

DEVELOPING CLASSROOM RULES WITH STUDENTS AND PARENTS

All classrooms need rules to function effectively. These "rules" are sometimes called "expectations" or "standards of behaviour."

The nature of classroom rules, and routines, and how they are developed varies according to a teacher's belief system. How we work with students in the classroom, including establishing rules and routines, is shaped mainly by our beliefs about how students learn how to behave. At one extreme, some of us may believe that students are passive receivers of knowledge, and they need to conform to the system and to see a clear pay-off or benefit for their learning. As a result, we may emphasize firm, standard rules and routines. At the other extreme, some of us may believe that students are active, positive, motivated, and unique problem-solvers. Consequently, we may emphasize giving our students choices.⁵⁶ When we develop classroom rules and routines *with the involvement of our students*, we can take a more "middle of the road" approach that is flexible to meet the different, and often changing, circumstances in our classrooms.

We often develop rules as a way to anticipate and prevent behavioural problems or difficulties that may arise in the management of the classroom. General guidelines for developing rules include the following.

- ◆ Make only a few rules that emphasize appropriate behaviour; neither

you nor your students will remember a long list. Post these rules in the classroom for everyone to see.

⁵⁶ Mayeski, Fran. The Metamorphosis of Classroom Management. Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning. <http://www.mcrel.org/pdfconversion/noteworthy/learners%5Flearning%5Fschooling/franm.asp>

- ◆ Consider making rules or setting expectations for the following issues in order to create a smoothly functioning classroom: (a) beginning and ending the period or day, including how attendance will be taken and what students may or may not do during these times; (b) use of materials and equipment; (c) how to ask permission for unexpected needs (such as going to the toilet or sharpening a pencil); (d) seatwork and independent group work procedures; and (e) how students are to ask or answer questions.
- ◆ Choose rules that make the classroom environment orderly and that promote successful learning. Some behaviours, such as gum chewing or fidgeting, probably do not significantly impede learning, unless they are noisy or distracting.
- ◆ Do not develop classroom rules that you are unwilling, or are unable, to enforce consistently.
- ◆ Make the rules as clear and understandable as possible. They should be stated behaviourally: "Keep your hands and feet to yourself" is clearer, and sends a more positive message, than "no fighting."
- ◆ Select rules that are unanimously agreed upon or abided by everyone in the school. If students learn that they can't behave in a certain way in your classroom, but can do so in other classes, they will test the limits to see how far they can "get away with" a misbehaviour.
- ◆ Above all, involve your students in developing classroom rules! You might start with the principle that "you may do what you want in this classroom, unless what you do interferes with the rights of others, such as your classmates and your teacher." Using this "rights-based" approach, ask your students to identify what behaviours are acceptable and what behaviours are not acceptable because they violate the rights of others. Develop rules to fulfill these rights and penalties for violating the rules. Remember that these penalties should help the child to learn and they should be consistent with the nature of the misbehaviour; that is, they are in the best interest of both the child and the class. Then ask your students to develop a "classroom constitution" or "classroom policy board" that can be prominently displayed in the classroom. Ask them to sign it so that they agree to adhere to the rules and, if they break them, they will abide by the consequences. Misbehaviour is less likely to occur

if a student makes a commitment to avoid breaking the rules and to engage in other, more desirable behaviours.

- ◆ Revisit classroom rules regularly to see if some are no longer necessary. If there are, praise your students, and then ask them if other rules are needed.

Parental Involvement

Rules are most effective when teachers, parents, and students are equally committed to upholding them. In some schools, a "compact" is made between all of these parties. A "compact" is simply a formal agreement or contract that clearly states the specific responsibilities of each party and is signed by each of them. The text of one such compact might take the following form.⁵⁷ It can be discussed with parents at the first parent-teacher or parent-teacher-child conference. Can you adapt it and use it as a way to involve your students *and* their parents in promoting good classroom behaviour?

As a parent/guardian, I will:

- ◆ Show respect and support for my child, the teachers, and the school.
- ◆ Support the school's discipline policy and the rules of my child's classroom.
- ◆ Provide a quiet, well-lit place for study and supervise the completion of homework.
- ◆ Participate in formal and informal parent-teacher or parent-teacher-student conferences.
- ◆ Talk with my child each day about his or her school activities.
- ◆ Monitor my child's TV viewing, or other activities that might detract from study time.

⁵⁷ Education World. Creating a Climate for Learning: Effective Classroom Management Techniques. http://www.education-world.com/a_curr/curr155.shtml [accessed online on 10/6/2005]

- ◆ Assist with at least one school or classroom activity each term.
- ◆ Read with my child for at least 10 minutes each day or let my child read to me.

As a student, I will:

- ◆ Always try to do my best work.
- ◆ Be kind and helpful to my classmates.
- ◆ Show respect for myself, my teacher, my school, and other people.
- ◆ Obey classroom and school rules.
- ◆ Show respect for property by not stealing or vandalizing.
- ◆ Come to school prepared with my homework and my supplies.
- ◆ Believe that I can and will learn.
- ◆ Spend at least 15 minutes each day studying or reading at home.
- ◆ Talk with my parents each day about my school activities.

As a teacher, I will:

- ◆ Show respect for each child and for his or her family.
- ◆ Make efficient use of learning time.
- ◆ Provide a safe and comfortable environment that's conducive to learning.
- ◆ Help each child grow to his or her fullest potential.
- ◆ Provide meaningful and appropriate homework activities.
- ◆ Provide necessary assistance to parents so they can help with assignments.
- ◆ Enforce school and classroom rules fairly and consistently.

- ◆ Supply students and parents with clear evaluations of progress and achievement.
- ◆ Use special activities in the classroom to make learning enjoyable.
- ◆ Demonstrate professional behaviour and a positive attitude.

Now, together, we will work together to carry out this contract.

Signed:

Parent signature/date

Student signature/date

Teacher signature/date