



Responsible Behaviour



Teaching children to take responsibility for
their own behaviour

By

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Responsible Behaviour Policy - An Introduction to The Theory

Many teachers will complain of students not being capable of knowing how to behave properly in the classroom. Yet you would not hear of a Science teacher complaining that his students didn't know the periodic table of elements before he taught it to them, or a History teacher complaining that before they started the course his students had no idea what led to the start of the Great War.

Responsible Behaviour takes as its starting point the idea that appropriate behaviour is a learned activity. What is appropriate in one cultural context is not necessarily appropriate in another. The behaviour in a family may be completely different to behaviour on the street. In our increasingly pluralistic society, it should not be surprising that norms of behaviour vary more than ever. If the behaviour needed for academic progress is not the normal behaviour for a student then he or she needs to be taught that behaviour in just as open and structured way as the teacher might teach them the periodic table or the causes of World War I.

Several things follow from this initial truism. First of all it follows that behaviour can be changed and the behavioural culture of a school can be altered, whatever the culture of the area in which it is located. The need is for 'normalising' behaviour. That is making the appropriate behaviours in the classroom simply habits and norms, not the source of a continual battlefield. To change the culture of a school, however, needs the collective resolve and consistency that is adequate to counter the influence of other behavioural norms.

Discipline needs to be planned for in the same way that a teacher plans how to ensure that his students know the content of his curriculum area. By accepting that misbehaviour is a teaching opportunity and the chance to re-establish a norm in the classroom, a teacher can begin to take much of the personal stress out of the situation.

Consistency is vital. No child would give much credence to Geography if he were told that France was in Europe one lesson, but in Asia the next. So with discipline, the consistent message must be given. Equally if a Maths teacher constantly emphasised wrong answers, they would not produce mathematicians. So discipline must be taught in a positive context.



The Teachers' Dilemma

You can tell a teacher by the look on their face when out on the street watching a parent shout obscenities at their uncontrolled children. “ No wonder they can’t behave in school !” is the cry. But once back in the classroom, it is the response to this situation that distinguishes the effective teacher from their less effective colleagues.

The effective teacher will accept that they cannot control the home environment. They can only control the situation in their classroom. Faced with the choice between accepting the behaviour witnessed on the street as being normal or deciding that they are going to set the standards, they choose the latter.

The former is the route to teacher stress, poor learning, aggression and low self esteem. It is the breeding ground for bullying and dispute.

The latter is no easy route either. The battles need to be won. The alternative culture witnessed on the street is well entrenched. It will be a hard fight to overcome it. But the outcomes of that fight will lead to an orderly classroom, with good learning, self respecting children and a calmer working environment.

Of course the teacher who decides to take control will often be fighting a lonely battle. Such a teacher can make a difference, but it is so much easier for him, and everyone else, when the approach is a whole school approach, backed by whole school policies, training, leadership support, and so on. This means making the approach one which can be described in some shorthand way. Hence the need for a term such as “Responsible Discipline’.

Much of what follows will be familiar to many teachers. The language may be different but the tactics and strategies will be easily recognised. What is different is the idea that these tactics can be put together, and put together in such a way as to allow those who do not follow a similar approach intuitively to do so as part of a learned skill - a behaviour management competency



Two Case Studies

These two case studies are based on real teachers who taught in the same school. They worked in the same department. Throughout the rest of this topic I will be using them as examples. The school they worked in is a very tough inner city school that has faced Special Measures and all that goes with that downward spiraling context. It is a far from easy situation for any teacher. Their names have been changed.

Case 1 - John

The first teacher will be known as John. He has been at the school for over 25 years. He has held various positions of responsibility in the school. He has served his time. He is loyal, supportive of colleagues, well respected by students and parents (many of whom he taught). John has an orderly classroom. He gets good results for the area and suffers few discipline problems.

As you might expect in such a situation, John does not need training in all this modern stuff about Positive Discipline, Assertive Discipline, Responsible Discipline. He knows his job and really just wants to get on with it.

Case 2 - Ann

The second teacher has also been at the school a number of years. We will call her Ann. She teaches in the same department as John. She is always prepared to listen and learn. Her classroom is often chaotic. She seems unaware of disruption. She struggles to get even poor results. Students complain about her unfairness, her lack of control, her shouting and so on. Parents complain of things that go on in her lessons.

Ann has had training on approaches to discipline and has had this followed up by support and monitoring by senior staff. She has an open mind and is willing to try any new idea if it will help her in her job. She is constantly under a great deal of stress in her classroom.

The next page will show how individuals such as these respond to a Responsible Discipline approach and the ways in which they illustrate the difficulties in getting such an approach adopted by the whole staff.



The Impact of Responsible Discipline - John

John practices Responsible Discipline - he just doesn't know it, or won't accept it. A typical lesson would involve him waiting at the door for the students to arrive. Despite his other responsibilities his prime concern is his lessons. That is his key "raison d'être". He is invariably well prepared. His lessons start with a friendly (but not over familiar) word of welcome. Only when he is ready does the class enter the room. They go to the seat he has told them is theirs at the start of the year. At the first sign of chatter, he quietly tells the offender

'Luke - this is a classroom, we are here to learn not chatter- remember ? - Thank you'.

The lesson starts with him explaining what they are going to do by the end of the lesson. He assumes that they can complete the tasks set. He helps those with particular difficulties as he goes around the room - say by correcting bad spelling, or a poorly expressed answer. No fuss is made of it and nothing is said aloud to the class except when it is a common problem. The it is done in a depersonalised way and with a sense of support rather than criticism. The work is never easy. Some students struggle and John constantly boosts them by repeating that they are able to do it- but then follows it up with a private word of support to help them get on with the task. The work is varied. Any signs of minor disturbance picked up by his constant scanning of the room is dealt with at a very low level, unless it is constantly repeated, whereupon the level of intervention gets greater and more intrusive. The minor disruptions are dealt with firmly but not aggressively. They are usually followed very soon by a visit as part of his walk around the room with a slight pat on the back - the merest of acknowledgements that he appreciates that the student has heeded the warning.

