Teaching Weak Learners

Tips and Strategies for How, What and When to Teach Weak Students

Teaching weaker students is not an easy job. What is the trick behind reaching them?

Weak students come in all sizes and shapes. Sometimes kids come from borderline Special Education, other children have learning disabilities or behavior problems and some just hate the subject because of negative learning experiences.

Succeeding with weak learners is all about timing. If a teacher is able to catch them and give them all that she or he can when they are still young, they will be able to close their gaps. By the time these learners reach High School however, they are already so demotivated to learn, they have little or no faith in their ability to succeed or in the teacher’s ability to teach them.

If you do however teach weak students in whatever grade, here are some tips and strategies on how to build up a successful learning program.

First, get as much information as you can about each pupil. It makes the beginning of the year much easier. At least you can approach each according to his or her needs.

Ground Rules for the Teacher:

- Bring with you a great deal of humor
- Bring a lot of love and care
- Make sure you have a serious program.
- Look for a positive point in each student. Make them feel good and tell them!
- Contact the parents as soon as possible.
- Be very consistent in checking homework.
- Give a mark for most of the work they produce

It is important to use successful methodological techniques in order to fill the gap between what weaker students know and what you teach them.

What and How to Teach

- Every class should have a course book.
- Start the lesson with the book.
- Give homework
- Choose those chapters that interest them.

The question still lies: How to motivate such students to learn?

Weaker kids need lots of success oriented activities. The trick is to teach the material subconsciously without them realizing they are being taught. Otherwise, there will be too much theory. The lesson should seem spontaneous to them even if it was well prepared by the teacher. Variety is a key word with them. Try not to repeat your work in methods even if you teach the same strategy.
By success oriented activities I mean:

**Brainstorming.** The beauty of brainstorming is that a teacher writes everything on the board that the students say. For the weaker student, this is especially important. He or she sees his contribution on the board, and it makes him/her feel good. Even those students who do not participate directly or are passive are still involved as they continue to listen to those who do.

**Final Words**

The key ingredients for a teacher is **sensitivity and flexibility.** Consistency will show its result.

### Positive Techniques for Motivational Teaching

**A Positive Teaching Plan Motivates Students to Learn**

Demonstrations Motivate Student Attention - *Harvey Craft*

Good motivation produces good learning. Students need to feel the joy and purpose of learning. Some teachers are great motivators. Others need help to inspire.

Student motivation is about students’ desire to be a part in the learning process. Students are not equally motivated to perform, and the sources of their motivation may be very different. Motivation is every bit as important as discipline.

Principals may want to initiate a staff motivation program. It helps when the faculty is engaged in student motivation. Student success is too important to assume that all teachers understand how to establish a positive classroom atmosphere.

Incentive motivation is a popular business practice that has found its way into education in the form of offering extrinsic rewards for achievements. *Intrinsic motivation* is better with students because extrinsic rewards can interfere with altruism and goal-setting in students. Schools are designed for a special population with needs that are different in many ways from the adult business world.

**Students Learn Better and Teachers Teach Better in a Positive Atmosphere**

The classroom walls are a good place to start with generating a positive atmosphere. Use them to display motivational posters, student-oriented and student-generated materials, and creatively designed instructional materials. A casual observer should realize quickly what subject is taught in the classroom.

Some teachers confuse power with discipline. Positive teaching approaches are more effective. Conduct a motivation survey. Ask students what teachers do to help them learn. The information will provide revealing information about the class, and students will appreciate being asked their opinion. Communication from student to teacher is enhanced by surveys.
Teachers can improve their communication with students by using positive words in verbal communication and the classroom posters. Students are often very sensitive to non-verbal communication, consequently a generally positive personality and a smile can help students relax. Show enthusiasm in teaching – move around the room and gesture use gestures for animation.

Notes can be the death of instruction. While there are some things that must be presented in note form, the use of demonstrations and visual aids to help to maintain student interest and improve attention and motivation.

