



How To Save Yourself A Mountain Of Stress And Misbehavior

Small, seemingly insignificant behaviors in September will in almost every circumstance multiply into major disruptions down the road.

A single incident of hushed **side-talking during a lesson**, for example, may be hardly noticeable the first couple weeks of the school year, but by November just getting through a lesson will prove to be a challenge. By March, it will begin affecting your health.

It's an all too common mistake to assume that just because a certain behavior doesn't affect your ability to deliver your curriculum, walk your students to lunch on time, or complete your daily schedule, then it doesn't need to be addressed.

After all, what's the big deal? Why so persnickety? Why have high expectations if it doesn't necessarily affect learning? Who cares if a student shares an innocuous joke and muffled laugh with a neighbor?

Well, one of the truisms of classroom management is that little things don't stay little for long. Left unchecked, minor behaviors have a way of infecting other students and areas of your classroom and becoming more severe as time goes on.

Now, there are two common teacher approaches that are most susceptible to this truism. The first are those teachers who understand the importance of teaching behavior expectations in a highly detailed way, but struggle holding students accountable for those expectations.

In other words, they communicate what they want, they model and practice their classroom management plan and accompanying routines and procedures, but they don't follow through consistently.

Too often they choose to enforce a consequence based not on what their classroom management plan actually says, and how it's been taught, but on the severity of the misbehavior, who is involved, or when it takes place – all of which are open to one's whims, moods, and subjective interpretations.

But inconsistency is baffling to students, and shoots an arrow through the heart of their sense of fairness – which all students have in abundance. *Why does Sarah get to call out questions and I don't? Why am I in time-out today for running when yesterday the teacher didn't say a thing? Why do we have to redo the lining up procedure now when he (the teacher) usually allows us to talk?*

Inconsistency communicates to students that you don't mean what you say and therefore can't be trusted. It's confusing and arbitrary and causes them to push your buttons and test the limits of your patience. It also causes anxiety and insecurity, meaning that your students will never be able to let down their guard and **relax in the freedom that comes with fair and fixed boundaries.**

The second common approach that leads to growing and pervading misbehavior is when teachers are unclear about what they expect from students. This is the “I’ll know it when I see it” approach. In this case, they merely “go over” their rules and behavior expectations, not giving them the time, attention, and detail they require.

The reasons for this approach can vary from simply not knowing what they want from students to not grasping its extreme importance to assuming students should already know better. Of the two approaches, this one is more common. But much like being inconsistent, it leads to a tense and distrustful classroom.

Because the teacher doesn’t have her expectations clear in her own mind, she is unable to recognize a problem brewing until it’s too late. She has no standard of behavior she can hang her hat on to ensure fairness, peacefulness, and disruption-free learning.

Further, when she does try to call her students on behavior that was either glossed over in the beginning or left out altogether, they’re quick to argue and react disrespectfully. They resent her for even bringing it up.

The lesson here is that you can’t effectively hold students accountable for that which hasn’t been clearly and thoroughly defined for them. To attempt otherwise will feel unfair to your students and cause aggressive pushback. It also increases your chances of falling into **harmful methods** like yelling, scolding, and using sarcasm.

The solution to both faulty approaches is to take the time to thoroughly teach what you expect from your students, from A to Z and back again, based on the clarity of what you want each day to look like.

Then hold them to it 100% of the time.

Because when you establish your vision of a dream class from the very beginning, you'll enjoy peace in your classroom to the very end.