

Ways to Increase Positivity in School

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Ways to Increase Positivity in School

- Offer positive feedback
 - Keep the focus on the positive (Let kids know what they've done right and teach them the rest.)
 - Allow “do-overs” to correct mistake, get full credit
 - Build on strengths (vs. criticize weaknesses, mistakes, errors, flaws, omissions, etc.)
- Eliminate double standards (Subtle but powerful message communicated when we “walk the talk,” modeling behaviors, language, tone, attitudes we want from kids.)
- Change threats to promises, focusing on the positive outcomes of their cooperation or performance
- Think: *Consequences* = *POSITIVE outcomes* (Energetically, everything else is punitive, even if logical. Really.)
- Reinforce with recognition rather than praise. Rather than talking about the student being good or making you happy, use a 2-part statement which:
 - Describes the behavior: “*You brought your library book back!*”
 - Tells the student the positive outcomes of this choice: “*Now you can take another one home.*”
- Let parents know about the good stuff!
- Maintain your sense of humor!

Ingredients of Effective Adult-Student Relationships:

Positivity

Needs: Acceptance, Encouragement, Reinforcement

Alternative to negativity and punitive orientation.

The ability to differentiate between a child's worth and behavior, valuing the child (worth) even when behavior is unacceptable.

The ability to focus on what the child is doing right and building on strengths.

The ability to create a reward-oriented environment in which consequences are *positive* outcomes which are experienced as a result of cooperation.

The ability to communicate positively (using promises instead of threats, or focusing on positive consequences of cooperation instead of punishment, for example).

The ability to recognize and acknowledge cooperative behavior without using praise or conditional approval.

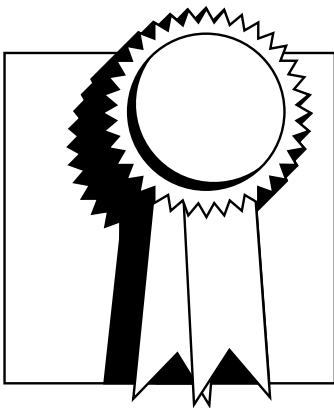
The ability to maintain a sense of humor.

The willingness to use evaluation and assessment simply as a tool for determining where a student needs more work or what we need to clarify or teach next (rather than punish).



Guidelines for Reinforcing Positive Behavior

- Use positive reinforcement—verbal or non-verbal (interactive, token or activity)—to acknowledge and strengthen *already-existing* behaviors. Avoid attempting to use reinforcement *before* the desired behavior has occurred. (Use different strategies to motivate the student to *initiate* a desired behavior [promise a meaningful positive consequence for cooperation] or to *intervene* a disruptive behavior [withdraw or withhold a privilege or positive consequence].)
- Watch for a tendency to use praise to help a student solve a problem or feel good about himself. Flattery can appear manipulative even to a young or needy student. Such messages are superficial at best and will not contribute to the student's genuine sense of self-worth.
- Avoid praising one child (or group) to motivate others. "I like the way Bobby is sitting" only serves to reinforce Bobby (and may, in fact, back-fire if Bobby isn't happy about the attention), promising conditional approval to others when they, too, sit.
- Avoid using teacher approval as a means of reinforcing desired behavior. Learn to distinguish between reinforcers intended to maintain a particular student behavior and genuine expressions of appreciation, affection or enjoyment of your students. In a win-win classroom, behaviors such as a smile, touch, nod or wink—which obviously communicate the fact that the teacher is pleased—are not used as expressions of conditional approval or caring. Although they may sometimes be used as reinforcers, such behaviors may also appear randomly, regardless of the student's performance or behavior, as expressions of appreciation or affection.
- Phrase reinforcements as an affirmation or acknowledgement of a behavior the student has demonstrated and the positive consequences now available (not as "if . . . then" statements, which are more useful for motivating behavior that has not yet been demonstrated). Reinforcements may be effectively communicated in either oral or written form.
- To reinforce a desirable behavior, first *describe* the behavior that took place. Be specific and concrete and avoid making judgments about the behavior or the worth of the student.