Use differentiated instruction to tailor individual student needs. This means tending to the “total student,” not merely offering teaching in different ways.

**Motivation is Improved by the Application of Educational Best Practice**

Remember Maslow's Hierarchy. Motivational strategies will be affected by student needs. It's hard to motivate a starving student or one with security issues with a promise of a good grade on a poetry quiz. Teachers need to understand how demographics and emotions affect motivation to learning. A classroom should feel like a “break.” All students should feel unthreatened and safe.

Most, if not all, teachers use rewards. There is a negative side to a reward system, as has been mentioned above. It bears mentioning also that extrinsic motivation loses effectiveness with time. Teachers should apply social skills that motivate intrinsically and enhance socialization.

Revisit Bloom’s Taxonomy. It is still relevant and is essential knowledge for expert teaching. Tailor lessons to appropriate learning levels, and always include some higher level material.

Don’t punish everyone when only one student is guilty. The idea is to put peer pressure on the offender, but it a terrible way to teach justice. Motivation is affected by discipline. Have a discipline plan that minimizes conflict.

Turning students against each other is simply wrong. Punishment motivates students to avoid punishment. That punishment will cause a positive change in behavior or attitude cannot be assumed.

A discipline plan that minimizes conflict quietly is best. Don’t expect raising one's voice to positively motivate students. Students respect mature teachers. Negative reinforcement may temporarily suppress behavior without changing it to positive behavior.

Some remnants of “old school” teaching just hang around. Help eliminate them. Specifically:

1. Don’t assign school work for punishment.
2. Don’t take points away for bad behavior.
3. Avoid sarcasm and embarrassing techniques.
4. Don’t threaten; students learn quickly to ignore threats and the teacher’s authority suffers.

**Students Respond to Teachers Who Care to Take the Time to Motivate**

Don't “just teach,” but teach with passion and a desire to reach every student. Teaching is hard work, and to avoid the rut and routine teachers must make a conscious effort to regenerate their purpose occasionally. Remembering that the fate of the nation may depend largely on the success of teachers is no small thought, and it may be true.
Motivational teaching demands that teachers care about how they teach and, most of all, who they teach. Even the least qualified student deserves the best prepared teacher. Students know the difference between teachers who care and those who don't. They learn better from teachers who care, because teachers who care will take the time to apply techniques that invite all students to learn.

Teachers need to understand what motivates and what doesn’t. Some students can be particularly challenging and seem to lack motivation to learn. Instructional strategies should stress positive techniques. Motivational teaching is about caring about students and caring about finding and applying those methods that help all students learn.

**Myths About Students and Teaching**

**Teachers’ Instruction Must be Based on Best Classroom Practice**

![Anger is not a Good Student Motivator - Paolo Tarantini](image)

Teachers are a dedicated bunch. They want to teach well and try lots of different ways to improve student performance. The question is “Does it work and how do you know?”

Teachers – at least the really good ones – can adapt to a wide range of student behavior and understand that it is important that students like them. These teachers study teaching and research. They understand the psychology of learning and the learner. Unfortunately, too many teachers are not proactive or creative. The results can result in bad practices.

**Common Teaching Myths**

Much of what people believe about human behavior has obscure and often negatively influenced origins, and too many of these beliefs find their way into classrooms. Among the most prevalent are:

*It’s best to be tough the first few days of school to set the tone for discipline.* This procedure works for teachers, but most students respond well to caring, smiling teachers – especially on the first day. Be nice is not the same as being weak and powerless. Nice people can be strong leaders. The important thing is to have a plan that includes dealing immediately, fairly, and firmly with troublesome students. Weakness often reveals itself through mean-spirited behavior that is meant to intimidate. Good disciplinarians have no need to threaten or intimidate – they understand discipline and use their skills.

