

Correcting or Disciplining Students

General Considerations

- When it comes to discipline, remember that the specific consequences you give are not as important as the way you present your plan, the matter-of-fact way you handle infractions, and the consistency with which you enforce your plan.
- Remember “little problems, little solutions.” If you deal with things while they are small, you will find that smaller consequences can still be effective. If you struggle to find the courage to talk to a student early on, you often miss the opportunity to stop a habit before it gets worse and worse and spreads to other students.
- Effective discipline fits into the following categories:
 - Clear and consistent—predictable and uniformly applied
 - Developmentally appropriate—suits the student’s age and temperament
 - Growth-promoting—fosters self-discipline and encourages students to reflect on their actions
 - Teaches skills—imparts social and life skills
 - Prompt but not hasty—addresses issues quickly but thoughtfully
 - Logical—the punishment fits the crime, as much as possible
 - Respectful—don’t embarrass students in front of their peers
- Keep the “why” of discipline in front of you. The goal of enforcing rules is not to create a herd of robots who perfectly do what they’re told without a moment’s hesitation. The goal is to be part of forming people with soft hearts that are turned towards the Father.
- Beware of letting emotionally unstable students become scapegoats who unfairly bear blame in situations where other factors are at play. For example, a student may have an outburst that was triggered by another student’s subtle provocation or stress due to overwhelm. Investigate causes rather than solely punishing behavior.

Addressing Misbehavior

- When addressing misbehavior, have the student tell you what he did wrong. Beginning with, “Can you tell me what happened?” leads a child to confession or wrong (a nice way of saying, “So what did you do?”) That question can be followed by, “And why is that a problem?” This usually leads to talking about which rule/concept was violated.
 - Asking an erring child the question, “Why did you do it?” rarely brings good results.
 - If two disgruntled students sit in front of you, your approach will need to be a bit different. Asking “Can you tell me what happened?” usually leads to accusations and blaming. Instead, it often works well to say, “I want each of you to tell me what *you* did wrong. For right now you may not talk about what he did, only what *you* did.” This places the onus on each child to take responsibility for their own actions.

- As much as possible, frame consequences in terms of the student's choices. You want to prevent a you-versus-them mentality from developing, and one of the best ways to do that is to make it clear to your students that they are being punished because of *their own* choices.
- Involving students in their own process of growth will look different depending on what age of students you are teaching, but in general, it's a good goal to keep in front of you when punishment is necessary. "This needs to change, and you have the power to do that," is a wonderful phrase to encourage students to take ownership for their own actions.
- Monitor your feedback to ensure that you are not always negative or critical of children with behavior challenges. The child should not be receiving the teacher's attention and help only when he is off-task or breaking a rule. Balance your correction with praise.
- Be specific in your correction. "You need to behave!" is not good feedback. Instead, give students actionable feedback. Make sure they know what action you are talking about and make sure they know exactly what is expected of them instead.

Methods of Correction

- There can be a power in making the entire class re-do a procedure or practice an appropriate behavior, even if it was just one or two students who didn't comply. This teaches students that their actions affect everyone. This also creates positive peer pressure that works to your benefit. For example, "Let's recite that chart again with everyone helping," or "We were too noisy as we walked down the hall just now. Let's go back to our classroom and try that again."
- Have a "ladder" of consequences. When a child misbehaves, start at the bottom rung of the ladder, which is a simple and unobtrusive consequence, such as simple eye contact and a slight shake of the head. If the student continues to misbehave, move "up the ladder" to more and more serious consequences. Frequency of infraction and how long you've been working on that particular behavior will dictate the speed at which you climb the ladder.

Sources

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- An Open Letter to First-Year Teachers by Meghan Brubaker [An Open Letter to First-Year Teachers - The Dock for Learning](#)
- Effective Discipline: Grades 1-3 by Lise Gaines [Effective Discipline: Grades 1-3 - The Dock for Learning](#)

- Peaceful Classrooms: What Are the Ingredients and Why Do They Matter? By Sheldon Kauffman
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