



How To Handle Students Who Complain And Talk Back When Sent To Time-Out

So a student, let's call her Karla, pushes another student while rushing to enter the classroom after recess. You see the incident and quickly realize that, because it's her second rule violation of the day, a time-out is in order.

As soon as Karla sits down, you calmly approach, inform her of what rule was broken, and **then ask her to take herself to time-out**. Karla, in response, is furious. She glares at you and yells, "But I didn't do anything wrong! This is so unfair!"

She stands abruptly and stomps off to time-out, while muttering under her breath. She slams her books down and drops dramatically into her new seat. After one last insolent glance in your direction, she crosses her arms and sulks into the chair.

Now for most teachers, their first inclination is to follow Karla to time-out to either try to talk things out, explain how she *should* respond, or cut loose with a well-deserved, how-dare-you lecture.

But doing so would be a mistake. It's far better to ignore the incident and get back to the business of your classroom.

Here's why:

It can ruin the relationship.

Any effort to discuss with Karla her angry reaction to being placed in time-out will only cause an increase in friction between you. Either you'll be fired up and looking for a confrontation or she will.

Either way, you risk sullyng the relationship. In order to preserve good rapport, open communication, and the leverage you need to positively affect her behavior, it's best to let Karla stew and not take it personally.

It interferes with accountability.

As long as you're clear with Karla about why she must to go to time-out, deep down she'll get it. In other words, although she may be angry – and express that anger toward you – in her heart she'll know that she's in time-out because of *her* behavior.

Attempting to talk with her, or “put her in her place,” will interfere with the purpose of the consequence – which is to hold her accountable for misbehavior. It will relegate her culpability and personal reflection to the background, and place you and your prideful feelings in the spotlight.

It spoils the lesson.

It's normal to want to spell out for students how they should feel and what they should be learning from their misbehavior and subsequent consequence. But doing so spoils the lesson, with the student leaving time-out having not learned a thing.

You must give your students an opportunity to think for themselves, to accept the consequences for their behavior and learn from them on their own terms – even if that means a show of anger. If you insert yourself into this important time of reflection, then the very reason they’ve been sent to time-out will become lost in the mire.

Now, What To Do

Despite keeping a cool head, when you send students to time-out, there is always a chance that they won’t take it well – even if, as in this case, the student is clearly guilty of breaking a rule.

And that’s okay.

If a student like Karla reacts angrily or immaturely to being sent to time-out, so be it. It’s not your issue. She can be angry all she wants. It doesn’t affect you.

If, however, her anger crosses the line into disrespect, either of you or her classmates, then continue to leave her alone and let her cool down. Let the time-out play out – and then some.

Later in the day, after the incident is long forgotten, approach her with **a behavior letter to take home** (the third consequence). Simply hand it to her and say, “I want this signed and returned tomorrow.”

And then turn on your heel and get on with the day.