*Remind underachieving students of the danger of failure to motivate then to try harder.* Failure is a lousy motivator. Many students simply perceive failure of more proof that their best efforts don’t work. Try to build success into some
activities so that low achievers can have reason to feel success. Avoid talking too much about grades. Don’t allow students to define themselves in terms of grades.

*Extrinsic rewards are an effective tool for teaching.* The research is pretty clear that intrinsic motivators work better and last longer than candy, homework passes, etc. *Extrinsic rewards* tend to teach children to work to acquire rewards. Intrinsic rewards tend to generate a feeling of achievement and learning for the sake of knowledge.

*The best learning occurs when the room is quiet.* Rooms that are perpetually quiet except for the voice of a teacher can be boring because active learning is not happening. Students are better engaged when teachers can control a lively learning activity where students discuss and exchange ideas. Variety helps motivate students, as well.

*Misbehavior should be squashed by power.* Teachers should not get involved in power struggles. There is no need to “defeat” a student verbally. If he disobeys, rules should be in place which are followed calmly and firmly without rancor. Students in a classroom where teachers are in calm control are more contented.

*Listening is the primary method by which students learn.* Listening is important for learning, but attention spans are limited. Students learn best through varied activities which involved moving, talking, doing, writing, etc. Listening should be one of many techniques used by teachers.

**New Teachers may Have the Advantage of Newer Educational Practices**

*If a teacher needs the best advice, ask the most experienced teachers.* This may or may not be true. Be aware that longevity does not guarantee that a teacher is up to date regarding contemporary education. Many experienced teachers have found a system that “works” by their definition, but if it involves the myths just mention, new teachers who read research and apply tested methods may have an advantage over thirty-year veterans.

**How do Teaching Myths Develop**

Myths are often simply used to justify behavior. For example, if a teacher is naturally mean-spirited then being verbally combative seems like the right thing to do. It can be justified by believing that children are to be seen and not heard, or one of many old fables.

Myths help relieve cognitive dissonance – the uncomfortable feeling that develops when new information comes into conflict with a belief held firmly by another person. *Cognitive dissonance* discourages new learning and open-mindedness.

Myths help explain things conveniently and quickly. They don’t require analytical thinking. If “everybody knows” that children behave badly when the moon is full, then one does not have to accept responsibility for the class being out of control. The moon did it.

Teaching is tough enough without making it tougher by false ideas about human behavior. Myths are common among teachers and may negatively influence teaching effectiveness. New teachers should try to exercise good judgment and analyze what they hear from other teacher. Myths serve purposes that reduce stress, but don’t necessarily help students.
Things the Best Teachers Should Know

There's More to Teaching Than Content and Discipline

Teachers have to know what they teach and how to teach it. That's quite a bit by itself. Those who want to really understand education go beyond the basic requirements.

Professionals in all occupations are exposed to staff development opportunities that are intended to enhance their skills, but there are always important topics on the periphery of any job that are usually learned by active, voluntary searching. Education needs people who know about the underlying explanations of what really works. These people may operate quietly as expert teachers or they may share their knowledge to improve teaching generally.

Ideas and Concepts for the Best Teachers

Teachers benefit from learning beyond the minimum to be certified. Having an organized mind is as important as having an organized desk. Mental organization helps teachers understand why students do what they do, for all teachers are culturally limited in some way that creates a barrier to understanding.

Furthermore, teachers may not understand their own motives or will have trouble accepting new ideas which they find troubling. The following three topics can help teachers understand the behavior and beliefs of others as well as themselves.

Teachers Need to Know the Basics of Attribution Theory

This theory helps clarify why students vary in the type and amount of effort to a task. Simply put, attribution theory provides an explanation for how students perceive the source of their success or failure. Students sometimes place the cause of failure outside of their control. For example, failure might be blamed on poor teaching. This is a face-saving device that holds the student less responsible for failure.

