

Elementary Classroom Rules and Management

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Elementary classrooms can become better learning environments when teachers have rules, classroom management skills, and a belief that each child can be successful. Rules help create a predictable atmosphere that limit classroom disruptions and encourage children to use self-control. Children need to be taught that it is their responsibility to make appropriate choices and that they will be held accountable for their actions.

Teachers may decide to establish rules or allow their students to assist in formulating them. Teachers who involve their children in the rule making process contend that students are more likely to follow them. One way to involve students in forming rules is to have them brainstorm as a class or in small groups why they come to school and their goals for learning. Then ask them to name rules that will help them achieve their goals. Write their ideas on the board. If a child states a rule negatively, such as, “Don’t come to school late,” ask how it could be stated in a positive way. Below are some examples.

- Come to school on time.
- Bring what you need with you.
- Listen to the teacher.
- Follow directions.
- Be kind to others.
- Use manners.
- Work hard.
- Do your best.
- Keep your hands and feet to yourself.
- Follow playground rules.

Then assist them in consolidating their list into three to five basic rules, such as:

- be prepared;
- be respectful;
- be productive; and
- be safe.

After the rules are decided upon, you may want to have the students sign a copy of them and display them. Review and define each one as needed. Students are more likely to follow the rules if they are clearly stated and understood, and if classroom management procedures are in place and followed.

Some examples of procedures or routines that need to be explained, practiced often and followed consistently:

- what to do upon entering the classroom;
- what signal will be used to get their attention
- what to do when a signal is given;
- what to do when it is group time;
- what to do if they want to speak;
- what to do if they need to use the restroom;
- what to do if they need to sharpen their pencil;
- what to do when they need help;
- what to do when they are finished with their work;
- how to line up;
- how to walk in the hall;
- what to do in the cafeteria;
- what to do if a visitor is in the classroom;
- what to do if the teacher is not in the room;
- what to do when the fire alarm rings; and
- what to do before being dismissed.

In addition, listing the schedule for the day helps children know what to expect.

Here is an example of a teacher's management plan for individual students:

First infraction: Name on board.

Second: Student writes down the rule that he/she broke.

Third: Student loses ten minutes of recess

Fourth: A parent is called or a note is sent home for the parent to sign and return.

Fifth: The student is sent to the principal.

When deemed appropriate provide choices. For example: if a child does not stay on task and complete his work, you could say, “Do you want to finish it during free time or recess?” Or, if a child is being disruptive, you could say, “Would you like to sit in the “thinking” chair or at your desk with your head down?” When given a choice, students tend to feel respected and are more likely to comply. However, allow only a short time for the choice to be made and if the child does not choose, make the choice for him/her. As much as possible, have the consequence directly relate to the offense.

After deciding what rules and management procedures you will use, discuss consequences for broken rules. However, allow yourself some flexibility. Consequences for inappropriate behavior need to focus on helping a child learn from his/her mistakes. At times you may want to meet with a child alone and ask him what you could do to help him make constructive choices. Then listen, share thoughts with your student and develop a plan of action.

An idea for classroom management is to put a word on the board such as “responsibility.” When the class does well, a letter is underlined in red, and when they are off task, the red underline is deleted for one letter. When the whole word is underlined in red, the class earns a privilege such as a theme day or viewing a movie. Having the children brainstorm and vote on ideas of what they would like to receive for their exemplary behavior can foster their desire to follow the rules.

A management plan for group work is to divide the children into teams of four or five students. Review what is expected and give each team points for listening to instructions, being respectful toward each other, completing the assignment, etc. After keeping track of the points for a week, the team with the most points could earn extra recess, lunch with the teacher or free time. Start the point system over again the following week.

Signals that a child or students need to be on task include: staring, frowning, shaking your head, standing close, holding your finger or hand a predetermined way, or placing a child’s name on the board. Making a check on the board may signify a consequence such as the class losing five minutes of recess.

Positive consequences for appropriate behavior or exceptional effort also need to be used to reinforce constructive actions. Examples are: specific verbal recognition (see [Effective Praise](#)), certificates, handshakes, high fives, thumbs up, smiles, and earned privileges such as getting to eat with a friend from another class or being the teacher’s assistant. Other acknowledgments could be computer, homework or library passes, or a positive phone call or note sent home to a parent. When an entire class has done exceptionally well on a test or project, provide a fun activity like playing games or having a special snack (see [Rewards in the Classroom](#)).

Teachers need to anticipate and deal with problem behaviors before they escalate. When teachers enforce a classroom management plan and rules, as well as build a positive relationship with their students, the children will more likely develop self-discipline and learning will take place.