

Teacher Tips

Behavior-Management Techniques for Safe Schools

Each new school year brings high hopes, great expectations and challenges for both new and seasoned teachers. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) has developed a series called *Teacher Tips* to help teachers start the year off right and anticipate the year ahead.

Teacher Tips is developed with you, the educator, in mind. The tips in this collection are taken from real classroom experiences and are part of the AFT's Educational Research and Dissemination (ER&D) professional development program.

The AFT is a leader in providing teachers the resources they need to help them succeed. Visit AFT's Web site for teacher resources at www.t-source.org today.



Schools remain one of the safest environments for children. However, in far too many schools, a lack of respect for the authority of teachers and other school employees, as well as for the rights of other students, is undermining the ability of schools to provide students with a quality education.

Even in the best schools, employees often experience frustration and feel abandoned in their efforts to maintain a safe and orderly learning environment. Many teachers can relate personal stories of administrators undermining their attempts to maintain order by letting student offenders get away with disruptive behavior.

Solving school violence and discipline problems isn't easy, but it can be done. Ultimately, it requires a districtwide commitment to safe, orderly schools, including a real effort by district officials to stand behind school employees with the support they need—and a commitment by administrators to forge a cooperative effort with school employees aimed at educating students, parents and members of the community about the need for tough but fair discipline policies.

Effective Behavior-Management Techniques

Many behavior problems can be prevented or corrected using effective behavior-management strategies. There are many practices—based on research and demonstrated to work—that are effective for preventing and correcting this behavior.

Techniques for managing the aggressive behavior of students include prevention and intervention. **Prevention** strategies focus on stopping the behavior before it gets started; **intervention** techniques focus on stopping the behavior after it gets started.

Preventing Problem Behavior

Prevention strategies minimize the chances that problems will occur. Such strategies include:

- ◆ **Creating a Structured Environment.** Many children with persistent behavior problems lead very unpredictable lives. An organized environment can replace their feelings of insecurity, mistrust and discomfort, with predictability and stability. Research shows that a predictable environment is based on set rules and routines, and well-established schedules and arrangements.
- ◆ **Monitoring Student Behavior.** Research indicates that continually checking children's progress over time allows adults to use this information to adjust their interventions and improve their effectiveness. It also is helpful to develop individual behavior plans for children who present more serious behavior problems, and to maintain written records of specific events to assist in tracking behavior.

Intervening in Problem Behavior—Teaching Alternative Behaviors

When individual children continue to act out in spite of prevention measures, it becomes necessary to use interventions to try to reshape their behavior.

- ▶ **Social Skills Training.** Some children who do not behave appropriately simply have never been taught how to behave. They have difficulty developing friendships, meeting adult expectations and dealing with social problems appropriately. Teaching children social skills helps them develop good relationships with other children and adults. Research shows that social skills instruction should include the following steps:

- ◆ **Identify** the social skills that are needed to replace problem behavior. Decide which steps are necessary for performing the skill. Ask students to remember the steps of the social skill. For example, “Asking permission to leave your seat” may include:
 - » raising your hand;
 - » waiting to be recognized;
 - » asking permission to be dismissed;
 - » waiting for an answer; and
 - » asking questions if you do not understand the answer.
- ◆ **Model** or show the students how to perform the skill. Watching other children use appropriate social skills and seeing them rewarded often leads to imitation of those skills.
- ◆ **Practice:** Allow the students to practice using the skill through role-play situations.
- ◆ **Reinforce** acceptable performance by letting students know how well they are performing the skills.

► **Anger-Management Training.** Children whose behavior is disruptive often have difficulty expressing anger in acceptable ways. When they were young, many of these children learned that they could control their world through anger. When people give in to these children’s aggressive behavior, this behavior is being rewarded, strengthening the connection between anger and control. Many children who exhibit aggressive behavior

have never learned acceptable ways of showing dissatisfaction, frustration or anger. They need coping skills for resolving conflicts without coercion, physical force and aggression.

These children need to recognize the triggers that ignite their anger and aggression, develop strategies for managing their anger, and avoid unnecessary conflict with others. Anger-control strategies include:

- ◆ **Self-instruction:** “Self-talk” and “self-prompting” are ways of talking through problems using special strategies. Students learn to engage in self-talk to manage their anger. In other words, instead of telling themselves negative things, such as “The only way out of this situation is to be more violent than the other kid,” they learn to replace these negative



thoughts with positive ones.

- ◆ **Relaxation skills:** Breathing and physical exercises allow students to reduce both stress and the physical symptoms of anger.
- ◆ **Social problem solving:** This strategy helps students view situations as problems to be solved and not as battles to be won.