AT the end of the lesson there is a quick review of what they have learned, not what they have not learned!. Time is left to explain the homework. Time is left to pack away properly. Quiet chatter is now allowed - *he 'always' lets you talk til the bell goes !'* That is understood. When the bell does go, John is stood by the door. He dismissed the class group at a time and has a friendly word as they leave.

Students enjoy John's lessons. They see him as strict but fair. He is universally respected by them. He gets the best from them. He is viewed as having a sense of humour. Students say he works them hard, but explains well. They ALL know that you do not mess John around. Few can ever remember him shouting or losing his temper.

John doesn't believe in all this Responsible Discipline stuff !!!

The Impact of Responsible Discipline - Ann

Ann teaches the same groups as John. Her typical lesson would be as follows. The students arrive to a locked room (*'You can't leave it unlocked - you can't trust them !'*). This spell between lessons is one of the few times when Ann can talk to the LSA. They use the store room at the back of the class as it is further from the kids waiting and therefore quieter. Invariably by the time she gets to the door to open it there is a problem (*'See - I told you they couldn't be trusted !'*). Each lesson has to start with an attempt to sort out these problems. The students come into her lesson in a negative frame of mind. Someone has probably been told off for something they didn't do, others will have been the butt of a bully or the victim of theft.

As Ann finally gives up trying to find out who did what before she got there, the door is opened and the students rush in to sit with their mates. There is no seating plan. Two students who are always stirring up trouble sit next to each other - a bad idea for Ann. She asks one - Hannah - to move. Arguments follow.

'Why miss ? I haven't done anything wrong', - 'Not yet.', - 'Everybody else can sit where they want, why not me', - 'Because "I" say so.' - 'You always pick on me - I've not done anything wrong'.....

So it goes on - often for several minutes. Meanwhile the other students are starting to mess. Ann's mind is on Hannah and the conflict there. By the time she realises that she is fighting a losing battle with Hannah the rest of the group are rowdy. She raises her voice to get quiet. The students have to talk louder to continue their conversation, Ann ends up having to shout. The noise grows. Eventually Ann decides to pick them off one at a time. She calls to Mark. This promotes a confrontation like the one with Hannah. In despair Ann threatens to get a Senior member of staff. Most stop but a few continue. It is quieter though and so Ann starts the work. The half of the class that weren't listening interrupt to ask what they have to do. She explains to them what she has just told the class, pleased that at last she has got their attention. The other pair of students ask what to do. Then another. Meanwhile the half of the class that listened from the start get restless, bored and fidgety. They talk to each other while Ann tells the others what to do.

During all this one girl, Susan, has remained quiet, wanting to learn. Her patience wearing thin, as she turns round to stop a boy pulling her hair. Ann has had enough. Even a good girl like Susan can't stop turning round. She shouts at Susan, who has had enough and runs out of the room.

The bell goes. It is the end of another lesson. Ann feels relieved. The kids run out. No one feels good about it. Ann sits and complains about "these kids" to the LSA while the next class waits outside the locked door.



The Impact of Responsible Discipline - Staff Views

The cases of Ann and John highlight the ends of the spectrum, but it must be remembered that they worked in the same department in the same school in the same area and taught the same students. It is interesting to see how their situations were seen by other staff. I will summarise conversations with other staff.

The belief was that Ann was not cut out to be a teacher. She worked hard and never gave up. She had a lot of sympathy from most staff. Their view of her generally was that she just didn't have it in her. She was weak with the kids. She couldn't command respect. Her teaching was poor. In reality this was only a part of the story. Much of her teaching was perfectly satisfactory if there was a senior member of staff present who could take away the issue of discipline.

Ann had been on courses on Positive Discipline and had attended internal training on Responsible Discipline. She had had support from external consultants. The trouble was that she could not get away from her belief that the trouble was external to her. It was the kids ! She never really came to believe that she was able to make a sustained difference.

John was different. He practised the approach intuitively. He had probably developed the strategies over the years as a defence against what was a difficult context to teach in. He developed tactic as survival tactics, but was strong enough in his self belief to be able to select those that would change the culture in his classroom. He was unbending and inflexible - in this context a strength in so far as it meant he never wavered in his belief that he could control the things that went on in that classroom.

The problem was that staff saw John as being someone who "just had it". He didn't need training and so the feeling was that he had something that was a natural gift and by implication could not be passed on to those who were less "gifted". His reluctance to accept that he was applying an "approach" meant that it was difficult to get people to use him as an example of what could be achieved.

This leaves the dilemma. If Ann was given training and it didn't work, and John never needed the training - then the training and the approach must not make a difference ! What is needed is some way to make what John had transferable to others, whilst developing a whole school culture that a difference can be brought about. This is where Responsible Discipline come in.



Developing the Culture - The Route Map (1)

In our work covering **Total Responsible Management** there is an explanation of how to change the culture of an institution. It is built upon three elements.

1. The Destination

2. The Ground rules

3. The Route

To understand this better an analogy is made with a road journey. A coach company is organising a holiday tour for a group of 200 people. They are all going to the same hotel in Torquay. 4 coaches will be used. Each driver can decide his own route. There are some constraints though in the form of rules they have to follow - they must leave at a given time ; they must arrive by a certain time ; they must allow 2 comfort stops ; they must not exceed the speed limits ; etc. If all this happens the holiday will run smoothly.

Compare that situation to a school wanting to improve behaviour. The school wants to create a behavioural culture that supports learning. The equivalents to the coach trip for this school would be as follows.

1. The Destination.

It is the responsibility of the leader of the school to determine the destination. It cannot be a committee decision or a compromise. The school Head teacher or Principal has to decide the set of outcomes required. Often this is referred to as the Vision statement. In this example the decision is assumed to be that the school is going to implement a whole school Responsible Discipline strategy to create the culture being sought. The Leader has decided the approach. It is non-negotiable. In this case it would be defined by a whole school policy that everyone must support.



