

Frameworks for Success: Building an Effective Classroom Management Plan

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Sylvia's Responses to Webinar Questions

1. Because of inclusion, what are some ideas for managing challenging and distracting behaviors by students who have Autism or emotional behavior problems (EBD), for example?

The grade level of the students, the nature of the distracting behaviors, and the number of students in a class with special needs will impact the types of interventions that would be most appropriate. Students with Autism, EBD, ADHD, and other disabilities that include challenges with behavior should have an individualized behavior plan that includes environmental accommodations, educative strategies, reinforcement for exhibiting desired behaviors, consequences for non-compliance, and a severe clause that specifies what will occur when behaviors are unsafe or exceed the limits of the classroom. Students without disabilities can be taught to ignore mild to moderate behaviors that are not dangerous and can be encouraged to assist in helpful ways.

For example: A child with whom I worked had been traumatized by parental abuse and removal from her home prior to entering our school. When Julie (a pseudonym) was not allowed access to a preferred item or activity, she would scream, throw books and other classroom items, knock materials from shelves, and threaten to harm herself and others. The class was taught to move away from Julie when she began to scream. The students were awarded tokens for continuing to work and refraining from laughing at her or saying unkind things to her while her teacher directed her to a cool off area. Each week they had opportunities to use their tokens to purchase desired activities and items. They knew that Julie would be given a time limit to stop the screaming, would be expected to calm down in a designated area of the room, would be required to clean-up the mess she made, and would be removed if she did not stop screaming within the time limit. Her outbursts were frequent in the beginning (4-8 times per week). Within a short period of time, the other students learned to proceed with their work whenever Julie began to raise her voice. Her behavior plan respected her need to learn more acceptable behaviors as well as her classmates' need for protection from tantrums that were unacceptably long. When Julie accepted being told no in response to a request for a desired item or activity, she earned tokens that she also used to purchase activities and items along with her classmates.



Julie received weekly lessons in anger management. When she did not calm down in the classroom within the desired time limit, she was removed to an office area where she would often tantrum for 20-40 minutes during the first few months of the plan. Within 4 months, removal from the classroom was no longer necessary. She was able to calm down without being removed. She did continue to

receive weekly anger management and social skills instruction for a total of 6 months and that intervention eventually was faded.

General guidelines in response to this question include:

- Work with a team to develop an individualized behavior plan for each student with special needs.
- Teach students without special needs how to respond to the behaviors of the student with a disability.
- Reinforce students without disabilities for exhibiting the desired behaviors when the student with a disability exhibits problem behaviors.
- Reinforce the student with disabilities for exhibiting the desired behaviors.
- Celebrate each student's strengths—including the student with special needs—to build capacity for acceptance.

2. Do you think a behavior chart posted in the classroom is appropriate for students with behavior disorders in the middle grades? I am an Intervention Specialist in an inclusion setting for math in a middle school. The behaviors of students are out of control. What suggestions do you have to get the class in control?

Behavior charts that compare one student's performance to another student's performance would not be appropriate in any classroom. Behavior charts that illustrate strategies for managing difficult situations, procedures, rules, and social skills are extremely important and most appropriate at any grade level. Secondary teachers often shy away from using illustrated behavioral cues. They think that those types of supports should not be necessary for older students and are too elementary. If that were true, we would not have icons and illustrations in public areas for adults such as the handicapped accessible icon, the male and female icons on restroom doors, and the no smoking icon. Illustrations are not elementary. People, in general, respond to illustrations. That is why products have identifiable logos, magazines put their most eye-catching photographs on their covers, and international symbols have been developed for travelers' convenience.