Providing Safe Learning Environments Through Prevention of Bullying

Creating an environment where all students feel safe is extremely important to learning. Schools should ensure that students never feel they are being bullied by other students. Bullying refers to repeated aggressive behaviors (physical, verbal or psychological) meant to hurt another person. Bullying is signified by an imbalance of power, often the result of differences in physical size and/or cognitive abilities.

Characteristics of Bullies

There typically are three types of people involved in bullying behavior: bullies, victims and bystanders. Bullies can best be defined by their personality style. Researchers describe bullies as having the following characteristics:

- ◆ Enjoy aggression and the rewards gained from aggressive acts;
- ◆ Lack empathy for their victim;
- ◆ Lack guilt for their actions;
- ◆ Are dominating and like to be in charge;
- ◆ Have aggressive role models; and
- ◆ Think unrealistically about how the world should meet their needs.

Victims of Bullying

There are two types of victims: passive victims and provocative victims. Passive victims generally do not

defend themselves and can be characterized by:

- ◆ Being isolated during the school day;
- ◆ Lacking social skills;
- ◆ Being physically weak;
- ◆ Crying or yielding easily to bullies;
- ◆ Suffering from past trauma; and/or
- ◆ Having learning difficulties.

Provocative victims generally tease and provoke bullies, but do not have the social or physical skills necessary to defend themselves. Provocative victims can be characterized by:

- ◆ Being easy to arouse emotionally;
- ◆ Behaving in a manner that maintains the conflict; and/or
- ◆ Possibly having attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Interventions for Bullying

Like most effective interventions, strategies to prevent bullying should be comprehensive and multifaceted. This means that bullying interventions should be implemented schoolwide, classroomwide and individually; must include all staff, related personnel and administrators; and should have input and commitment from students and family members. Most important, staff must be trained to:

- ◆ Identify bullying behavior and differentiate between normal peer conflict and bullying;
- ◆ Teach students about both bullying and caring behavior; and
- ◆ Intervene with bullies, victims and bystanders.

In addition to schoolwide interventions to reduce bullying (or instead of them, when there is no comprehensive schoolwide program), classroomwide interventions are necessary. Classroomwide interventions for bullying include setting up an environ-

ment that expects and rewards caring behavior. This environment should reward those who stick up for victims and deter bullies, and should emphasize the importance of including all students in activities.

Bullying is a very serious problem and, if allowed to continue, can cause long-term problems for both the

bully and the victim. Adults need to be aware of bullying and must intervene whenever bullying occurs. Bullies and victims alike need to know that adults are there to defend and protect victims, and that they will not allow bullying to continue.

Five Great Reasons to Join a Union of Professionals

The American Federation of Teachers:

1 Supports you in the classroom. Effective learning only takes place when high-quality teachers, with the support of other competent professionals, have the materials and assistance needed to accomplish the task. Your union is a strong advocate for quality classroom materials that are aligned to the standards of achievement we expect our students to meet. We also insist that state and district assessments for measuring student progress are aligned with these standards and that the assessments be used appropriately to support student learning.

2 Helps you prepare. No matter how well prepared you may have been before entering the classroom, there is always room for improvement. Ongoing professional development that meets you at your point of need is vital for continued growth as an educator. The AFT and its affiliates deliver some of the finest professional development programs available; and in situations where ours are not available, we advocate and broker for you to receive the best training possible.

3 Stands up for you. Whether the discussion is taking place in the White House, in the halls of Congress, on the floor of your statehouse, in colleges of education or in your local editorial pages, you can be sure that union representatives are

weighing in assertively, ensuring that the collective voice of educators comes through clearly and effectively.

4 Advocates for your profession. No one enters the teaching profession without a strong desire to help children reach their potential. Yet, at times the realities of life make this calling difficult to stick with. Adequate salaries and benefits are essential in order to keep the best teachers, paraprofessionals and support staff in our public schools. Working conditions such as manageable class sizes, adequate teaching materials, and discipline policies that support teaching and enhance student learning are important factors in ensuring that the best teachers remain in the classroom.

5 Keeps you informed. *American Educator* is one of the most highly respected journals available to keep you informed on current thinking in public education by some of the most capable thinkers and doers in the field. *American Teacher* will keep you on top of the challenges and successes of your colleagues across the country. And a host of optional publications, as well as a comprehensive Web site that will assist you in addressing the particular needs of your school and classroom, provide the balance of a professional literature package that is second to none.