Developing the Culture - The Route Map (2)

2. The Ground rules

Just as there will be conditions for the coach drivers if they are to have a smooth drive, so there will be conditions that staff in the school will need to abide by. It is possible for these to be negotiated. There is no reason why another member of staff, a committee or the whole staff could not become involved in describing in detail the “rules” that determine the approach adopted within the school. They could decide the key features such as

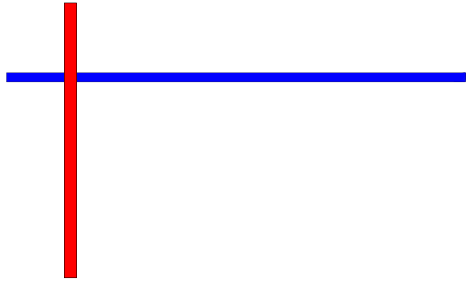
- q All actions should be aimed at making students take responsibility for their actions
- q Each teacher should plan for discipline as they plan for content
- q It should be expected that a teacher can change the behaviour within his or her classroom
- q A menu of agreed tactic should be used
- q Sanctions should be on a least to most intrusive scale
- q All actions should be followed by an attempt to repair and rebuild relationships

Whilst this is not an exhaustive list, it does show the sort of things that a staff can work towards as their toolkit of ground rules for moving to the “Destination”.

3. The Route

Just as the coach drivers could use the ground rules to determine their own route to Torquay, so these ground rules can allow staff to take on responsibility - at an appropriate level - for the interpretation of the policy. Heads of Department might produce a departmental policy on priorities within the whole scheme. Individual staff might determine for their own classroom and their own students the balance of tactics they feel most likely to attain the results.

The important thing overall is that everyone is going towards the same destination and there is a consistency of approach for the students.



From Policy to Practice

Making the Theory Practical



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From Policy to Practice

Once a school has agreed its destination and its ground rules for getting there, it is possible to codify that in the form of a policy statement. This should not be seen as set in stone and should be reviewed. It should also have its equivalent at each appropriate level - say as Departmental policy.

In the appendix to this topic there are a number of policies to act as guidelines for schools wishing to adopt the approach. These are not intended as off the shelf policies so much as a series of exemplars from which an individual school can start to build its own.

The overall philosophy of Responsible Discipline will be reflected in the policy once adopted. The implementation of it will not be identical in any two schools, and there will probably be differences at the margin between departments within the same school. The policy should contain the following elements if it is to reflect this approach.

- n It should aim to determine the culture of behaviour within the school
- n It should aim to transfer responsibility for actions to students
- n It should be founded on ground rules and a contract approach
- n It should involve consistent application
- n Sanctions should be applied according to the least to most intrusive scale
- n Rewards should be frequent, low key and automatic
- n Language should be positive, including non verbal communication and should centre on the “Language of Choice”
- n It should seek to set up routines of behaviour that form behavioural ‘habits’

What follows is a description of the main tactics involved in using Responsible Discipline. These will be exemplified from real life situations and will include case studies and examples of how to apply the tactic.

It is in the choice from these tactics and the balance chosen between them that an individual school Route map can be determined.



Classroom Strategies Menu



A B C - Agreed Behaviour Code



Makings Sanctions Effective



The Language of Choice



Repairing and Rebuilding Relationships



Time Out



Routines and Planning for Discipline





Classroom Strategies

1. The A B C

Agreed Behaviour Code





Establishing The Agreed Behaviour Code (ABC)

One of the most important features of Responsible Behaviour is the outlining of the basic givens in terms of acceptable behaviour. This is the Agreed Behaviour Code for the classroom.

Some schools have a common Agreed Behaviour Code, whilst others agree it at departmental level in order to allow for differences between the rules needed in an Art room compared to a Science Lab; in an English room compared to a Drama suite. Yet another variant is for the individual teacher to negotiate it for his classroom. Obviously this last option is easier to deal with in a Primary School, whereas the second is more appropriate for a diverse secondary school. The first option of a whole school Agreed Behaviour Code works best in a school where there is a great deal of commonality of ideas on what is acceptable. Where a school is on this matter will be a matter of judgment.

The Agreed Behaviour Code is the formal wording of what is going to be sought in terms of behaviour in the school context. It is a positive statement that outlines the sorts of behaviours that are expected. It is not a set of rules to challenge children to break. It must have the agreement of the students if it is to mean anything. Obviously there is a world of difference between agreeing to everything a student says and a skilled teacher gaining consent to a set of guidelines on how best to ensure that good quality learning can take place.

I am sure that all teachers have come across the child who deliberately strolls around the running track - because the school rules say “ No Running”, or the child who refuses to answer a question because the school rules state “No Talking in Class”. This is the equivalent of an Industrial “ Go Slow”. A set of rules that are imposed and are all built around “Thou Shalt Not...” leaves itself open to this abuse and can often be counter productive.

A positively stated set of behaviours expected for good learning to take place can be infinitely more productive in terms of allowing a teacher to keep a class on task. When the starting point for these is a set of student proposals for Agreed Behaviour then it is a very powerful tool. It can be used to avoid a confrontation. The teacher can point to the fact that these rules were the agreed way to behave, thus avoiding issues of arbitrariness in application, and claims of unfairness.

Let us consider “Good” rules and “Bad” rules.

'Good' and 'Bad' Rules (I)

A 'Bad' rule is one which sets up a confrontation. It forms a challenge to the wily student who wants to have an outlet for his rebellion. It is usually related to a fixed point in time. (One time it is a ban on long hair - another a ban on short hair.) A 'Bad' rule is not explained to students and often appears to be the arbitrary decision of someone who is "out of touch" . Bad rules breed confrontation. They are usually bans on specific behaviours but applied generally and create a negative tone. 'Bad' rules are often vaguely expressed. Policing 'Bad' rules can become a bigger problem than the problem that the rule was introduced to solve. Examples of 'Bad' rules would include.....

