

What To Do When Students Ignore Your Instructions

It happens for no apparent reason.

You send your students off to recess and a troop of Howler Monkeys returns. Or a visit to the library turns into an embarrassment of unruliness and misbehavior.

It could be a direction you just gave your students or a routine they've been doing for months.

Whatever the case, there are times when your instructions fall on deaf ears, when your students *know* what you expect from them, yet ignore it anyway.

It's common for teachers to react to such blatant disregard with frustration and how-dare-you emotion. **Lectures**, threats, and warnings are the norm. And although these methods may settle things down initially, they do nothing to stop them from happening again and again.

The truth is, if you look real close, if you sneak up quietly, part the tall grass, and examine the situation with a bit of shrewdness, you'll see an opportunity just waiting to be had...

An opportunity to teach your students a lesson they'll not soon forget.

Here's how:

Wait

Don't lecture. Don't remind. Don't pace or brood. Simply **signal for your students' attention** and wait. And then wait some more. Give them a chance to grasp the gravity of ignoring your instructions – without you spelling it out for them.

Test

Give a simple direction. Ask your students to clear their desks and sit up straight, for example. If you waited long enough they should be eager to do whatever you ask of them without hesitation.

Cancel

Clear your schedule for the next fifteen minutes or so. Yes, you'll lose learning time in the short term and may even have to cancel the next lesson. But in the long run, pumping the brakes on your day is more than worth the time lost.

Mimic

Without mentioning names, mimic for your students the behaviors you witnessed. Be as exacting as possible. With rare exception, whatever you act out for your students in detail, they'll go to great pains not to do again.

Model

Normally I recommend having a light, even humorous, tone when modeling. But not in this case. Disregarding your direct instructions is a

serious offense – with safety implications. As such, affect a serious tone as you model the right way to do things.

Undo

Ask them to make things right by showing you how it should have been done. If possible, duplicate the conditions under which the misbehavior occurred. A quick return to the scene of the crime, so to speak, makes for a memorable lesson.

Move On

As soon as your students prove they can do it right, start your next activity as if nothing happened. Too many teachers undermine these opportunities by belaboring the point, **harping on it until the students are resentful** and ready for revolt.

Remount

Get your students back on the horse as soon as you're able. In other words, if the problem occurred while visiting the library, try to arrange for a visit the next day. Give your students the chance to put the incident fully and completely behind them.

Averting A Train Wreck

Many teachers react to brazen disregard by either losing their cool or by trying to reason, plead, or coax their students into doing what they ask. Some may even do some ignoring of their own.

But these methods are a train wreck, counterproductive at best.

Effective classroom management is about action. It's about *doing* something in response to misbehavior. It's about communicating what you want then holding students accountable for doing it.

Resolve to stop being so disappointed by whole-class misbehavior and too-cool-for-school complacency. Instead, start looking at them as opportunities to make your class better, sharper, and more receptive to your instruction.

And each time you do, each time you bring the train to a screeching halt and send the message that you really do mean what you say, the closer you'll get to having that attentive, respectful, and well-behaved class you really want.