Without more information about the behaviors of concern and the functions of the behaviors for individual students, it is difficult to respond to the specific challenges this class presents. My guess is that the students are attempting to avoid academic tasks and attempting to access social interaction with peers. Interventions for a class such as this should accomplish the following goals:

- Boost interest in the academic tasks by connecting required content with preferred topics and/or activities.
- Break lessons into brief 10–15 minute segments. Change the pace, materials, and/or group configuration at each interval. Example: Concept to be taught—adding unlike fractions. Begin with fraction tiles on an overhead—demonstrating how to use the tiles as students use their own sets of tiles to work problems with the teacher. Next, put 5 problems on the board. Challenge students to use the tiles to get the answers. Allow them to work independently or

with a partner. Award a token at the end of a specified time limit for each correct answer. Now play a game of solving problems by putting the students into 2 teams. Award 1 token to players for a correct answer and 1 token for playing the game by the rules during each round. Finally—give each student 5 problems to work independently.

- Identify preferred items and activities for each individual, establish a menu based upon their preferences, and award tokens for completed work as well as following the classroom rules.
- Establish a clearly stated hierarchy in response to undesired behaviors.
- Reinforce desired behaviors continuously at first and intermittently as behavior comes under control.
- Enforce rules **consistently**.
- Provide frequent opportunities (2 times per week) to spend tokens initially and gradually fade to once a week or even once a month.

3. Do you think a loss of recess is an appropriate punishment? I find that many behavior students have extra energy and recess may be needed for them to refocus...

Whether or not recess is an appropriate punishment depends upon the student. Some students do not like recess and would much rather stay inside. Loss of recess would actually reinforce the undesired behavior.

Some students with special needs benefit from opportunities to be physically active. Those students often need more frequent physical activity than a single recess period. Students can be denied social time at recess if a consequence for undesired behavior is warranted and still engage in physical activity.

4. How often do you do the [fist to five](#)? Do you do your own "fist to five"?

The frequency is determined by what the teacher wants to reinforce and/or enforce regarding the expectations. If I use the fist to five to bring undesired behaviors to the students' attention during a lesson, I look for an opportunity later to use fist to five when students are behaving well. Frequency varies as students' needs for review varies.

Yes, I also indicate my own level of compliance with a classroom expectation. If I feel like I have not lived up to our agreed upon expectations in some area, I tell the students how I should improve my behavior and apologize.

5. I am a student teacher and my mentor uses tickets that students are allowed to turn in for rewards, e.g., take their shoes off for the day, eat lunch with the teacher. Do you think that is a good idea?

In general, token economies (in this case, tickets awarded for desired behaviors and “cashed in” for preferred activities) are a great idea. Token economies allow teachers to individualize their overall classroom behavior plan and can be faded over time.

6. I am a substitute teacher. What can I do when a student refuses to do any work even if I offer help?

Go into the classroom with a basic behavior plan. Explain that work completion is a requirement for earning the activity or privilege that you will make available to those who exhibit the desired behaviors. If a student refuses to work and is not disrupting others, explain that she or he is making a choice to be excluded from the reward and that documentation of refusal to work will be left for the classroom teacher. If the school has a system for communicating with parents via notes in an agenda, document the refusal in the student’s agenda.

If the student refuses to work and disrupts others, send the student to another teacher at the same grade level with his required assignment. Make plans with a partner teacher prior to beginning of the student day in case this intervention becomes necessary.

7. Approximately what portion of the school year do you usually spend establishing expectations, agreeing upon rules, and practicing routines?

I must admit that I do not engage students in developing classroom rules. I make clear to them on the first day that they will have decision-making power in some areas, and that I reserve the right to have sole decision-making power in other areas. The teaching of rules, procedures; the development of expectations with the class, the shared development of teamwork rubrics, and the building of a classroom community are on-going processes. At the beginning of the year discussions occur daily. As students master the desired behaviors and skills, discussions are intermittent—as needed. Time spent early in the year (for the first 3–4 weeks) teaching and re-teaching desired behaviors allows the class to move forward academically, because the transition from teacher control to shared control to independence occurs more fluently. Please understand, however, that even during the more intensive first weeks of teaching desired behaviors, academic instruction is also occurring.

8. I understand what you mean about not having students sit still too long but the way my school has our schedules set up, our students transition about every 15 minutes. Any tips for how to help students transition so frequently with fewer problems?

Transitions are extremely difficult for many students. Suggestions include:

- Provide students with a 2-minute warning before each transition.