- q No wearing of white socks
- q No drinking in class
- q No short haircuts
- q No mobile phones to be brought to school
- q No talking in Class

Why are these 'Bad' rules ? Wearing of white socks no longer the symbol of rebellion it was when the rule was introduced. The symptom became the disease. Drinking is generally frowned upon, but increasing evidence suggests that dehydration is a barrier to learning. This rule is often relaxed when it is hot, or if someone is coughing. This leads to it being a matter of individual teacher choice and an opening for the age old cry of "Mr Smith lets us...."

There is a wide range of views about what is meant by short hair. Sometimes it can mean the banning of "skinhead cuts" when a racial situation is developing. Often it is merely fashion. Parents will often fail to support a school if the real point of such a rule cannot be demonstrated.

Mobile Phones are a problem. They can go off in lessons causing disruption. They can be used for verbal and text bullying. The idea of bag searches each lesson is enough to drive a teacher wild and bring in law suits galore. The first time that a child gets hurt on their way home and cannot call for help is the signal for a media onslaught. It is a rule which tries to go against a massive change in culture in the last decade and a battle that might be won, but at what cost ?

So what is a 'Good' Rule ?



'Good' and 'Bad' Rules (II)

A 'Good' rule is one which supports the prime aim of the school -to encourage effective learning. This means that it aims to encourage acceptance of a culture of achievement and elicits compliance and acceptance. A 'good' rule is one that can be policed and which can be justified. It is a rule which is intended to generate a consensus about what is acceptable for reaching the common goal. It is about creating a positive attitude to behaviour and promoting social cohesion in the school.

The previous page had some 'bad' rules. The equivalent 'good' rules might include the following...

- ü Sensible drinking to promote learning should be encouraged
- ü Mobile phones disrupt learning and should be switched off except for emergencies
- ü Hairstyles should avoid safety risks and discourage people from viewing students in a negative way
- ü Any noise should be such that it does not interfere with other people working

There might appear to be little difference at first sight between these rules. The latter set are phrased in a positive way. They are justifiable and ideally would have come out of a reasoned discussion. The rules should be focused on achieving the aim of effective learning. They should have the acceptance of the students so that if they are not adhered to then the teacher can reflect the issue back onto the barrier to student learning. If a student openly disobeys such rules and does so with the clear justification that she doesn't care whether anyone learns or not, then this is a case for a much higher level of sanction and usually would involve a meeting between parents and a senior member of staff.

Good rules support the majority and isolate the disruptive minority. They allow student to take on responsibility for their behaviour - they choose to abide by the consensus of their peers, or they choose to accept the consequences.

How would a set o such rules come about ?

Gaining Consensus on an Agreed Behaviour Code (ABC)

A starting point for any consensus based code of behaviour is the establishing of the basic Ground Rules of the Institution. For a school this implies acceptance of the following.

- q Schools are primarily about learning
- q Everyone has the right to learn
- q Everyone has the right to safety and security
- q All individuals are of equal worth
- q Attendance is compulsory

There will be variants on this from school to school. The important thing is that there is a set of Ground Rules which define the purpose of the institution and these cannot be negotiable. What is negotiable is the way in which these rules are interpreted in a given context. As previously stated, this may be different in the context of a PE lesson than would be the case in a Science Lab.

A useful way to gain consensus is the outline these Ground Rules and then follow it up with a brainstorming of what is needed to ensure that they come about. Taking each Grounds Rule in turn the teacher can formally brainstorm the actions needed to bring about the best chance of that Ground Rule being achieved.

For example Everyone having the right to learn would usually lead to agreements that people shouldn't be too loud in class; that they should listen when the teacher wants to explain ; they should allow others to get on with work; they should avoid shouting out ; they should listen to others; etc. Note that these are all expressed as a positive statement.

Doing the same for the Ground Rule on the right to safety and security will elicit responses related to bullying, theft, peer support, team work and so on. Of course there is also the issue that the discussions will bring about answers about expectations of teacher behaviour too. In a child's mind security can easily mean the security of knowing that you will not be mocked or made to feel small by a teacher.

The final Agreed Behaviour Code (ABC) should be prominently displayed and, if possible actually written out by one or more students.





Classroom Strategies

2. Making Sanctions Effective

A structured approach to applying sanctions effectively





What are effective sanctions ?

A false dichotomy is often drawn between the use of rewards and sanctions - between the use of the “stick” and the “carrot”. It is sometimes seen as if these two are somehow mutually exclusive. Total Responsible Discipline argues that both are necessary. The key is to combine them in such a way as to make them an effective mechanism for classroom management.

In this section we will consider the most effective way to apply sanctions. It is often not so much the specific sanctions that are effective, so much as the way in which they are applied. In this section the basic principles of making sanctions work for you will be outlined. These principles are . . .

- n Use the “Least to Most Intrusive” scale
- n Make the sanctions certain, consistent and impersonal
- n Stick to primary behaviour
- n Present choices

The difference between a teacher who appears in total control of a class and one who seems to be struggling is often one of the planning that has gone into the process. No one finds keeping control of a group of 30 or so difficult young people easy, but some may well manage the situation whilst causing themselves less stress than others. Each of the strands in the Classroom tactics section is intended to help reduce that stress and this one is no exception. The list of principles described here is an attempt to allow sanctions to be imposed without them causing more problems than they solve.

Earlier we saw an example of a teacher allowing a student to generate stress by turning an initial situation into a totally different one, and in doing so raised the levels of stress all round. The case study of Ann’s lesson was a classic example of situations in which students escalate the level of tension and raise the stakes, often also introducing secondary behaviours which make the situation worse. Such examples are all too familiar to teachers in schools. A teenager skilled in generating tension and deflecting the source of any ill discipline is a formidable opponent.

It is in this context that the following comments should be viewed.

