroom. If I have special education (SPED) students in my room, I will work with the special education resource teacher to find ways to accommodate their needs so that they can participate as well. I will also include English language learners (ELLs) by providing extra help for their language comprehension so that they have some understanding of the lesson. I will include activities that involve less language (e.g., using pictures instead of words) for ELLs so that they can participate with their classmates. Including SPED and ELL students in such basic activities as the morning routine and classroom jobs will further help them to feel that they belong in the class and help other students to accept them, so I will make sure to give them roles in the class just like the other students. I will continue to provide encouragement to these students, as with all of the students in my classroom, to show them that I believe in their ability to be successful.

As William Glasser has noted, students have five basic needs that inform their behavior: fun, freedom, power, survival, and belonging, and the lack of fulfillment of these needs causes misbehavior (Charles, 2011, p. 140). Therefore, students may misbehave if they feel powerless, bored, restricted, unsafe, and excluded. For this reason, it is important to fulfill students' needs as best as possible and to seek out the reasons for misbehavior in order to determine what needs are not being fulfilled to prevent further misbehavior. If possible, as soon as misbehavior has occurred, I will have a short conversation with the student(s) in question and ask about the circumstances and reasons for the misbehavior; if it is not possible to talk about it immediately, I will take the student(s) aside later in the day for the discussion.

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When a student misbehaves, I will remember first and foremost that actions do not equal character; in other words, a student's misbehavior does not mean that the student is a bad person, but rather that he or she has made a bad decision. I believe it is important for me as the teacher to recognize this and for me to pass along this idea to my students both as part of the idea of having respect for them and also so that they understand that I care about them and will not stop caring because of misbehavior. When speaking to the student, I will gauge whether the student understands why the behavior was inappropriate by asking the student to explain why the behavior was wrong. If the student does not understand, we will continue to talk about why the behavior was inappropriate and may seek further help from others (including a person who may have been hurt by the behavior or the school counselor) if the student still does not understand.

In response to minor behavioral problems, such as calling out without raising a hand, I will only spend a short amount of time with the student to speak briefly about the misbehavior and ask that it not be repeated. However, when a student has exhibited a behavior that is continually disruptive, or a behavior that has caused harm to another student, I will require that the student follow Barbara Coloroso's "3 R's of Discipline"; this involves having the student make restitution for the problem, find a resolution so that the problem does not occur again, and find a way to heal the relationships that were hurt in the incident, creating a positive atmosphere (Gnann, 2013). In my conference with a student after misbehavior occurs, I will ask the student to address the three R's. I will also teach this process to my students as a whole group lesson so that students can begin to take responsibility for their own problem solving and learn how to mediate the problems of others. Students will learn how restitution and resolution work and appropriate solutions for problems. For example, if two students are arguing over whose turn it is to use the computer, I will require them to discuss the problem and find an acceptable solution

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and also discuss whether their relationship needs to be healed. In practice, this could be as simple as agreeing to trade after ten minutes and then giving each other a hug; however, the process of solving the problem will help the students to build important skills that will continue throughout their lives.

I do not believe in using punishments to deal with misbehavior, since students often will not learn from a punishment that has nothing to do with their behavior and may only make them feel angry or resentful. Students will have consequences for misbehavior that appropriately fit the misbehavior; for example, if a student is not using the computer appropriately, it makes sense for him or her to not be allowed to play games on the computer for a certain period of time until he or she earns the privilege of doing so again.

However, if a student is making a habit of misbehavior without understanding or intent to change, something more must be done. He or she will make a plan with me about how behavior will change and further consequences that will result if the plan is not followed. If the student is uncooperative, I will contact the student's caregivers and possibly the principal or other school staff to work with the student on behavior management.

Classroom management is a complex topic that requires the integration of students, parents, teachers, and schools and a lot of work, both in planning before the school year and continuing to keep a positive classroom climate throughout the year. However, when students feel that they are respected and understand the expectations of the class, they will be ready to work together for a positive environment and will be successful in learning.

References

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