



How To Handle Six Disrespectful Students In One Class

by Michael Linsin on March 12, 2016

A reader emailed SCM last week wondering how to handle six students who were wreaking havoc in his classroom.

Every day they were disruptive.

They were talkative and silly. They called out during lessons and made inappropriate comments.

They played off one another and held little regard for his expectations.

Most distressing, when he'd confront them or attempt to hold them accountable, they would become disrespectful.

They would argue and complain. They would **lie and deny**. They would talk back and then goof off when sent to time-out.

The teacher was at the end of his rope and desperate for answers.

One or two disrespectful students are hard enough. How do you handle a half dozen who are determined to make your life miserable?

Well, you don't. At least, not directly.

You see, one of the most common mistakes teachers make is trying to handle difficult students as distinct entities, separate from the class as a whole.

Day after day, this teacher was pulling them aside for one-on-one talking-tos. He was lecturing them, counseling them, and giving them pep-talks.

He set up behavior contracts, [offered rewards in exchange for good behavior](#), and had consequences designed just for them.

But these individualized methods only make matters worse – because they *encourage* misbehavior.

They cause resentment and antagonism. They wipe out intrinsic motivation and label students as “difficult,” which becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The truth is, when you have several or more students who consistently disrupt learning and behave disrespectfully, it’s a sign you’ve lost control of your class – or never had it to begin with.

It’s a classroom management problem, not an individual student problem.

And the only way to fix it is to start over from the beginning.

It’s to establish sharply defined, non-negotiable boundaries of behavior *for all students* that are designed to protect your freedom to teach and your students’ freedom to learn.

Create a clear, no-nonsense classroom management plan that covers every possible misbehavior. Teach, model, and practice it so there are no misunderstandings or excuses not to follow it.

Then defend it to the hilt.

If you’re in the middle of the school year, it may take several days to see results.

You may even get considerable pushback, especially from the core of disrespectful students who have grown accustomed to having their way and dictating the environment of the class.

But if you fulfill your promise to protect the right of *every student* to learn and enjoy school, if you refrain from pulling students aside to scold,

lecture, and bribe, and instead let your classroom management plan do your talking for you, then you'll begin to reel them in.

Your most well-behaved students will respond first. You'll notice them smiling more and making eye contact with you. They'll be more openly friendly and appreciative. They'll cheer you on from afar.

Then a few more students will join in support. One by one, you'll begin picking them off and pulling them into your sphere of influence.

Before long, just one of your most difficult students will turn things around. They'll abruptly start making the right choices.

They'll become more respectful. They'll grow calmer, happier, and more responsive to you and your expectations. [They'll like being part of the class.](#)

Then another difficult student will come aboard. Then another.

You'll now have more time and freedom to really enjoy your class and teach with greater passion. Your stress will fall away. You'll smile and laugh more often and begin building real influence and rapport with your students.

You'll have *leverage*.

Soon, the last few holdouts will take a look around and notice that no one is laughing at their jokes anymore. No one is amused by their antics.

They'll realize that following rules and participating as a valued member of the class is a better option than creating their own brand of fun or behaving rebelliously. They'll shrug their shoulders and join in too.

After all, you've made their choice an easy one.

You've made the gap between the experience of being part of the class, and the experience of being held accountable, so wide that no student can resist.

You've left the door to a safe, warm, and dry place wide open – where they're welcomed and accepted and can leave their baggage behind.

Where they can be part of something special and bigger than themselves. Where their intrinsic motivational engines can finally begin to turn.

This is no pie-in-the-sky scenario.

It's a transformation that is taking place in classrooms all over the world. Here at SCM, we receive hundreds of unsolicited email success stories every year.

[Our approach to classroom management](#) has been proven to turn around *any* group of students – no matter how disrespectful or ill-behaved. If you're new to our website or newsletter, I encourage you to visit our archive (along the sidebar), where you'll find over 350 articles covering nearly every classroom management topic imaginable.

You may also want to pick up one of our books or sign up for [personal coaching](#).

Finally, I have a new book coming out in May called *The Happy Teacher Habits*, which reveals 11 little-known secrets of the happiest, most effective teachers on Earth.

I hope you'll check it out.

Thanks for reading!

-Michael