



## How To Encourage Your Students To Follow Rules

by Michael Linsin on May 28, 2016

Here at SCM, we talk a lot about the importance of creating a classroom students look forward to.

It's one of [our core principles](#).

Because, when your students enjoy being a member of your class, they're naturally inclined to follow rules.

They *want* to follow them because the learning experience you provide is so much better than whiling away in time-out.

It makes the choice of following rules an easy one.

Much of that enjoyment comes from your personality, your kindness, and your ability to create compelling lessons.

But it also comes from your consistency.

It comes from your commitment to enforce consequences every time a student misbehaves.

Much of what we do here at SCM supports this approach.

But there is one other thing you can do to encourage your students to follow rules. It's something that at first glance seems obvious, but many teachers fail to do.

It's a strategy that can mean the difference between a reluctance to follow rules and a desire to follow them. It's also backed by solid research.

So what is it?

**It's to explain to your students *why* your rules exist.**

In his bestselling book, *Influence*, Dr. Robert Cialdini describes a well-known experiment by Harvard psychologist Ellen Langer, demonstrating that when we ask someone to do something – or not do something – the response is more favorable when we give them a reason.

Simply adding the word “because” makes people more likely to do what we want.

This underscores the importance of emphasizing the true purpose of your classroom management plan, which is to protect *your students' right* to learn and enjoy school.

You see, when you make it about them, and explain how [your rules](#) are in place for their benefit, it can transform their attitude toward the boundaries you establish for your class and your role enforcing them.

It causes them to agree with your rules, appreciate their purpose, and *want* to comply.

This natural desire to want to know ‘why’ is why teachers – and parents – who refuse to explain their rules, policies, and decisions experience so much pushback, rebellion, and hostility.

The “my way or the highway” approach misunderstands the call to be consistent with sternness, strictness, and authoritarianism.

But it's nothing of the sort.

[Consistency](#) just means that you'll do what you say you'll do – in this case, follow a set of guidelines that protect your students' freedom to listen, learn, and love school.

So what does the strategy look like in practice?

Well, when you first teach and model [your classroom management plan](#), you'll want to explain in detail how each rule benefits them.

It should be such a point of emphasis that at any time during the year they'll be able to repeat back to you how each rule makes the classroom a better, more enjoyable place to learn.

You'll also want to remind your class often that when you enforce a consequence, it's not personal.

It's not a means of revenge or a way to express your anger. It's simply a way to ensure a learning environment that is best for them and their education.

This is one reason why here at SCM we stress the importance of enforcing consequences without lecturing, scolding, or causing friction with students.

It further reinforces the idea that the entire enterprise, the whole point of being in school, is about them and their future.

It's not about us.

This is a remarkably effective approach to introducing, teaching, and [enforcing rules and consequences](#), which we'll be sure to unpack in greater detail in future articles.

In fact, there is a related strategy, also supported by research, that causes misbehaving students to reflect on their mistakes and resolve not to make them again.

We'll tackle that strategy in the coming weeks.

In the meantime, thanks for being a reader of Smart Classroom Management! We appreciate you and the opportunity to help improve your classroom.

-Michael

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