- Limit the number of items the students must remember to take with them from place to place.
- Play soft music to signal movement.
- Make a game of meeting or beating a time limit for transitioning. Reward students for meeting or beating their goals.
- Develop a rap, song, clapping pattern, or chant of some type to repeat while transitioning that focuses their attention and energy.

9. I'm a senior, education major . . . I'm in a 1st grade placement, 2 hours for 2 days a week . . . the teacher I work with didn't really establish classroom routines/ rules/ expectations at the beginning of the year, and tries various things, but doesn't do them consistently and, basically, gives up when they don't improve the classroom environment right away. Because of this inconsistency, the students act up even more! Is there a chance that I could do something simple to help the behavior issues improve in the little time I am there? The teacher is very frustrated and open to try anything that might work. Is it worth it, if she does not follow through when I am not there? Any suggestions?

If the teacher is willing and able, encourage her to establish a plan and stick with it for at least 3 weeks. Develop a plan based upon what you know about the students and effective classroom management. Conduct lessons that allow you to teach the plan while teaching academic content. Even if the teacher does not continue after you leave, you will have had a valuable opportunity to learn and will have given students moments of success.

10. I'm subbing this year, and every once in a while I get a class that just doesn't listen or follow directions. I try positive reinforcements as well as invoking consequences, but these don't work. What should I do to make it through the day?



Try this—Start writing the names of students who are behaving on the board. Ask the students their names if you don't have a seating chart. When they ask why their names are on the board, tell them that you want to write the principal a note about how respectful and hardworking they are. Put stars next to their names every 5–10 minutes if they continue. After 15-20 minutes, provide the students who are behaving a sheet of lightly colored paper and ask them to write a letter to their parents or guardians about how well they are doing. Tell them that you will sign it at the end of class if they continue to be respectful. During the teacher's planning period, stop by the office and ask one of the administrators to visit the students who are following directions and getting their work completed. Give the administrator the list from the board. This will probably surprise the administrator, but do it anyway. After lunch, provide students who have followed directions a pass to the library (3–4 at a time) if the school permits that practice. Respond to those who talk out or fail to work with the message that you know the teacher and their parents will be disappointed about the choices they

are making. Unless they are so disruptive that the students who are working cannot hear instruction or they engage in physically dangerous activities, ignore them. Leave their names and their behaviors on a note for the teacher or write notes in their agendas if the school uses agendas as a tool for communicating with parents.

11. I've seen some classrooms where the students develop rules for the teacher to follow in addition to the teacher having rules for students. Is this a good practice?

I am not comfortable with this strategy and do not use it. Students need to understand that the adult in the classroom is the authority figure with the responsibility to teach and protect them. Establishing shared expectations communicates that as a member of the class, the teacher has made a commitment to honor and model standards of conduct that represent the culture of that group. To pretend, at any level, that the students have the authority to dictate the actions of an adult seems to send mixed signals. I prefer not to do that.

12. I am an intern, so I am a visitor in a classroom with very little classroom structure. The students do well for the CCT but they do not respond well to my higher level of structure. But the way, they are Exceptional Student Education (ESE) students. If they are testing my limits, how do I assert myself and not end up in a power struggle?

The first response I have to your situation is that students with disabilities often have more difficulty switching from one adult's structure to another's than students without disabilities. The more similar you can make your behavioral expectations and plan to the CCT's, the easier the transition will be. They might not be testing your limits as much as responding negatively to change.

To avoid power struggles. . .

1. Examine your plan. Make sure it is aligned with the students' strengths and needs.
2. Be explicit with rules and instructional directions. Don't rely on spoken communication alone. Use visual aids.
3. Provide accommodations based upon students' needs.
4. Be consistent in rewarding desired behaviors.
5. Be consistent in responding to undesired behaviors.
6. Make students' choices the focus of the discussion. Present the positive choice first and the less desired choice second.
7. If the student fails to make a positive choice within the stated time limit, follow your hierarchy for responding to undesired behaviors.
8. **Be as calm, firm, direct, unemotional, and brief as possible when students misbehave.**
9. **Be as lively, demonstrative, and engaging as possible when students are behaving.**

13. What is your opinion on daily class agendas?

I'm not sure what is meant by daily class agendas. Students need to know their schedules. Even very young children respond well to a visual schedule. Posting the daily schedule is a required component of classroom management where I work.

