



Suggestions for Handling Surface Behavior

1. Know Your Purpose, Right And Responsibility

Purpose: To direct and redirect the behavior of students in a manner effective and comfortable to us as well as healthy and productive for the children in our care.

Right: This implies the sensitive and personal right of guiding and controlling the behavior of other human beings - "The Right of Management."

Responsibility: In exercising our Right of Management we must accept the Responsibilities that are attached to that Right, namely: Reciprocal Dignity and Role Modeling.

2. Have A Philosophy

As individuals influencing the lives of youngsters, we must have a strong, personal philosophy about what we are doing. It must be a philosophy of which we are completely convinced. Our field is rampant with theories of how we should teach, discipline, and motivate a kid. If we are not strong in our own thoughts and feelings, we will end up floundering and frustrated.

3. Use a Sign, Sound or Look

In many instances a word or motion provides enough intervening support to enable students to handle their impulses. Actions such as yelling, cursing, moving, etc., can be stopped by a simple sign, sound or look. So often we raise the roof when we need only to raise our eyebrows.

4. Be Fair

If you did not witness and incident handle all parties alike, ignore or give equal treatment. Strive for intelligent judgments not emotional reactions.

5. Become One of Their Fans

Build your kids up by showing interest in their work, projects, play, etc.. Exude praise and amazement over their accomplishments. They love phrases like... "When did you get that good?"

6. Be Specific, Consistent and Simple in Your Rules

Tell them what you want. Keep procedures simple and avoid vague rules. Complexity lends itself to confusion and leaves students with one option: to act out externally or internally.

Maintain consistency. An organized routine tells kids what is expected of them and what they can expect in return.

7. Use the Positive Rather Than the Negative

Too often we violate this rule by ignoring youngsters until they misbehave, thus focusing their attention on incorrect behavior. Too often we use the negative statements of control. We'll say, "Take your feet off the chair," when we should say, "Put your feet on the floor."

8. Save Your Threats

We usually regret making them. We make them when we are angry. We say we're going to do things we cannot do, should not do, or do not even want to do. Threats move us from a position of power to one of no choices. We put the trigger into the hands of the youngsters.

Selected from a lecture by Nicholas A. Seta. Printed with permission.



Things To Say When Confronted

Long ago, I was having trouble relating with a youth who always seemed to attack me verbally. Certain words made me want to go off on him. He knew how to press my buttons. Even though I knew his background included abuse, I had trouble maintaining control in the face of his assaults. I went to a friend who noticed how upset I was. This was a man who was noted for having great discipline with all kids, no matter how tough they were. He told me that in his opinion I was giving away a great deal of power by reacting emotionally to the young man. My friend asked me how I'd feel if, instead of calling me an s.o.b., the kid called me a "typewriter" or "plate" or a "can of Spam." I laughed, but at that time it was hard for me to see where this might have a place. A few days later, the kid loudly referred to me as the waste product that comes out of a horse's rear end. I found myself thinking, "Plate, Spam, typewriter ... plate, Spam, typewriter..." I began laughing. The kid probably thought that I had lost it. I remember looking him squarely in the eye and saying without sarcasm, "There's probably some truth to that. Thanks for letting me know." He stopped!

It is important that I remind myself of the times that I am responsible for the anger I get from others as a result of what I say or do: when I discount by not paying attention, when I am critical or blaming, when I expect unattainable performance, when the tone of my voice accuses another of being stupid, and when I come across as having the only right answers. In cases such as these, I can expect others to protect their dignity by fighting back.

When we feel put on the spot, we all need phrases to say that are emotionally neutral and de-escalating. For practice, let us suppose that an angry child yells a put-down at you in front of the class. He calls you an s.o.b. or says, "You're unfair---always picking on me." Write down as many things as you can think of that would be emotionally neutral or de-escalating:

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.
- f.



The following is a list of possible responses:

- (a) When did you start (feeling, thinking, believing) that? Tell me after class.
- (b) Do you always (think, feel, believe) that way about me? When did it start? Let me know after class.
- (c) That is an interesting opinion.
- (d) I must not be showing up for you because, if I were, I don't think you'd say that to me. When we have some time, I'd like to know how I can improve and be a better teacher for you.
- (e) I'm glad you trust me enough to tell me how you feel, and I'm concerned. Any suggestions for improvement are appreciated.
- (f) There's probably a lot of truth to what you are saying. Sometimes you get angry when you think I've been unfair.
- (g) When you call me names, I feel upset and kind of feel like attacking you back. But I know you are hurting inside, and I really need to understand about that if you are going to be successful in this class.
- (h) You might be right.

Reprinted with permission from *How to Achieve Discipline With Dignity In the Classroom*, Allen N. Mendler Ph.D.;
National Educational Service, Bloomington, IN