This placement of blame is not a conscience effort, but a learned coping device. Teachers are fully familiar with students who seem totally unsurprised that they failed a test and my even laugh about it. These students likely see the failure as inevitable. Successful academic efforts do not necessarily help motivate such students because they do not give themselves credit for the achievement – they are likely to believe in “luck” as a determining factor of success.

Teachers Need to Know the Basics of Reinforcement Theory

Reinforcement theory explains the specifics of motivation. To know that motivation exists and that it helps determine human behavior is not enough. Teachers need to understand that the motivational effects of a “thing” vary according to how reinforcement is applied.

Reinforcement theory helps fill in the gaps about how to maximize motivation and how teachers might unwittingly reinforce inappropriate behavior. The applications and limitations of different types of motivation depend on our knowledge of this theory.
Teachers Need to Know the Basics of Cognitive Dissonance

Cognitive dissonance can apply to any one of any age. It is best explained as the uncomfortable feeling that people get when new information mentally confronts an established belief. The two conflicting beliefs create a need for resolution which may be difficult if both seem equally plausible. Cognitive dissonance can be of importance in the acceptance or rejection of new information. Teachers see it in the faces of students frequently when new information is presented.

Teachers are subjected to cognitive dissonance when ideas about teaching, students, etc. conflict with ideas they have held for years. Being aware of dissonance allows people to accept new learning if they can learn to evaluate the information so that it “fits” into their cognitive world.

Attribution theory, reinforcement theory, and cognitive dissonance all relate to motivation theory. Understanding these concepts broadens teachers’ understanding of how motivation works and how new information is processed. All theories have important implications for teaching, especially if teachers wish to reach beyond content knowledge and basic teaching skills for professional self-improvement.

Rewards and Motivation

Effective Classroom Management Doesn't Need Rewards

Teachers have different techniques for maintaining discipline and motivating students. Rewards are arguably the most popular, but they may discourage intrinsic motivation.

Rewards are used in virtually every school in the nation in one form or another. They may be offered as a piece of candy to reinforce a good act by a student or as awards in ceremonies at the end of the school year for a variety of student superlatives. Teachers love to use them to improve discipline, and rewards often form the cornerstones of classroom management plans. Rewards are so accepted that few people are aware that they have a potential "dark side." The research on rewards in the classroom is not encouraging.

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

As motivators, rewards may present the false appearance of being positive and effective, but rewards motivate children to seek more rewards, not necessarily more knowledge. When the reward becomes the objective, learning goes out the window, and rewards become a manipulative way of getting children to simply perform or comply. Dr. Marvin Marshall, a renowned expert on motivation writes, "External controls are manipulators that set up students to be dependent upon external agents."

As time passes, rewards lose their effectiveness and the ante must be increased. What was motivating a week ago is suddenly ordinary. Therefore, students with discipline problems will return to their old behavior once they tire of the
reward. They have learned only to "perform" for a specific prize. The National Literacy Trust maintains a rich list of abstracts emphasizing the importance of intrinsic motivation.

Another negative aspect of rewards is that they are extrinsic motivators, and do little to encourage intrinsic values. Students come to understand that they need to please the giver of the reward. Once again the manipulative feature is apparent. Teachers and adults generally should reflect on how rewards affect their behavior. Do they obey laws because the laws are part of their value system or because they receive tangible rewards? One must not assume that what is rewarding to one student is equally motivating to another. To find equally motivating rewards is very difficult. The typical reward generally isn’t equal to all recipients, and that creates a time-consuming problem of individualizing one system of motivation. If better discipline is the goal, rewards will have to be changed periodically as the reinforcing value of things decrease with use.

Teachers are taught that their effort should be made create interest in the subject they teach, and while dispensing candy or privileges might be fun, it does little to make the subject matter more interesting. Teachers may get a false impression that students like the subject but they are, in reality, reacting positively on to the reward. This is bribery, not classroom management.

