How to Handle Discipline Problems with Effective Classroom Management
By Melissa Kelly

Discipline problems are listed as the major concern for most new teachers. What can teachers expect and how can they effectively handle discipline problems? Classroom management combined with an effective discipline plan is the key. This step-by-step look at classroom discipline will help you see some important steps in dealing with discipline problems that may arise in your classroom.

1. Begin each class period with a positive attitude and high expectations. If you expect your students to misbehave or you approach them negatively, you will get misbehaviour. This is an often overlooked aspect of classroom management.

2. Come to class prepared with lessons for the day. In fact, overplan with your lessons. Make sure to have all your materials and methods ready to go. Reducing downtime will help maintain discipline in your classroom.

3. Work on making transitions between parts of lessons smooth. In other words, as you move from whole group discussion to independent work, try to minimize the disruption to the class. Have your papers ready to go or your assignment already written on the board. Many disruptions occur during transitional times during lessons.

4. Watch your students as they come into class. Look for signs of possible problems before class even begins. For example, if you notice a heated discussion or problem before class starts, try to deal with the problem then. Allow the students a few moments to talk with you or with each other before you start your lesson to try and work things out. Separate them if necessary and try to gain agreement that during your class period at least they will drop whatever issue they have.

5. Have a posted discipline plan that you follow consistently for effective classroom management. Depending on the severity of the offense, this should allow students a warning or two before punishment begins. Your plan should be easy to follow and also should cause a minimum of disruption in your class. For example, your discipline plan might be - First Offense: Verbal Warning, Second Offense: Detention with teacher, Third Offense: Referral.

6. Meet disruptions that arise in your class with in kind measures. In other words, don't elevate disruptions above their current level. Your discipline plan should provide for this, however, sometimes your own personal issues can get in the way. For example, if two students are talking in the back of the room and your first step in the plan is to give your students a verbal warning, don't stop your instruction to begin yelling at the students. Instead, have a set policy that simply saying a student's name is enough of a clue for them to get back on task. Another technique is to ask one of them a question.

7. Try to use humour to diffuse situations before things get out of hand. Note: Know your students. The following example would be used with students you know would not elevate the situation to another level. For example, if you tell your students to open their books to page 51 and three students are busy talking, do not immediately yell at them. Instead, smile, say their names, and ask them kindly if they could please wait until later to finish their conversation because you would really like to hear how it ends and you have to get this class finished. This will probably get a few laughs but also get your point across.
8. If a student becomes verbally confrontational with you, remain calm and remove them from the situation as quickly as possible. Do not get into yelling matches with your students. There will always be a winner and a loser which sets up a power struggle that could continue throughout the year. Further, do not bring the rest of the class into the situation by involving them in the discipline or the writing of the referral. More on dealing with confrontational students in your classroom.

9. If a student becomes physical, remember the safety of the other students is paramount. Remain as calm as possible; your demeanour can sometimes diffuse the situation. You should have a plan for dealing with violence that you discussed with students early in the year. You should use the call button for assistance. You could also have a student designated to get help from another teacher. Send the other students from the room if it appears they could get hurt. If the fight is between two students, follow your school's rules concerning teacher involvement as many want teachers to stay out of fights until help arrives.

10. Keep an anecdotal record of major issues that arise in your class. This might be necessary if you are asked for a history of classroom disruptions or other documentation.

11. Let it go at the end of the day. Classroom management and disruption issues should be left in class so that you can have some down time to recharge before coming back to another day of teaching.

http://712educators.about.com/od/discipline/ht/class_manage.htm