

Why Allowing Your Students To Talk Can Be An Effective Classroom Management Strategy

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It's common to assume that allowing students to talk to whomever they want about whatever they want is a bad thing.

That it wastes time.

That it gets them off track.

That it riles them up and causes misbehavior.

But when *you* decide when and how it's done, it's nothing of the sort.

In fact, giving students a few minutes to stand, stretch their legs, and chat with a friend can be an effective classroom management strategy.

Here's why:

It releases tension.

When you first [give the signal](#) to allow your students to freely move around the room, if you listen closely, you'll hear an audible and very happy sigh.

Because it effectively releases the natural tension that builds up from sitting and concentrating for long periods of time. It relieves antsiness, restlessness, and excitability, which are major causes of misbehavior.

It's like letting the air out of an overfilled – and ready-to-burst – balloon.

It focuses.

For most students, talking and sharing with friends is the quickest way to get boredom out of their system. It clears the boards, gets the blood flowing, and frees them to focus on the next lesson.

Even a short break of a minute or two can make a big difference.

Unburdened by the gossip they couldn't wait to share or the check-in they're dying to make with their social circle, you'll find your students more attentive and receptive to instruction.

Note: Talking breaks are especially important for students with ADHD.

It's appreciated.

A less obvious but no less valid reason for allowing talking breaks is that your students will *deeply* appreciate them.

It shows them that you know what it's like to be in their shoes and to sit, listen, and learn for an entire school day. It's this kind of empathy that makes students want to please you and behave for you.

This is no small thing.

Reciprocity is a key principle of SCM that can have a profound effect on everything from listening to work habits to (intrinsic) motivation.

Sneakily Effective

The key to allowing talking breaks is for you to decide when and how they're done. It's to teach and model precisely what is and isn't okay before putting them into practice.

I recommend using the strategy **during transitions** or natural breaks in the school day.

If you're a high school teacher and therefore have less time and fewer opportunities for breaks, then you may want to allow your students to chat a moment or two before class begins.

I realize that allowing students to talk can feel a bit rebellious or sacrilege or almost too simple to make much difference.

But it's sneakily effective.

Not every student will take advantage of it, and that's okay. Let them take a few deep breaths if they wish or get up and stretch or just daydream.

The idea is to give them a truly free mental break.

To give them a chance to sweep the attic clean, restore power to their light bulb, and be ready for the next activity.