

# National Association of Special Education Teachers (NASET)

## THE PRACTICAL TEACHER

### *This Month's Topic:*

## Establishing a Positive Classroom Climate: Teacher Advice

At a recent behavior-management workshop, teachers shared their best ideas for managing student behaviors in the classroom. Here are six tips that they offered:

- 1.)** Set firm but fair behavioral standards at the start of the school year. Teachers who set firm, reasonable expectations for student behaviors send the message from day one that they expect the classroom to be a place of respect, civility, and learning. As one instructor noted, "First impressions are everything. Students need to know the behavioral boundaries in the classroom- and they can only know them if you show them!"
- 2.)** If you teach with others, make sure that all members of the instructional team use consistent discipline practices. Nothing confuses students more than having various members of a teaching team impose different behavioral expectations and consequences. When teachers on a team are inconsistent in how they respond to student misbehavior, the result can be angry and frustrated students. Be proactive. Hold team planning meetings early in the school year to reach agreement on what kinds of negative student misbehavior warrant consequences and what those consequences should be. Write up the results of that discussion as behavior management guidelines. Then monitor to sure that team members follow the plan consistently! (You may want to go a step further and share your behavioral guidelines with your students.)
- 3.)** Classroom rules: Keep 'em short and sweet. Classroom rules tend to be most effective when they are few in number (e.g., 3-5) and stated in positive terms whenever possible (e.g., "Work quietly at your desk" rather than "Don't disturb other students!"). Teachers also find that students are more respectful of rules when they have had a voice in coming up with them. Finally, remember to post rules prominently and review them occasionally to 'remind' students that you really do value appropriate behaviors!

**4.)** Get to know your students from the beginning. Students are less likely to misbehave or act disrespectfully toward the teacher if they have a positive relationship with him or her. Teachers can get a jumpstart on getting to know their class as individuals by making up a simple survey for students to complete at the start of the school year. By asking students to answer items such as "What privileges or rewards do you prefer?", "List some learning activities that you enjoy", and "What instructional topics really interest you?", teachers can get interesting insights into their students as well as discover what topics, activities, or rewards are likely to motivate them.

**5.)** Be a role model. Teachers should never forget that they are powerful behavioral role models for their students. Because they shape student behaviors by their own example, teachers should hold themselves to the same standards for civility and respect that they expect of their students. If a classroom rule states, for example, that "In this classroom, we use a respectful tone of voice", the rule applies equally to students and teachers. To quote one teacher with whom we talked, "In the classroom, teachers should aim to treat others consistently, fairly, and respectfully. We are mirrors for our students!"

**6.)** Put together a classroom crisis plan. No teacher likes to imagine that a crisis will occur in his or her classroom, for example, a student suddenly becoming physically threatening. However, instructors who plan their responses to possible crisis situations are much more able to respond quickly and appropriately if and when such events occur. You can take charge of crisis planning by becoming familiar with your school's crisis plan, talking with staff whose rooms are near yours about how you can mutually help one another out in the event of a crisis, and teaching your students how they should respond (e.g., by evacuating the classroom in an orderly fashion) if a crisis situation occurs.

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