



By Tracey Garrett

“I want to show my students that I care about them, but I don’t want them to walk all over me.”

—novice teacher

**R**esearch indicates that one of the most serious problems plaguing beginning teachers is that they see caring and order as mutually exclusive concepts. They continuously struggle to reconcile their need to develop order with their desire to develop caring relationships (Weinstein 1998). Unfortunately, this mind-set exacerbates issues of classroom management. Knowing how to bring these two concepts together is essential for novice educators.

The tasks of establishing order and developing caring relationships play integral roles in an overall approach to classroom management. Seeing these two tasks as polar-opposites forces

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new teachers to choose either order over caring or caring over order. Yet one without the other is a prescription for failure.

Both objectives must be addressed simultaneously for a teacher to successfully accomplish either one. In fact, research demonstrates that students are more likely to follow classroom rules and routines when they believe their teachers care about them (Osterman 2000). On the other hand, caring relationships cannot develop if students do not feel part of a safe, orderly learning environment (Weinstein and Mignano 2007).

With the strategies that follow, you can create a caring and orderly classroom community starting now. It’s never too late to begin a caring and orderly approach to classroom management.

### Developing Order

- **Establish rules and routines.** Rules and routines effectively communicate expected behaviors to students. Set them on the first day of school and reinforce them continuously and consistently throughout the school year.
- **Teach and demonstrate each rule explicitly.** Demonstrate rules as though teaching curriculum. Posting the rules and assuming

that students will understand and subsequently follow them does not work. To clearly establish your expectations, with no room for misunderstanding, model each appropriate behavior.

- **Impose clear limits.** Develop and impose clear and logical consequences when students choose to misbehave.
- **Use explicit directives.** State the expectation rather than offer a choice: “Sit down and get back to work.” rather than “Would you like to sit down and get back to work?” One sets the expectation and leaves little room for misinterpretation. The other suggests an option on whether or not to sit down, a habit that surrenders authority.
- **Expect and give respect.** Maintain high standards for the way students speak to you and be sure to reciprocate when you talk with students.
- **Speak authoritatively and confidently.** Command the classroom without demanding. Communicating calmly and from a position of control speaks louder than yelling or acting in a dictator-like manner.
- **Present yourself as a strong, professional authority.** A teacher’s demeanor—dress, mannerisms, conversation, and even movement around the classroom can communicate confidence and control.

## Communicating Care

- **Organize and decorate your classroom.** There is little more unwelcoming than entering a messy, cluttered, and undecorated classroom. Take time before school begins to organize the room’s layout, traffic pattern, and storage options. Then decorate and personalize the room to create an inviting space for daily learning.
- **Send a welcome message.** Prior to the first day of school, send a welcome letter or e-mail to families that communicates your excitement about having their students in your class.
- **Smile.** This simple gesture shows students that you are genuinely excited to be their teacher. You would be surprised by how meaningful a smile is to students.
- **Send home positive notes.** Make the extra effort to notice students’ positive behaviors

and achievements. Jot them down in a notebook or use sticky notes on a seating chart as a reminder. Doing so assures that you will remember to let parents know through notes or e-mails about good and positive performance.

- **Conduct community-building activities.** In addition to establishing rapport between your students and you, be attentive to building relationships among students. Facilitate the development of peer relationships with various activities that provide opportunities for students to get to know one another.
- **Attend extracurricular activities.** Students appreciate it when teachers attend extracurricular events such as sporting events, school plays, and musical performances. It shows interest and conveys respect.
- **Let students get to know you.** Share a few of your interests such as favorite hobbies or sports teams to let students know *who* you are. You will be surprised by how much students love to hear about you and it helps you connect with them.

If you hear a veteran teacher make comments such as, “You’re too,” “Don’t smile until Christmas,” or “You have to be tougher,” don’t panic. What your more experienced colleagues are noticing is the common struggle between a new teacher’s desire to care and need to develop order.

Take a deep breath, relax, and reflect on the concepts of caring and order. Consider how they complement one another as components of effective classroom management. When school starts and you step in front of your class, try these suggestions to create a safe, caring, and orderly learning environment. 🍎

## References

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