**Rewards and Values**

Whether used to motivate or for classroom management, rewards do little to enhance positive values. People who contribute the most prized things to society do so out of an internalized value system. They have well-developed intrinsic beliefs about right and wrong, work ethics, and other positive traits. Indeed, it is not uncommon for people to express that to be happy in one’s work is more important than the salary. Public officials who were looking for material gain often turn out to be criminals.

Volunteerism is important in any society, and people who volunteer expect little in return except a feeling that they have done a good thing. Still, schools commonly have charity events like food drives and reward the homeroom that collects the most food with a pizza party or some similar event. Charity needs to reflect an inner goodness, not a desire for an extrinsic payback. Fund raising efforts at school would likely be a miserable failure in the material world we have created, because students are involved in “training sessions” which emphasize the acquisition of rewards to those who sell the most.

**Awards are Overplayed**

Awards are simply trophies or certificates that offer extrinsic rewards for the recognition of specific achievements. Very few school awards have standards which can be accurately measured. Some schools get carried away with the practice and give rewards for categories that are highly questionable. Excellence can be and often should be validated by recognition, but how much more value can an award really add to a student scholarship or a report card will all A’s?

A diploma might be an exceptional award that finds a place in a home. Most others are consigned to the darkness of an attic.

If schools are truly interested in the development of character they must get on with the task of expecting students to do right things because they are right. The perception that students can be disciplined or taught only when they get something tangible is a pretty negative view. Instill values in people that hard work, good acts, and helping others have intrinsic value and that students will seek these things because they are intrinsically rewarding, not because there is a pay off in the material realm.
Decent, successful people are influenced by the way other decent, successful made them feel. They are motivated by the validation and love of important people with positive values. Love of friends and family are powerful rewards.

**Classroom Management for Teachers**

**Classroom Control and Behavior Management**

Learning classroom management skills can help teachers maintain classroom control and make them more effective teachers as well.

Effective teachers begin the year by putting into place procedures and routines that will become automatic for the students. Because teachers are able to manage the class using these established routines, the need for discipline will be less of an issue. These teachers develop a plan of action from the first day of school, and continue to implement the plan throughout the year.

For instance, students are aware of what to do when they are tardy or absent, where to put their backpacks, and what to do when they first enter the class. They know where their homework goes on a daily basis, and can complete tasks without asking the teacher. They know ahead of time what process should be used to attain the teachers’ attention, or any other management procedures that might otherwise disrupt the class. Most students enter school with some prior knowledge of basic procedures based from their home environment. These basic processes, or lack thereof, can help teachers maintain classroom control or lose control quickly.

**Introduce Classroom Procedures**

A good way to begin the school year is for the teacher to make a classroom management plan. The teacher should also write out a script for the first day, or even the first week of school. This should detail procedures that are to be used in the classroom throughout the year. The plan should be shown to students on the first day of school. A PowerPoint presentation can help to introduce the information regarding procedures and routines. In addition, discussion and role-play would cement the routines in the students’ minds and assess their knowledge. The procedures should be reviewed constantly throughout the first few weeks of school in particular. The three step approach for teaching classroom procedures are:

- **Explain:** State, explain, model and demonstrate
- **Rehearse:** Practice with supervision
- **Reinforce:** Re-teach, rehearse, practice and reinforce until it becomes habit

**Follow a Classroom Management Plan**

Classroom discipline is really a response to a class that is not well managed. In a class with procedures and routines in place, there will be less need for discipline. If students know the consequences up front of various acts, they will be less likely to commit the acts that require disciplinary action.
Within the first week of school, the teacher should walk the students through what is expected of them throughout the year. Students should be given choices concerning consequences for undesirable behavior so that they feel they are contributing to the classroom environment. Teachers should continually remind and reinforce expectations throughout the year.

