



## How To Stop Misbehavior Before It Starts

Can you tell when you're going to have a bad day?

Can you sense an unhealthy energy rising up in your students or a disquieting buzz you just can't place?

Do you know it the minute your students walk into your classroom?

Maybe it's in the chatter and clang of the morning routine or the slinging and unzipping of backpacks. Perhaps it's the frenzied movement, the excitable voices, or the whirl of color and scraping of chairs along the floor.

Whether or not you're able pinpoint the source of your uneasiness doesn't matter. What matters is how you respond.

Far too many teachers chalk up these early warning signs and premonitions to the inclement weather outside, an upcoming holiday, or "just one of those days."

They shrug their shoulders, resign themselves to their fate, and soldier through an endless day of inattentiveness, misbehavior, and stress. *"Oh my gosh, the stress!"*

But to be an effective teacher, to create the peaceful, well-behaved class you really want, you can ill afford to lose a single day settling for less than the best from your students.

Better to pay heed to your sixth sense . . . and do something about it before it's too late.

Here's how:

### **Stop them in their tracks.**

The second your teacherly powers detect trouble on the horizon—regardless of where your students are in that moment or what they're doing—**signal for their attention**. Freeze them where they stand. Pause and wait until every eye is upon you. Then wait a beat or two longer before opening your mouth.

### **Call for one minute of silence.**

It doesn't matter whether they're sitting, standing, or in the middle of hanging up their backpacks, ask your students to place any and all materials either on the floor in front of them or on their desk. After pausing to wait for every student to be hands free and facing you, **lead them through a series of slow, deep breaths and one minute of silence**.

### **Use the phrase "in a moment."**

The phrase "in a moment," best used just prior to giving directions, is an effective way to keep your students from moving on mentally or physically before you've finished talking. After the minute of silence is up and the

nervous tension has lifted, these are the perfect words to segue into the next step.

Example: *“In a moment you’re going to…”*

### **Give your directions.**

Tell your students that “in a moment” they’re going to put everything back inside their backpacks, slide the straps over their shoulders, and line up outside (or wherever you meet your students before the morning bell). In effect, you’re going to start the day – or the hour, period, or lesson – over again.

### **Start over.**

**Use your ‘go’ signal** and observe closely as your students walk outside your classroom and into line. As soon as every student is standing quietly in line, ask, “Is there anyone who *doesn’t* know how to perform the start-of-the-day routine?” This question is an effective way to place a no-excuses form of responsibility on their shoulders.

*Note:* If you sense trouble at any other point in the day (other than first thing in the morning), you may have to go back to the beginning of the previous routine, period, or lesson.

### **Don’t explain.**

What you *do* is infinitely more important than what you say. Thus, performing routines over again is a powerful classroom management strategy that communicates to students all they need to know to get

themselves back on track. However, it only works if you've modeled and practiced your routines, procedures, and lesson steps thoroughly beforehand.

### **Observe.**

Once again use your 'go' signal and observe as your students perform the routine a second time. Say as little as possible. Remember, routines are an expectation they've already mastered. So if you offer too many reminders and suggestions you will, in effect, display a lack of trust in them – communicating that you don't believe they're capable of doing anything without your help.

### **Move on.**

Once your students are back in the classroom, seated, and attentive, move on with your day as if nothing happened. There is no need for lectures, warnings, or scoldings and no reason to get your frustrations off your chest. Five minutes of action will reinforce your expectations more effectively and more profoundly than anything you can say.

### **Excuses, Excuses**

Teachers are quick to offer a myriad of explanations for whole-class misbehavior.

*"We just celebrated a birthday, and they're still so amped up over it."*

*"The wind is gusting outside, and you know how crazy that gets them."*

*"It's Friday...and, well, let's just say their minds aren't on school."*

*"Vacation is coming up soon and my students can sense it."*

But these are nothing more than excuses.

Because students *can* behave how you want, they can be calm and attentive – regardless of what day of the week it is or what's happening outside the four walls of your classroom.

Excitable, restless, talkative, fidgety, unfocused, prone to cause trouble. You don't have to accept these precursors to misbehavior, or the stress they bring, as part and parcel to being a teacher.

It is *not* just part of the job.

But you do have to teach them. You do have to *show* your students in a highly detailed way exactly what you want.

And then back it with action.

So the next time your intuition tells you that trouble is on the way . . . push the stop button immediately.

Rewind to the beginning.

And start anew.