Adapted from The Win-Win Classroom, by Jane Bluestein, Ph.D. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2008).

- Secondly, whenever possible, attach a comment that *connects* the immediate benefits of the student's behavior to the student. (Occasionally, it may be appropriate to state the positive outcomes in terms of their benefits to the group.) Focus on the payoff for the student, making sure the outcome is positive and meaningful. Avoid projecting your own feelings and values, which may or may not be relevant to those of the student, or suggesting how the student should feel.

- Look for the positive. You can almost always find something to recognize in any performance. Reinforce what was done right and work to correct or improve the rest.
- Perhaps because of the rigidity of roles during the factory-era, there was a tendency for teachers to recognize certain behaviors in boys (such as strength, mechanical skill, and ability in math and the sciences) more frequently than girls (who are more often reinforced for neatness, creativity, attractiveness, and writing and artistic abilities). In recognizing students, be aware of any tendencies to promote stereotypes.

Success with Students' Parents

Parents and guardians can provide a great deal of support and reinforcement. For the most part, they want to know what's happening in school, how their children are doing and how they, the parents, can help. They tend to be far more enthusiastic and positive in their support when they feel informed and included, when they feel welcomed in our classrooms, and when their interest in their children's well-being is respected. Unfortunately parent-teacher relationships rarely attain their maximum potential. Often both parties complain of a lack of contact unless there's a problem. If this has indeed been the case with the parents of your students, imagine how effective a more positive approach can be! Here are a few ideas that might help:

- Get acquainted early in the year, either by note, phone, in-school conferences, welcome meetings or home visits. Keep first meetings positive.
- Keep parents informed about your policies and goals. If you have certain specific requirements about how you want work done, when assignments are due, or other boundaries or follow-through intentions they may have some questions about, let them know ahead of time.
- Keep them informed about your classroom projects and practices. For example: If you are doing a special program, or allowing new behavior options—like leaving the class to work in the library or sitting on the floor to read or do special assignments—let the parents know.
- **Maintain regular positive contact. *Best bet:*** A weekly progress report that focuses on responsible learning behaviors necessary for success in the classroom. (Sample below.) Having the students (or one student) put the names on the forms will leave you free to quickly fill in the progress. I have found that these reports work best when we only mark the skills that had indeed been demonstrated (only positive marks, rather than “grading” each skill) and when we make sure that each student gets at least three stars or smiley faces every week. (I frequently checked all 5, as often as possible!) Made a point, when you can, to write a few words on the back or bottom of the form—always something positive! *“Doing great in math!” “Self-control is improving.” “Great sense of humor!” “Very helpful and caring with other students.” “I love teaching your child.”* The little time you put in will pay off in a big way.
- Make positive “surprise” contact. Example: An unanticipated email, text, phone call, or note home about something special that happened or something that you noticed. These contacts don't need to take more than a minute. Pick one class that really needs a lot of encouragement. Attempt to get back to the parents of *each* child in the class—say once a month, or even once a semester.
- Create (or supervise the creation of) a monthly newsletter. Be sure to include samples of the students' work—including *all* students in some way during the course of the year. Tell about new projects, guests, field trips or special events. You might also include reviews of parenting resources, parenting tips and ideas, and/or excerpts from books, magazines or websites (be *sure* to reference them correctly).
- PROOFREAD all correspondences that go home or, better yet, have someone else check for spelling, punctuation, grammatical and even format errors. Make sure your correspondences reflect your care and professionalism.

Based on material in Dr. Bluestein's books, Being a Successful Teacher (Fearon Teacher Aids, Frank Schaffer Publishing, Torrance, CA.) and The Win-Win Classroom (Corwin Press, 2008.)