**Avoid Overusing Discipline and Reward Methods**

Teachers who use ineffective discipline will use consequences and rewards to get their students to behave in a manner that is appropriate to their classroom. They might have a student change their card, or take away privileges. They will probably use a reward system such as stickers, or privileges for good behavior. Although these procedures are acceptable to some degree, they are often overused, and should serve to accent procedures that are already in place to manage classroom behavior.

If children are aware of class procedures from the first day of school, they will know what is acceptable and what is not, and will be more inclined to follow the classroom plan. In addition, the extrinsic motivation that rewards provide might encourage students to work for the reward rather than the intrinsic motivation of obtaining success for their own sense of self-achievement. The ultimate goal is to encourage them to want to learn to increase their knowledge stores, and not to receive an outside reward.

**Classroom Management**

Finally, effective teachers can structure and organize the classroom for effective learning, where students gain an education in an environment that is task oriented. Consistency in the classroom is the key to making procedures work. They should be predictable routines that the children follow daily.

When the teacher is able to teach routines and procedures, the classroom will run effectively and smoothly. Classroom management and discipline are not the same things. With a good management plan in place that teaches students the routines and procedures of the classroom, no real discipline problems should occur. Classroom management is an integral part of running a well-organized and effective classroom where children can achieve optimum learning.

**Using Teacher Presence to Motivate Students**

**Positive Student Learning Depends on Positive Teacher Relations**

Dec 19, 2008 Dorit Sasson

Motivating students to learn is how you use your teacher presence to "speak" to the students which can have favorable outcomes in terms of positive student learning.

Motivating your students to learn depends on how well you manipulate your teacher presence effectively. In addition to how you stand in front of students and present yourself teaching academic content, teacher presence is really about how teachers build a positive relationships with students, which is just as important (if not more than) teaching academic content.

Many newer teachers think that by nurturing the interpersonal element in their classrooms they will not teach effectively. This is not true. In fact, many discipline problems often occur in classrooms where students are not
engaged with the teacher on an interpersonal level. How many times have you heard students say: “That teacher does care – she just gives me a 70.” These are often signs that the interpersonal element is missing.

Nurturing Your Teacher Presence

Every new teacher needs tips on how to motivate students using his/her teacher presence.

Here are a few for starters:

- **Establish a trusting bond.**

  Say what you mean and follow through. Give students sometimes the benefit of the doubt. If they say that they couldn’t find material on the internet, believe them. Give them a feeling that you are listening to them even when they give you feedback. It may not be always what you want to hear. (You can also set the rules straight about how to give feedback as well.)

- **Take a few minutes to greet the students before they enter the classroom.** You’ll already see what a big difference in terms of how they respond to you during the course of the lesson.

Create an Interactive Lesson Plan

This doesn’t mean students should take over the lesson but involve quality opportunities for students to interact with each other via group or pair work. Use this interactive lesson plan on children’s uniforms which incorporates different modes of interaction.

You can distribute questionnaires on learning and reading styles in order to acquire a class and individual profile of your students. Explain to the class that this is your way for understanding what makes your class “tick.” Showing that you value their backgrounds sends a very powerful message to students. Continue to use this information to plan differentiated lessons that appeal to learning styles and interests.

It takes a very consistent and determined teacher to constantly motivate his/her students by nurturing the interpersonal element. By using some of these simple strategies, you’ll be well on your way to effectively engage even the most apathetic learners who have already been labeled as “passive” and “uninterested.” A smile helps a student bloom!
Giving Homework

Deciding on a Homework Policy

Is homework just another teacher check or a way to appeal to a student's learning style? Decide for yourself.

Giving homework involves a lot more than just checking it and giving it a grade. Think carefully and plan your own homework policy for your class.

At one of our staff meetings at the school I teach, the subject of giving homework was brought up. The motion for debate was its effectiveness. Is homework usually a waste of time?