Least to Most Intrusive Sanctions

It is often the case that a situation that could be dealt with without much fuss can escalate to one of excessive confrontation. In the Training Manual to accompany this section there are examples of the sort of situations that arise commonly in classrooms, and examples of alternative ways to have dealt with them. For the moment we will use simple examples that will be familiar to practicing teachers.

The idea of the Least to Most Intrusive Scale is to keep matters in perspective. You would have a scale of actions that you could take. Often these sanctions would be agreed as a whole school list of agreed or recommended sanctions to take. They will be staged responses that begin with very unobtrusive actions such as a “look over the glasses” and a “cough” aimed at gaining a student’s attention. The lowest level is often referred to as “Tactical Ignoring”. For a number of low level misbehaviours it is sufficient to merely acknowledge that you know what is going on. This may be combined with a simple mention of the child’s name so that you know that they know that you know !

As time goes on and the student does not respond to the low key, unobtrusive actions, you would go onto a slightly higher level. This may mean actually mentioning the item in the Agreed Behaviour Code that is being broken. This might need no more than a comment such as “ Matt, we stop others from learning in this classroom do we ? Thank you “. Note that this is about labeling the action and not the person. Note also the use of the “Thank You” at the end. This would be said in the tone of someone who is expressing an expectation that the student will now do as expected. It is difficult when expressed in this way for a student to argue with the statement that has been agreed by the class as a whole. There are only three options for Matt...

1. Accept that he is wrong and stop
2. Accept that he is wrong and yet not agree that the purpose of the lesson is for people to learn

Or 3. Deny that he was doing It

Option 1 gives us no problem. Option 2 is usually easily defused by relating the incident to the Agreed Behaviour Code (ABC). Few children will openly agree that they should be allowed to stop the learning of others and if they do then an escalation is unavoidable. Option 3 should be met with a dismissive comment since the point has been made. Comments such as “ Well that’s good then, we can all get on with no one getting in the way then “ will usually give the student the room to back off without being pushed into a corner from which it is hard to withdraw with respect.



Least to Most Intrusive Sanctions (2)

A teacher who is well prepared will be armed with a list of these actions, in order of the level of intrusiveness getting greater as they move up the list. Such a list might have the following actions in it. There may even be a whole school agreed list of actions.

- 1 Tactically ignoring
- 2 A Knowing look
- 3 A tap on the shoulder as you move around the room
- 4 Mentioning the students name (and the action)
- 5 A reminder of the item in the ABC
- 6 A simple direction to act
- 7 Short term removal to a spare desk
- 8 A note to parents in diary
- 9 Additional work allotted
- 10 Time out
- 11 Short informal detention
- 12 Longer Formal detention
- 13 Appointment with senior colleague
- 14 Appointment with Headteacher
- 15 Formal letter to parents
- 16 Interview with parents

This list is an example of the process only. Each school will have its own set of sanctions. Each school will have a view on the stage at which parents should be involved. The point of giving it is to illustrate that there are lots of sanctions that can work effectively at a low level of stress. Firmness and fairness in applying them is the real key. Keeping the issue to the original and not being drawn into the “ That’s not fair - you are always picking on me “ syndrome is important.

Most importantly the key is to use the least intrusive level possible to change the child’s behaviour and allow the lesson to continue. Always try to de-escalate the situation.



Consistency and Certainty

The problems with sanctions is often more to do with how they are applied than it is to do with the specific sanction. The key is to make sure that they are applied in a consistent way. The sanctions should always be applied for the behaviour not the person. They should be related to specific actions and thus easily justifiable.

If arguments over the fairness of a sanction are to be avoided then it is crucial that the behaviour is labeled and not the student. If a student is made to feel they are “bad” then it is too easy for them to hide behind that label and act out the role they have been allocated. If the behaviour is labeled then it is much easier to accept that this behaviour can be changed.

The issue of certainty is crucial. The basic concept is that all children will be more likely to alter their behaviour if a sanction is applied with a high degree of certainty. If there is a chance that they might get away with the punishment then it is vastly more likely that they will put their energy into avoiding the sanction than into changing their behaviour. Consider the following situation.....

Gemma has been told that she has to come back at breaktime because she had been consistently talking in the lesson. She thinks she may get away with not turning up so she doesn't go. Next lesson, assuming the teacher remembers, Gemma might be faced with two types of reaction.

Reaction (1) might be where the teacher gives her a more serious punishment and threatens even more dire consequences - “ you are going to do break time detentions for two weeks now - and if you don't turn up then I will have you excluded !”.

Reaction (2) might be to reissue the breaktime detention, but this time check who she is taught by prior to the break and make a point of asking that teacher to keep Gemma behind until the teacher is able to collect Gemma.

For many teachers the former reaction feels right - to give extra punishments for not doing the original one, and in addition to find a way to make sure that Gemma turns up. Unfortunately this often quickly gets out of hand and there are numerous examples of where something as trivial as talking in a lesson becomes a matter of principle and students end up being excluded. An alternative to this needless escalation is the teacher spending hours chasing up more and more extreme punishments, each less likely to be accepted than the one before.



Certainty and Severity

Reaction (2) is often seen as a softer option. In fact it is far more likely to produce the change in behaviour than reaction (1). It may need a degree of chasing up, but as soon as it becomes clear that you do not get away with ignoring sanctions, then there is little need to chase up in the future. The initial time spent making sure that Gemma does the punishment originally given is an investment, saving time in the long term as others see that you WILL follow it up.

There is a natural desire to gain some form of natural justice - if someone ignores your punishments then they deserve to get a more severe one. This “pound of flesh” approach is understandable, but that doesn’t make it effective. In terms of making changes to behaviour there is no doubt that lower level sanctions applied with certainty will make change much more likely than the chance that a severe punishment might have to be accepted. The balance changes from the action being punished to the child being the problem. A problem child can be created in this way, and possibly one that thinks that they might get away with sanctions.

The underlying principle is this

Certainty not Severity of sanction is the key to effective changes in behaviour

This is one of those issues where it is possible for a single teacher who does not insist on the certainty of their sanctions to undermine all the other staff in the school. If you get away with it with one teacher it is always worth trying it on with another ! It is for this reason that a number of schools develop training and support policies for ensuring that children always do whatever punishments are given.