14. We have used the traffic light and now students don't care if they get to yellow! How do you address back talkers?

Determine how many times the child talks back each day. If the number on average is 12, put 10 or 11 strips in a pocket. Put a pocket on the board with paper strips in it for each child who tends to talk back. Pull a strip each time the student talks back. If the student has strips left at the end of the day, rewards should be made available. If the student does not have strips left, a punishment can be implemented. For some students, not earning the reward is enough. If the student is young, make rewards available twice a day and gradually fade to once a day.

15. How do you shift kindergartners back when one or two in particular are always in trouble?

I'm not sure that I understand the question. Students who are following directions should be reinforced regardless of what others are doing. The two who are always in trouble need individualized behavior plans ASAP! Behaviors are harder to remediate as students get older and they have had more practice doing the wrong things. Assess assistance immediately to determine the function of the behaviors of concern and develop a plan for changing the behaviors.

16. What are some strategies to use with 3rd graders who always talk while others are speaking and have a hard time raising their hands?

- #1—Teacher beware! In classes where students talk out excessively, the teacher is often reinforcing the behavior without realizing it by speaking to students who have not raised their hands and waited to be recognized.
- Try the Student-Teacher game described in the Webinar.
- Distribute tokens to students who listen.
- Write a reward such as POPCORN across the top of the board. Erase a letter each time a student talks out. Rewrite a letter for every 5 minute period that no one talks out. If at the end day, letters are still on the board, put popcorn kernels in a jar. Pop the popcorn when the kernels reach a predetermined line on the jar.
- Get a soft foam ball. Throw it to the person who has permission to talk. Only the person with the ball talks.
- Play Silent Speed Ball at the end of the lesson when students refrain from talking out.

17. What do you do when students (middle school) always do the opposite of what you ask? e.g. "Please don't talk when someone else is talking" seems to be a cue for them to all begin talking. What do you do when you have to repeat constantly to stop talking during quiet time or instructional time?

Students, in general, increase the behaviors that teachers give attention to. If the teacher says, "Sit down" frequently, students will begin to get out of their seats more frequently. If the teacher says, "Stop talking" frequently, students will talk more. Instead of thinking of what is happening in terms



of doing the opposite of what is directed, think of what is reinforcing the behavior.

Teacher attention is powerful. Try attending to the students who are engaged in the desired behaviors. Hand out free homework passes, bonus point cards, or coupons for other desired activities or privileges for the desired behaviors. Also, keep in mind that middle school students are attempting to assert their independence from adults and establish relationships with peers. Build into the lesson plan opportunities for peers to work together. Remind students that you value their desire to work together and that some of the instructional time will include listening and some will include interaction. Expect them to respect the rules for both types of class activities.

18. What if I walked into a classroom as a substitute with a classroom management plan/behavior plan that I don't agree with. What are some suggestions that I could do?

I recommend that substitutes have their own plan already developed and ready to go. It saves a great deal of time and energy just to tell students that you will not follow the teacher's behavior plan for that day. It can help decrease the number of times you have to hear, "But the teacher doesn't do it that way." Other advantages are that you will be more comfortable, fluent, and consistent in the execution of the plan. Do be sensitive, however, to any notes left about students with special needs and their accommodations.

19. When you refer to giving students personal space, would you recommend having the students' desks side by side?

Whether or not students can sit side by side is determined by the students themselves. If students seated side-by-side results in frequent behavior problems, then those students need more room between them and their peers.

With more than 30 years in the field of education, **Sylvia Rockwell** has a wide range of teaching experiences. She has taught general as well as special education, co-taught in inclusive classrooms, and worked with adolescents with emotional and behavioral disorders in a therapeutic, wilderness educational program. Dr. Rockwell currently teaches online graduate courses at Saint Leo University and serves as a behavior coach at B. T. Washington Elementary, both in Florida.