



How To Handle An Out-Of-Control Student

So you have this student who seems determined to ruin your school year.

He (or she) is blatantly disrespectful. He makes fun of and laughs at other students. He's rude and silly. He's argumentative and attention-seeking. He is well known by every staff member and can describe the inside of the principal's office. Time-out has minimal effect and notes and phone calls home rarely do any good.

It's clear that there is little accountability at home and school administration is reluctant to suspend him for classroom behavior. Short of physically hurting another student, he is untouchable. And he knows it.

He is one of those rare students who has gotten a peek behind the curtain and has discovered that no matter what he does, within fifteen minutes or so he'll be right back out on the playground or in your classroom doing as he wishes.

It's disheartening and stressful, and you're at the end of your rope. You've tried everything. You've done your research. You've read all the books. You've requested help and consultation from counselors and psychologists. You've hashed and rehashed it out with your colleagues.

But to no avail.

And so here you are, deep into the school year, and other than a few brief and blissful periods of improved behavior, nothing has changed. In fact, if anything, it has gotten worse. He has now begun misbehaving right in front of you, literally daring you to do something about it.

All the while you've been a saint. You've worked hard to build rapport. You've been patient and kind and forgiving. Your students love being in your class. It's just this one student. Why isn't he coming around? Why isn't he buying into your program?

The answer is because he doesn't have to.

He knows your hands are tied. He knows you've tried everything. He knows he's got you over a barrel. With no accountability at home and nothing forthcoming from the office – whose hands are tied as well – he believes that there isn't any more you can do.

But he's wrong. There is still one more thing you can do. And this, my friend, will work. The key is to **make the accountability stronger**.

You must make the accountability so strong, in fact – and the alternative so attractive – that it's guaranteed to work. You see, as you widen the extremes between accountability on one side and what you're offering as a member of your classroom on the other, there will be a point when he'll think, *"I'd much rather be a part of that (the classroom)."* And it is at that point that his behavior will change, and change drastically.

So here's what you do.

After speaking to his parent(s) and the principal to let them know of your plan, you pull the student aside and inform him that he is no longer a regular member of the class. You tell him, in so many words, that because of his behavior, you can't ensure the education and enjoyment of the rest of the class, and thus he can no longer be a part of it.

You explain that his desk will be set apart until he can prove to you he can behave like a full-fledged, contributing member of the classroom. This is no permanent time-out, mind you, for there is a way back into the classroom and its good graces that is entirely up to him.

Practically, he will no longer be allowed to participate in learning games, group/fun activities, partner work, and non-essential verbal exchanges. He is still required to do all work and participate as an observer, but he may not *actively* participate. (If some of the suggestions above are such that you feel can't be taken away, for whatever reason, then you take away what you can.)

Remember, though, the stronger the accountability, the quicker he'll be back in your classroom behaving like everyone else. As for recess, if similarly you can't make certain the safety and enjoyment of every student on the playground, then he shouldn't be out there.

The best way to handle recess is to sit with him and watch. Like being in the classroom, he needs to see what he is missing. If you're at a school that discourages taking away recess, then give him the option of running or walking laps – again, while you watch.

Yes, it's a bit of extra work. But it's a small price to pay for a peaceful classroom. In fact, even while in the midst of the strategy, your teaching life will become easier, your students will be happier, and you'll accomplish so much more.

I recommend waiting at least a couple of days before entertaining any thoughts of returning him to full membership status. And even then, only if he has proven through his behavior he can do it *and* has requested an opportunity to try.

It's important to note that you shouldn't attempt this strategy if you're not otherwise faithfully following a [classroom management plan](#) and successfully managing the rest of your students. Further, the strategy is only effective if the student feels he is missing something, thus the critical importance of creating a learning experience your students like and want to be a part of.

To be clear, this strategy is meant only for an unusually difficult regular education student in an otherwise well-behaved classroom.

Why It's The Right Thing To Do

To be an effective teacher, you must never let any one or more students interfere with the rights of the rest to learn and enjoy school. It's when educators of all stripes lose track of this core classroom management principle that there is a breakdown in learning, behavior, and all things right and true.

For what does it benefit *anyone* to allow a disruptive student to continue day after day to interfere with learning or run free to bother and harass other students? Do we allow everyone to suffer and lose out on the opportunity to learn and improve and enjoy school and friendships in order to say that we won't exclude anyone from anything and for any reason?

And here's the kicker.

Students like this *need* accountability, desperately. And down deep they know it. Their behavior screams out for it, craves it, pleads for it. They're searching high and low for someone to step forward and say, "I care enough about you and your future and for the rest of students in this class to truly hold you accountable."

You may very well be the only person in his life in position to make such a heroic and potentially life-changing, life-saving stand. You may be the only one willing to apply the perfect combination of love and grace and accountability that will cause him to turn off the rocky path he's on . . .

And leap like from a burning building onto redemption road.