Name	For week of:
Takes care of materials	
Is caught up on all homework assignments	
Is caught up on all seatwork assignments	
Says “please” and “thank you”	
Raises hand before speaking	
Signed	

- Invite parents to visit your classroom, to see your class in action, to help out or to share their own expertise in some area.
- Be respectful of constraints on parents' time. Begin and end meetings on time.
- If a student is experiencing difficulty, either with the work or social behavior, or if the student is demonstrating behaviors that are interfering with her potential success in school, get in touch with the parents right away. Don't allow yourself to be placed in the embarrassing position of having to explain why you didn't contact the parents until the behavior became enough of a problem to affect the student's grades, progress or placement.
- IF THERE IS AN INCIDENT, call only to *report* what happened. Watch your tone and any tendency to judge. Stick to the behavior—what you *saw*—rather than trying to interpret or analyze the child's intent. Avoid blaming or criticizing, or judgments about personalities, character or values that might leave parents feeling defensive, protective, shamed, anxious, angry or resentful.
- When reporting an incident watch the tendency to suggest that this is the parent's problem or demand that they solve it *for* you. *Best bet:* Describe the problem and how you plan to deal with it. You might ask for input or suggestions, but avoid asking the parent to "talk to him" or punish him for you. Offer to follow up in a few days (and then make sure that you do). Remember, if you've been maintaining positive contact, regularly sharing what the child has been doing *well* and building a positive, respectful relationship with parents all along, you're much more likely to find them much more supportive when there's a problem.
- You have specialized knowledge that makes you qualified for your line of work. Do not use that knowledge against the parent by using jargon or talking down to him or her.
- Work with parents toward a mutual goal: the child's success and well-being in school. Do not presume to care more about the student than the parent does.
- Do not speak ill of coworkers, the administration or other students, teachers or parents. At all times, keep your actions and interactions professional.
- If confronted with an angry parent, STAY CALM and maintain your boundaries. Speak softly if they speak loudly. Acknowledge the parent's anger as well as how important it is for you to hear what he or she has to say. If you need to, suggest going to an appropriate place for this kind of discussion. Encourage the parent to talk about what's going on and LISTEN! Try to avoid getting defensive or making the parent wrong for being upset. If you feel the least bit threatened, make sure to include (or call for) another teacher, administrator or support staff. It is OK for parents to get angry and blow off steam. It is *not* OK for anyone to use their anger as an excuse to violate you!
- Watch out for requests from parents for you to punish a child in the classroom for misbehaviors that happened at home. It is neither appropriate nor necessary for you to withhold privileges for events you did not witness, although you can suggest resources or classes for parents who are having problems and seem open to receiving such information.
- DOCUMENT, DOCUMENT, DOCUMENT. Keep track of all contact with parents in which you have shared important information or discussed a student's progress or behavior. Note the date, the purpose of the call, the parent's response and the outcome. Alert administrators to problems you may be having. Also make a note to follow up as necessary and then do so.

Focus on What They're Doing Right

- Offer positive feedback
- Keep the focus on the positive (Let kids know what they've done right and teach them the rest.)
- Allow “do-overs” to correct mistake, get full credit
- Build on strengths (vs. criticize weaknesses, mistakes, errors, flaws, omissions, etc.)
- Let parents know about the good stuff:
 - Regular positive contact. Find *something* to recognize with each contact; see sample note below; choose your most challenging class; be generous; add a few positive words.
 - Inform of problems immediately. Maintain responsibility for the solution, resisting the urge to ask parents to correct the child's behavior.
 - Provide information about the child's progress in school on a regular basis before there is a problem that would affect the child's grade, promotion, or graduation.
 - Provide information about what you're doing in class.
 - Make parenting tips and skill sheets available
 - Create a parent resource center with books, audio and video materials, handouts, links, etc. Be sure materials are accessible (language, reading level, grade level) for the population.

Name	For week of:
Takes care of materials	
Is caught up on all homework assignments	
Is caught up on all seatwork assignments	
Says “please” and “thank you”	
Raises hand before speaking	
Signed	

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