

Why You Should Take Your Time Responding To Misbehavior

It's common practice for teachers to interrupt misbehavior as it's occurring. The idea being that if you react quickly enough, you'll be able to cut off the wrongdoing before it escalates.

This is a typical response from anyone wanting to stay on top of classroom management. And like a beat cop who aggressively tamps down neighborhood trouble before it gets a toehold, it makes sense.

But you're not a police officer, nor should you be so gung-ho to get in on the action. The truth is, becoming involved too quickly is a mistake.

It's best to observe from a short distance, responding only after the misbehavior has played itself out.

Here's why:

It allows *you* to be the witness.

If you get involved too soon, it will be a challenge sorting through what happened and who is deserving of a consequence. Confusion is a difficult student's best friend, and by diving in too quickly, you'll be swimming in a sea of denials, arguments, and accusations. Better to let the misbehavior play out and see with your own eyes what happened.

It deescalates the behavior.

By calmly observing misbehavior from a noticeable distance – whereby making students aware of your presence – you keep others from becoming involved, you ensure the safety of all your students, and you eliminate the chance that your early involvement, and the subsequent tension it creates, will cause an escalation in misbehavior.

It saves learning time.

When you allow misbehavior to play out, when you're able to witness what transpires, you save time otherwise spent interviewing students and getting to the bottom of what happened – or what was about to happen. Knowing for certain who is responsible allows you to enforce a quick consequence and be done with it.

It allows for introspection.

A delayed response gives your students a chance to think twice about their misbehavior. In fact, your observing presence all but forces them to make a choice. This window of time provides an opportunity for them to turn from their poor conduct and take responsibility for it. Acknowledging their mistakes without your prompting makes the lesson much more effective.

It keeps you cool.

Interrupting misbehavior is personal, for both them and you – making it easy to lose your composure, **raise your voice**, say things you'll regret, and incite anger and pushback from your students. When you observe first, on

the other hand, you're able to keep your emotional distance and follow **your classroom management plan** without causing friction.

Watchful Eyes

In taking this more clinical, observant approach to misbehavior, you'll notice a remarkable thing begin to happen. Your students will be less inclined to misbehave. I've observed this phenomenon enough over the years to know it to be true.

There is something about misbehaving under the direct gaze of a fair and objective teacher that makes students very uncomfortable, like having a video camera recording your every move.

Being observed from a noticeable distance by a teacher committed to following her classroom management plan elicits in students a strong, uneasy feeling to turn from their misbehavior and get busy doing what they're supposed to be doing.

And as you get better recognizing the early seeds of misbehavior, and getting into position to observe it, your students will grow more and more uncomfortable under the weight of your discerning, watchful eye.

They know that if they misbehave on your watch, there is no **arguing**, finger pointing, or clever misdirection. Just consequences.

Following classroom rules, then, becomes a most attractive option.