Primary and Secondary Behaviours

In any classroom incident it is likely that the student will try to deflect attention from the initial action. This muddying of the waters has a number of potential results. It may escalate the problem; it may transfer the problem to someone else ; it may result in increased levels of stress ; it may lead to sanctions that are beyond the original need ; it may lead to charges of lack of fairness ; it may back a child into a corner from which they can only keep on fighting. In short it introduces a high degree of uncertainty into the situations. Here is an example.

Teacher : Josh, we don't eat in the classroom do we ? Put the crisps away please. Thank you

Josh : What crisps - I am not eating

Teacher : Just put them away Josh and we can get on with the lesson

Josh : You are always picking on me - just like yesterday

Teacher : I do NOT pick on anyone

Josh : You did yesterday - you said I was talking and I wasn't

Teacher : You were talking yesterday and you know it.

Josh : And Kerry never does ? She is always talking and you never tell her off

Teacher : Kerry wasn't talking yesterday

Josh : She was, but you never said anything. You like her though and you don't like me.

Teacher : Just stop that now Josh - I have no favourites

Josh : Oh sure you don't (cont..)



Primary and Secondary Behaviours (2)

Teacher : Now you are going too far Josh. Don't be insolent

Josh : Yeah you don't like the truth do you ?

Teacher : One more word and I will send for Mr Roberts (Deputy Head)

Josh : Yeah, go on then - get someone who can do your job properly.....

This situation has now moved completely out of hand. The teacher will have to ensure that a severe punishment is given to Josh. He has called the teacher's professionalism into question in front of a class. There is no way out of this for Josh now. Or the teacher backs down and there is no way out of it for him. A simple incident has escalated beyond recognition.

The mistake was in allowing Josh to transfer the issue to a secondary incident. The problem was the crisps. Josh successfully avoided that issue - but at a great cost, probably to himself as well as the teacher. If the teacher could have found a way to restrict the issue to the initial incident then it would have been possible to have avoided the difficulties.

Here is a possible alternative dialogue.

Teacher : Josh, we don't eat in the classroom do we ? Put the crisps away please. Thank you

Josh : What crisps - I am not eating

Teacher : Just put them away Josh and we can get on with the lesson

Josh : You are always picking on me - just like yesterday

Teacher : Do we eat in class Josh ?

Primary and Secondary Behaviours (3)

Josh : No, but I am not eating and you are picking on me again

Teacher : So then if we don't eat in class there is no need to have a packet of crisps in your lap - is there?

Josh : But you are still picking on me again

Teacher : Ok Josh, we can talk about whether I pick on you at the end of the lesson, but as for now the rest of the class has the right to learn, doesn't it ? So put the crisps away and I will talk to you about the other accusation at the end of the lesson. Thank you.

Josh : How does me having crisps stop them learning ?

Teacher : We don't eat in the classroom, you know that Josh. So you can put them away or else you will be choosing to have a detention for breaking the groundrules. It's your choice

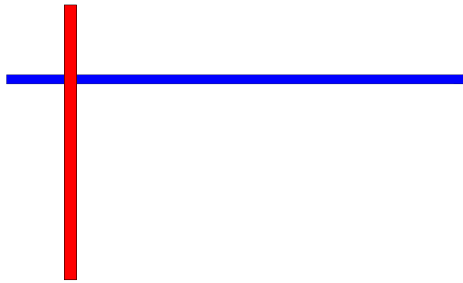
Josh : Its not fair (grudgingly putting crisps in bag)

Teacher : Thanks Josh, now let's get back to where we were.....

There are a number of important differences. Clearly the teacher was not drawn into the issue of picking on Josh. The teacher kept the eating as the focus of the discussion. Josh was given a choice as to whether he eventually complied or accepted the punishment. By keeping the issue as the primary action the teacher defused the incident. There was a "Thanks" when he did it - acknowledging that there was nothing personal, just a behaviour that was not appropriate.

This sort of incident gets replayed over and over again in our schools, and it is well worth developing some phrases, actions and fall back positions for when it does come up. No teacher should be so naive as to be caught unprepared for this type of situation.





Classroom Strategies

3. The Language of Choice

Transferring responsibility for behaviour onto the student





The Language of Choice

The language that we use in our dealings with classroom incidents will have a major impact on the outcomes. This is true of our body language as well as our verbal comments. The prime tenant of Responsible Discipline is the transfer of responsibility for behaviour from the teacher to the student. They choose to behave in certain ways. If these are not appropriate to the classroom then they know that there will be certain consequences that follow logically from their choice.

It therefore becomes very important that sanctions are not merely given for certain types of actions, but that the student understands that he or she has the choice not to have them applied. They merely have to learn to behave appropriately. It is up to them to take on board the appropriate behaviours. This way they will learn to behave in an appropriate way because it is their choice, not because they might or might not get caught out. It becomes their own responsibility.

In practice this is a relatively straightforward process. In the section on “Making Sanctions Effective”, there was an example of a classroom incident in which a student was told that if he did not carry out a certain action (putting a packet of crisps away) then he was choosing to accept that he would get a given sanction (a detention). It should be overtly put to the students that the sanctions that are given are a direct response to their actions, and that it is within their power to conform and hence avoid the sanction. This is often referred to as the concept of “ **Logical Consequences** ”.

Body language is also important. A request for a student to do something (eg to put away the crisp packet) should be acknowledged. It may only be a tap on the shoulder as you pass the student next, or a simple “ thumbs up” sign when you catch their eye. It should not be underestimated how powerful such gestures can be in affirming the restoration of normal relationships.

It is also possible to use the geography of the room to reinforce the use of language. A tactic used by many teachers is to have locations in the classroom that are related to different types of activity. For example a teacher may always stand in front of their desk as a sign that they want silence. They might stand in the same corner of the room whenever they are applying a sanction. A different corner may be used when giving praise. These give powerful but clear support to the actions being taken. Many children can relate to such physical changes as a means of signaling a change in the purpose of what is being spoken. It should not be underestimated.



