

# Guidelines for Handling Negative Behavior

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# Guidelines for Handling Negative Behavior

- **Think prevention.** Although no one can predict every possible opportunity for disaster, many problems can be avoided by taking the time to anticipate what you and your students will need, considering any possibility for misunderstandings or difficulties and setting very specific limits ahead of time.
- When something comes up, try to isolate what's bothering you. Are you reacting to a personality trait or value conflict, or is the student's behavior actually interfering with the teaching or learning process?
- **Attack the problem, not the person.** Mentally separate the student from the behavior. It's the interruption that's annoying—not the student.
- Minimize your reaction. Count to ten, or at least to five. Use this time to remind yourself that you don't have to get angry, lecture, criticize, interrogate or punish. (Often, you don't even have to get involved!) Staying calm can help you avoid compounding the problem at hand. A brief pause can also allow the student to resolve or correct the problem behavior on his own.
- Deal specifically with the behavior—not the morality of the behavior, previous incidents or the personality behind the misconduct.
- If your reaction starts to create a win-lose (or no-win) situation, stop and back off: *"Wait. This isn't the way I want to handle this."* If necessary—and possible—withdraw for a few seconds to regain your perspective.
- At all times, stay responsible for your actions and words. We are most vulnerable to negative adult behavior patterns in the presence of negative or disruptive student behaviors. Regardless of our commitment to maintaining a positive, win-win environment, there will be times we will most likely slip up and say or do something hurtful or destructive. At those times, be careful to model responsible language and not blame the student. For example, avoid statements like, *"You make me so angry,"* or *"If you hadn't done that I wouldn't have said that to you."* If you act or speak in a hurtful way, apologize and switch to more a constructive approach—just like you would want the student to do!
- Look for ways to offer many choices and positive outcomes for cooperation, building in incentives and motivators. This is a proactive and positive approach that will eliminate many of the incidents that arise when students are competing for power.
- Withdraw the privilege or positive consequence as soon as a misconduct occurs. Keep your tone and body language as neutral as possible. (A statement like *"This isn't working"* can help you intervene decisively without attacking or criticizing.)



*Adapted from The Win-Win Classroom: A Fresh and Positive Look at Classroom Management, by Jane Bluestein, Ph.D. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2008).*

- Whenever possible, invite the student to reclaim his privilege or possession as soon as the misbehavior ceases: *“You may return to the group as soon as you can control your talking,”* *“You can continue playing with this game as soon as you finish cleaning up the area you just left.”*
- If correcting his behavior will not give the student immediate access to the privilege or possession, let him know when it will be available again: *“Please return to your seats. Let’s try (working together) again tomorrow,”* or *“Please put the puzzle back on the shelf until you finish your seatwork.”*
- Provide support, feedback, guidelines and limits to help, but leave the responsibility for the student’s behavior with the student.
- If instruction and activities would help in areas such as problem solving, social interaction, or handling anger and frustration, for example, save them for a non-crisis setting. Likewise, if you feel that you and your students could benefit from the administration or support staff (counselor, school psychologist, social worker), invite them to conduct or participate in these activities. These individuals may also be available to discuss particular problems and help you brainstorm possible win-win solutions, and will be especially helpful when you can provide documentation and don’t attempt to dump the responsibility for the problem on them.
- In problem-solving activities and discussions, keep coming back to win-win: *“How can we both get what we want?”*