Some arguments for giving homework:

Material needs revision

Students take responsibility for their learning

Homework enables the learner to become familiar with his/her learning style

Some learners need the free time to review new material

Doing homework makes the subject more affirmative

Pupils respect teachers (more) if homework is communicated on a quality level (something serious)

Some arguments against:

It is just another burden. (another task)

It is a subject for disagreement between teaches and parents.

It is hard to be controlled (who did what?)

If homework is not taken seriously, the teacher may loose his/her credibility.

How to deal with weaker students when it comes to giving and checking homework?

One conclusion that can be drawn is that there should be a logical consequence for what homework students do.

Homework Procedures (there are quite a few!) Again, where do you stand with these?

recording who has done their homework

collecting, checking and returning homework

reviewing homework in class
partially completed homework

unacceptable homework

no homework

opportunity to redo homework

meaning for each HW assignment with reference to student’s grade

**Where do you stand with regard to homework?**

How lenient or practical are you when it comes to your policy on homework?

**Consider also the practical side of giving homework.**

**Amount.** How much is enough to given in conjunction with the review and reinforcement of the material?

**Frequency.** How often is enough?

**Checking.** What is the most effective and best way to check homework. There are a variety of options such as answer sheets. See [Tips for Checking Student Work](#) for more information about this topic.

**Use as punishment.** Should homework be given as a logical consequence?

**Records.** Homework can be useful criteria for giving grades especially with problematic students who don’t give in homework.

Consider your homework policy in terms of its use for: practice, learning or finding out something new and testing and assessment.
Five Strategies for Effective Classroom Management

Remembering these five classroom management ideas helps prevent disruptive students and creates a positive environment for learning.

Some classrooms seem to run smooth as silk, with students behaving well and following directions. Other classrooms are chaotic and out of control. The difference between the two classroom environments is the management techniques used by the teacher.

The Positive Teacher and Classroom Control

The teacher is the biggest influence on how well students behave in a classroom. It's not the quality of the students, the involvement of the parents, or the administration that make the most impact. It's the teacher's attitude.

Students tend to live up to the teacher's expectations. Expect great things and they rise to the challenge. Expect poor classroom behavior and again, they will meet that challenge.

Since the teacher is the number one influence on classroom control, it's imperative to leave personal problems at the door. Once in the classroom, having a positive attitude and outlook makes the students feel secure. They relax in that security and are more willing to adhere to the classroom routines. When the teacher is positive, the students are able to be positive and more successful, too.

Firm Classroom Routines and Procedures

Building effective classroom discipline becomes almost a non-issue with firm procedures and routines in place. In a well-run classroom, the routines make it look as if the class runs itself. When students walk in the door, they know exactly what to do. As they work, they know the proper procedures for everything that needs to be done, from sharpening pencils, to passing in papers, to taking a restroom break.

Procedures and routines are two different things. A procedure is how something is done, such as passing in papers. Plan for an orderly procedure that will prevent students from running around the room, or bopping each other on the head with stacks of papers. If there is no procedure in place, these things will happen, guaranteed.

Routines are the order in which things are done. Plan a regular daily schedule beginning with bellwork. Bellwork is a morning procedure students are expected to do the minute they walk into the classroom. This serves two purposes. First, students have no reason to loiter in the back with friends, saunter around the room, or ask, “What should I do?”

Second, it gives the teacher time to deal with the morning influx of papers, notes, and taking attendance. After bellwork, begin the daily routine. A classroom management strategy for elementary school is to post the daily routines on the board. A middle school or high school option is to have each student use a planner.
Having procedures and routines in place for everything reduces the need for classroom interventions for misbehavior.

**Give Consequences That Make Sense**

Make the punishment fit the crime, as the old saying goes. Positive classroom discipline reflects clear expectations and fairness. Justice and fairness are of major importance to adolescents.

Some examples of punishment fitting the crime:

- If a student sticks chewing gum on a desk or chair, he must don protective gloves and spend a recess period cleaning gum from school surfaces.
- If a student shouts out and interrupts others in class, she loses the privilege of participating for the rest of the period.