The Language of Choice (2)

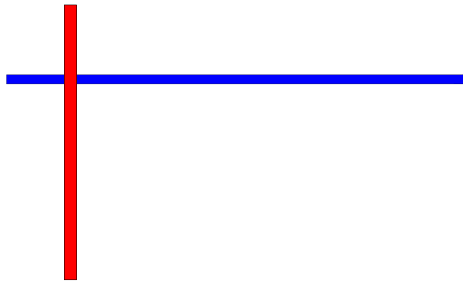
Some more general points about the appropriate use of language can be made. These are not specific to Responsible Discipline, but support the approach and make the outcomes more likely to be positive. These include these general guidelines...

- q Speak Clearly and Firmly and try not to show disrespect for the child
- q Avoid arguing, returning the exchanges to its primary cause
- q If an incident looks like becoming confrontational take the student to one side
- q Do not place yourself too close to the student
- q Do not try to be overbearing
- q Use a tone that is calming, whilst demonstrating your expectations of compliance
- q Keep your assertiveness in line with the nature of the incident
- q Use humour wherever possible
- q Where possible refer to external justifications - eg Agreed Behaviour Codes
- q Balance negative comments with positive ones on a ratio of at least 5 positive to every 1 negative

These all sound very straightforward and obvious. It is amazing how often they are forgotten, however. They do not always come naturally and will need practice. The Training Manual associated with this document contains exercises to develop a bank of planned ways to increase the chances of you using the appropriate forms of communication.



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Classroom Strategies

4. The Three “R”s

Repair and Rebuild Relationships





The Three “R”s - Repair and Rebuild Relationships

Responsible Discipline is about changing the onus from control by the teacher of a battle ground with winners and losers, into one of the student learning how to take responsibility for their own behaviour.

In some classrooms there is a constant battle. It is almost Feudal in nature. The teacher must win this battle. In doing so the student has to accept defeat. To the winner the spoils ! If the teacher engages in this battle and achieves a victory then the student is expected to pay for his opposition. Punishments follow inevitably. The punishments sometimes reflect the opportunity to exact their “pound of flesh” as much as a guarantee that the behaviour will stop. If this victory is achieved with some force and a strong retribution taken, then it is possible that the fear will keep a lid on any further rebellion for some time. Success can seem real.

But what has been going on under the surface ? Is there the chance of learning being more likely for that student ? Is learning likely to be more effective for the rest of the class ? Are hostilities over, or is it merely a temporary ceasefire ?

Responsible Discipline tries to ensure that this situation does not simply become another round - another battle - in a long running war between teacher and student. This approach is about resolving conflicts so that the real work of the teacher can be undertaken. It is about developing relationships of trust and respect.



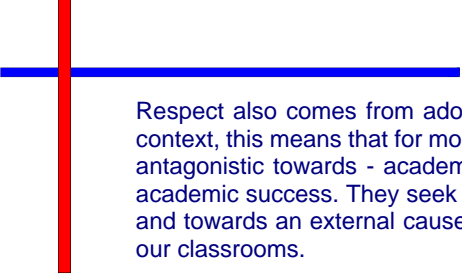
4. The Fourth “R” ?

If Responsible Discipline is about the three “R”s then it needs to take into account another “R” that is increasingly vital to the life of the student. This fourth “R” is their Respect. At a street level this is a dominant factor for young people. Tales of young people being beaten and even murdered for showing a perceived “lack of respect” are becoming more frequent. That may seem melodramatic, but even in the most affluent areas of the country, and even in the “best” schools, there is an increasing tendency for young people, but especially young males, to have to find a way through their school career whilst maintaining “respect”.

Bland phrases about working not being “cool” seem tame. For a 15 year old boy who is labeled a “swot” life can be intolerable. They can be bullied, physically and emotionally. They can be excluded from the social side of their society. They can be “excluded” to an extent that no school Governing Body could dream of doing.

There are ways around this social exclusion for young people. They include adopting the style of one of the various “tribes” - taking on clothing and hairstyles of a particular group - usually with its related music. This becomes a source of conflict with school uniforms and codes of dress.

Another way around it is to show elements of aggressive behaviour, often linked to an anti-authority image which again will lead to conflict with school. Alternatively it may be the reverse an ultra pacifism showing itself as self exclusion from society.



Respect also comes from adopting the tactic of not engaging in areas where you are likely to fail. In the classroom context, this means that for most boys (and increasing numbers of girls) it makes sense to opt out of - or even become antagonistic towards - academic success. Young people stop reading for pleasure. They avoid showing pleasure in academic success. They seek to divert the cause of their lack of success away from any hint of personal lack of ability and towards an external cause - usually taking the form of the teacher. Here lies the source of much of the conflict in our classrooms.

What is the lesson in all this for the teacher wanting to improve discipline in their classroom ?

Essentially it is to do with understanding of the real issues underlying apparent challenges to their authority. It is about applying the principles described elsewhere in this document and using them to make sure that the students know that it is the teacher who decides the culture of the classroom and determines what is and what is not acceptable. The successful teachers, however, do this in such a way as to avoid direct challenges to the student's "respect". It is done by maintaining consistently and openly that the problem is a particular behaviour and that the student has a choice as to how to deal with the conflict, bearing in mind that there will be automatic logical consequences of their choices. Finally, however, it is about reinforcing the message that the problem is the behaviour not the child by taking the opportunity to repair and rebuild relationships as soon as possible. It is this crucial element that is behind the comment that "*Mr X is strict but he is fair*". It is the way to ensure that behaviour is challenged - not the integrity of the individual.

You may not get you pound of flesh, but you do stand a better chance of changing behaviours.