Intervention Strategies			
Behavior	<i>Productive (Positive, Desirable)</i>	<i>Non-Productive (Neutral, Non-disruptive)</i>	<i>Counter-Productive (Negative, Disruptive)</i>
<b>Intervention Strategy</b>	Positive Reinforcement/ Recognition	Contingency Contracting, Offering Choices	Follow-through; loss of privilege (positive consequence); new boundary
<b>Goal</b>	Maintaining existing behavior, improving the likelihood of behavior recurring on its own	Encouraging more cooperative, more productive behavioral choices; building commitment	Stopping negative behavior; replacing with cooperative, non-disruptive behavior
<b>Process</b>	1. Describe the behavior 2. Connect to positive outcome	Connecting what you want to what the student wants; making productive behavior more desirable	Might include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• remove or delay access to positive consequence</li> <li>• ask student to <b>stop</b>, change behavior</li> <li>• present acceptable alternative</li> <li>• use promises (set new contingency)</li> </ul>
<b>Caution</b>	Avoid praise that connects behavior to worth. <i>“I really like you when...”</i> <i>“You’re good because...”</i>  Avoid praise that reinforces dependence on approval: <i>“I like the way...”</i>	Motivators must be need fulfilling to be effective. This will vary from student to student. Motivators must also appear accessible (immediate enough).  Avoid using conditional approval as a motivator.  Avoid depending on your students’ fear of your anger or power to motivate their cooperation.	Once limits have been violated, follow through immediately.  Avoid warnings, reminders after the fact. Do not ask for excuses. Instead, ask what the student plans to do to correct the situation.  Avoid punishing, moralizing, giving advice or solutions, making excuses or taking responsibility for the student’s problem.  Avoid making the child wrong; accept the student, <b>not</b> the behavior.

# Are You at Risk?\*

*Risk factors include a tendency to:\*\**

- feel personally responsible for a other people's successes and failures
- measure personal success by approval from others
- have an overwhelming need to avoid conflict and generate approval from others (which can manifest as attention-seeking, maintaining status quo, passive-aggressiveness or rebelliousness)
- compromise other people's needs to avoid "rocking the boat"
- believe that your life would be easier to perform if only the others and/or or "the system" would change
- have difficulty setting and maintaining boundaries between self and other people
- have difficulty setting and maintaining boundaries between self and job, self and others
- deal with upsetting or offensive behavior by shaming, blaming, complaining, manipulating, ignoring or dumping the problem on someone else
- feel threatened by other people's progress or success
- see perfectionism as a worthwhile goal (in appearance, performance, others' perception...)
- feel as though "things would completely fall apart if it weren't for me."
- swing from chaos, helplessness, and victimization to moral superiority and self-righteousness
- often ignore offensive or hurtful behavior, offering inappropriate second chances, or fail to ask for alternate behavior (as for what we want)
- protect others from failure or negative consequences in an effort to feel successful, valuable, or powerful
- over-identify with, and even adopt, another person's feelings
- appear to be "fine" and "in control"
- deny that any of the above are personally relevant

*\* At risk for lots more stress, frustration and conflict than you would like.*

*\*\* We're probably all guilty, to some degree, of all of the above from time to time. This list is simply a sample of the ways at-risk factors can show up in relationships. These patterns become problematic when they become typical of a person's feelings, beliefs, and behaviors.*

*These patterns can ultimately interfere with the your ability to:*

- interact with others without violating or compromising your dignity or self-worth
- interact with peers or coworkers effectively
- behave consistently within the framework of your own values
- feel worthy and successful
- detach from the job
- know how to start on a project, or when to quit
- take care of yourself

*Other contributing factors:*

- a tradition of dysfunctionality (which now feels "normal"); pressure to be perfect
- a scarcity of healthy, functional role models
- the absence of a healthy, functional system to support people trying to operate in healthy, functional ways.
- the very human tendency to resist change

*Some assumptions on reducing risk factors:*

- One can adopt healthy patterns of behavior, even in unhealthy, unsupportive environments.
- The system is not likely to rescue, protect, take care of or support your needs, despite your enthusiasm, skills, dedication, or good intentions.
- Change happens best in supportive environments; people tend to function effectively, grow professionally and personally, and avoid stress and burnout when they can create a support network for themselves, in social and professional environments.
- Change is most effective when individuals take responsibility for their own growth, rather than attempting to change or blame others.
- Change is most effective when encouraged rather than coerced.
- The system is not likely to change all by itself.
- As individuals change, the system will change.

*This information appears in Creating Emotionally Safe Schools and The Perfection Deception, by Jane Bluestein, Ph.D. (Health Communications, Inc.)*

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