

## How You Give A Consequence Matters

How you speak to your students, what you say to them, and how you react emotionally and with your body language after they break a classroom rule goes a long way toward curbing misbehavior.

Whether you're giving a warning, a time-out, or a letter to take home, the key is to inform them in a way that takes the focus off you – the mere deliverer of the news – and places the responsibility solely with them.

Your students must feel the burden of behaving poorly.

Because if they don't, if they don't feel a sense of regret and a greater desire to follow your classroom rules, then your consequences will be ineffective.

What follows are a few guidelines to help you inform your students of a consequence in a way that tugs on their conscience, causes them to reflect on their mistakes, and **lets accountability do its good work**.

### **Tell them why.**

When a student breaks a classroom rule, tell him (or her) clearly and concisely why he's been given a consequence. Say, "Danny, you have a warning because you broke rule number two and didn't raise your hand before speaking." Telling them why leaves no room for debate, disagreement, misunderstanding, or anyone to blame but themselves.

### **Keep your thoughts, opinions, and comments to yourself.**

Let your agreed-upon consequence be the only consequence. Refrain from adding a talking-to, a scolding, or your two-cents worth. By causing resentment, these methods sabotage accountability. So instead of taking a reflective look at themselves and their misbehavior, your students will grumble under their breath and seethe in anger toward you.

### **Behave matter-of-factly.**

A matter-of-fact tone and body language enables you to hold students accountable without causing friction. Most teachers make a fuss out of misbehavior – reacting angrily, showing disappointment, sighing, rolling eyes. But this can be humiliating for students in front of their classmates, causing them to dislike you and undermining the critical rapport-building relationship.

### **Be more like a referee, less like judge.**

A referee's job is to enforce rules, not mediate disagreements – which makes being fair, consistent, and composed a lot easier. Thinking like a referee, rather than a judge, also helps students see that your consequences aren't personal, but something you must do to protect their right to learn and enjoy school without interference.

### **Safeguard your influence.**

An influential relationship with students gives you the leverage you need to change behavior. And so anything you do that threatens that

relationship – yelling, scolding, lecturing, using sarcasm, etc – should be avoided. Simply tell your students like it is, follow **your classroom management plan**, and let accountability do the rest.

### **Move on.**

As soon as you've informed the misbehaving student what rule was broken and the consequence, turn your attention back to what you were doing without skipping a beat. The burden of responsibility then shifts in total from you, the deliverer of the consequence, to the student. The interaction should take no longer than 10-15 seconds.

*Note:* Your students must know exactly what their responsibilities are upon receiving a consequence. Thus, it's critical to teach, model, and practice your classroom management plan thoroughly before putting it into practice.

### **Your Students Decide, Not You**

Small, seemingly insignificant details – often glossed over, ignored, or deemed too nit-picky to care about – can make a *big* difference.

How you inform your students of a consequence is a small part of classroom management, to be sure, a bit player in the theater of your classroom.

But it's an important part, requiring Oscar-level performance.

Despite how much an act of misbehavior may get under your skin, or how much you'd like to **express your frustrations**, you have to stay in character.

Because if after receiving a consequence your students blame you, or become angry with you, then the consequence will be ineffective. They must see that they alone bear the responsibility for their misbehavior.

After all, *you* don't decide when or if to enforce a consequence.

Your students do.