Students appreciate consequences that are simple and straightforward because they make sense.

**The “Are You All Right?” Technique in Classroom Discipline**

Often students misbehave when they have problems to deal with. Keeping this in mind, if a student is disruptive, it can help to take the student aside and privately ask if everything is all right. Let him know his behavior is surprising and out of character and is causing concern. If a teacher lets a student know she cares, it often resolves the behavior issue. If there is a problem, the student now knows there is someone to talk to about it.

**Praise Openly, Discipline Privately**

Everyone loves to get recognition for things done well. When things go smoothly in the classroom, praise the class. If an individual does something that shows good behavior, praise the student. When the praise is scattered around the room evenly, no one will feel the teacher has a pet.

No one likes to be disciplined in front of others. As much as possible, take the positive discipline conversations to a private level. Be clear about expectations and avoid nagging. Even if a student becomes agitated and yells, (and this does happen,) the teacher must still remain calm. Yelling at the student only escalates the problem. Students appreciate teachers that stay calm and in control.

Effective classroom management begins with a positive teacher, firm procedures and routines, and techniques that show respect to the students. With these in place there will be very few behavior problems.
Positive Classroom Discipline
Teacher Strategies That Encourage Responsive Students

Discipline, according Merriam-Webster Dictionary, means, “Training that corrects molds or perfects the mental faculties.” For students to accept discipline in a positive manner, the training or classroom discipline must be delivered in a positive, direct manner. To be positive, classroom management techniques should guide, encourage, and reward the student with feelings of satisfaction.

What Good Behavior Looks Like in a Positive Classroom

Often students are told to behave, yet are not told exactly what that means. Before they can behave, they need to know what good behavior should look like.

It’s important and necessary use teaching strategies that model behavior such as sharing, raising a hand to speak, lining up, and walking between classes. Even simple tasks should be modeled and practiced so students know what to do and how to do it.

Use Positive Language and Be Specific

Positive discipline includes positive language. The teacher sets the tone of the classroom, and by focusing on specific, clear, instruction, with a positive overtone, the students will respond accordingly.

Rather than telling a student who is drawing instead of reading that she is not doing what she is supposed to do, tell the student, “It's time to put the pencil away and open your book.” Another way is to tell the student, “It’s reading time now. Please put the pencil down and read.”

Additional reinforcement could be to tell her, “I want you to tell the class three details you found on page 181.” Giving the student a specific question and an expectation of her answering it will help her focus.

Five Guiding Principles

Keeping the following five principles in mind will help develop positive discipline in the classroom.

1. Students want to do the right thing. Students do not want to be in trouble, or be embarrassed in front of their peers. Rather, they want recognition for a job well done, as most people do. A teacher can build on this desire by having faith in the students and setting positive expectations.
2. Be specific when giving directions and when giving praise. Instead of saying “Don’t litter,” say “Please put all your snack trash in the garbage can.” The compliment “Good job,” is vague. A more effective form of praise is to say, “I appreciate how you picked up the trash you saw blowing on the playground.”

3. Direct your focus on one student at a time. Pull the student aside for guidance in a one to one situation, in a place where other students will not overhear. This prevents embarrassment and helps the student to respond to the guidance in an honest manner.

4. Don’t talk too much. Young students have a short attention span, and can’t remember long lists of instructions or comments. Keep instructions down to one or two steps. Have the students repeat the instructions to be sure they know what to do.

5. Give the students time to respond. This is especially true when working with English language learners, who may need additional time to process what you have said, and to develop their response. Wait for an answer when asking a question, and give them at least 20 seconds to reply. Don’t interrupt, but rather, follow up with questions that encourage critical thinking and reasoning.

Using these five guidelines allows students to maintain dignity, and makes them willing to please the teacher. Part of a teacher’s job is to guide a student, developing good thinking skills and social skills. Positive classroom discipline techniques help produce positive, happy students.