

Behavior Crisis Management Tool #9

Teacher as Judge

Purpose

The purpose of this issue of the Classroom Management Series is to provide guidelines when responding to an incident or altercation between 2 children that the teacher has not personally witnessed.

Examples

Mrs. Jones is busy marking papers when she hears the children yelling that 2 boys are fighting. Mrs. Jones goes over to the scene and calms everyone down. She then proceeds to ask the boys what happened and each blames the other. Mrs. Jones knows that one of the boys has a history of taunting the other students and acting aggressively so she tells him that this is the last straw and there will be consequences. The other boy, a passive child is told to return to his seat without consequence.

Mr. Eggers turns the corner and sees two of his students screaming at each other and pushing one another violently. He separates the two students and asks them what happened. Each blames the other and tries to convince the teacher that the other should be punished. The teacher is not sure who to believe so he continues to ask more questions in hopes of determining who is at fault.

What May Not Work

What does not work in any of these cases is gathering information from two unreliable, subjective, self protective sources and trying to determine who may have started the altercation. Placing yourself in the position of being a judge in situations that you did not personally witness minimizes your authority and the respect your students will have for you. It is one thing to personally observe an altercation and see who started it. It is another to try to determine who is at fault when you were not there.

Try This

If you begin from the position that two students fighting have both chosen to use methods that are unacceptable, regardless of who started, then the only position is that both students need to suffer consequences for their choice of actions. After all, many other options may have existed i.e. walking away, telling the teacher, talking it out, asking other students to help out etc. The students need to know that inappropriate actions regardless of motive have consequences.

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You should tell both students the following, " There is no way I can determine who is at fault and who started it since I did not see this start. However, the fact that both of you chose to use actions that are not acceptable will result in consequences for both of you. In the future I suggest you use other means to prevent this from happening like ...

So, Never allow yourself to be a judge in an altercation by students if you did not see who started it.

from *Adapting Curriculum and Instruction in Inclusive Classrooms: A Teacher's Desk Reference*, by Deschenes, C., Ebeling, D., and Sprague, J., 1994.