4. Three “R” Tactics

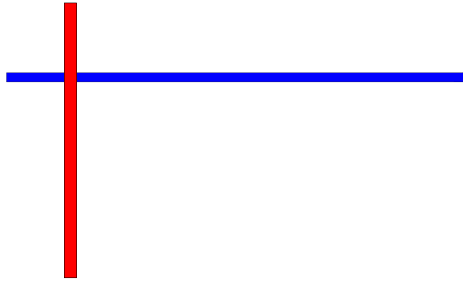
Repairing relationships is not rocket science. The tactics used can be very simple - the hardest bit is remembering to do it consistently. Doing it for some and not others will give exactly the opposite impression from the one intended.

At the lowest level the teacher would simply acknowledge the acceptance of the instruction given by something as simple as positive eye contact, a tap on the shoulder as you pass by, a nod or even a thumbs up sign if the student is able to accept this acknowledgement publicly.

For more serious incidents the teacher may feel that a private word is better. The closer this is to the incident the better, though sometimes it might be better to leave it until the end of the lesson if the student is still clearly showing signs of anger or upset. The danger here is that this may turn into a lecture - a private pound of flesh. The best way to deal with it is to.....

- q keep it very short
- q Avoid reliving the incident
- q Give a brief reminder of the groundrule broken
- q Avoid discussion about rights and wrongs
- q End by saying “thank you for agreeing to abide by the groundrule” and smile.
- q Leave the meeting with a comment about something else - say football or music





Classroom Strategies

5. Time Out

Time for Reflection





Time Out

Sometimes you can do everything by the book and still there is no resolution to the conflict. Once you have tried all the tactics and the situation is unresolved then you have to take into account the rest of the class. The time may come when the student who refuses to accept the groundrules of the classroom simply has to be removed to give the rest of the class the chance to get on. This should be a last resort and the way it is done is important.

The Time out system operating in the school may be based at department level or whole school level. Ideally a room should be identified and used solely for the purpose. It should be manned, though supervision is all that is required and the task can be combined with other activity. There should be a system in place for senior staff to collect the student (usually by sending another pupil to the Time Out room). The incident should be recorded and contact made with the student's parents.

The Time Out is intended as a time for reflection. It is not a punishment in itself. It should not be the basis for allocating extra work as a punishment, although tasks directing thoughtful reflection may be used. There should be no conversation with the person supervising, unless it is directed at helping the child to resolve the situation.

Time Out is a serious matter. It should be presented as such by the school.



4. Time In

Where Time Out is used simply as another punishment there is a danger that it will add to resentment rather than reduce it. In these circumstances Time Out is seen on both sides as a severe punishment and when the next lesson comes around - the punishment having been completed - the student goes back into the same classroom with a widened gap between them and the teacher. It rarely stops the conflicts and more often leads to the request for a stepping up of the sanctions until exclusion from school is the only answer.

In Responsible Discipline the use of Time Out is to calm a heated situation. It is to allow for private reflection and must be followed up by a meeting between the teacher and the student. This meeting should take place before the student is allowed back into the room. It should be centred along the lines of gaining acceptance of the behaviour being wrong and the tone should be one of rebuilding a relationship. It should be left with a contract - written or verbal - which makes clear what is expected of the student in the next lesson. Even at this stage the student may decide that they are unwilling to accept the rules of being in the room and should be left in no doubt as to the logical consequences of that choice - even if that means accepting a full exclusion.

A good "Time In" will involve the teacher in giving the student the chance to explain what they felt and why they acted that way. It will mean the teaching doing a lot of listening and NO lecturing. Questions such as,

" How does your behaviour help (or stop) you and others to learn ?"

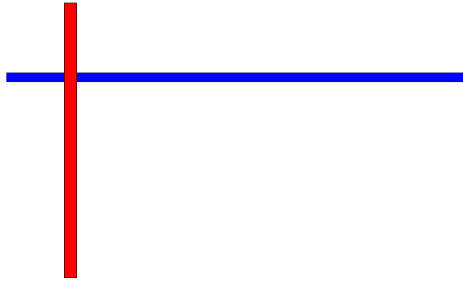
and

"How could you do it differently and still keep your respect ?"

are the sort of questions that would be helpful. Use them to repair and rebuild relationships.



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Classroom Strategies

6. Routines and Planning for Discipline

Taking the stress out of the situation





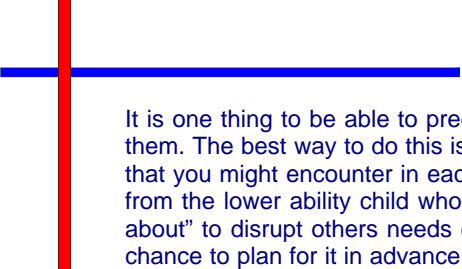
Planning for Discipline

It was said right at the start that Responsible Discipline is about reducing the stress in classroom conflicts. This is brought about by a mixture of setting up routines and using them to establish the norms of behaviour. It is also due to the de-personalisation of the conflict. The teacher externalises the conflict by relating it to the agreed rules and sanctions as a generality rather than that individual teacher. They also take all actions to avoid labeling the student as badly behaved, concentrating instead on the actual behaviour, whilst always taking steps to rebuild positive relationships.

The underlying philosophy of this approach is that behaviour is specific to a context and therefore the behaviour associated with a given classroom is something that can, and needs to, be learned. Only then can it become simply accepted as “The Norm” .

One important consequence of this set of statements is that Discipline should be planned for in the same way that a teacher plans for the delivery of the content of the lesson. Most behaviours are repetitions of previous behaviours, or at worst variants on them. Most children will stick to a narrow range of behaviours, even when trying to generate conflict. At the start of the year during what might be best called the “Establishment Phase” a teacher will be able to look at their timetable and work out what sort of behaviours they might expect from different children. These may vary between individuals and between classes, but the overall picture will soon appear.

What next ?



It is one thing to be able to predict what sort of behaviours will appear in your classroom, but it doesn't automatically avoid them. The best way to do this is to draw up a list of strategies, tactics and specific responses to the main types of behaviour that you might encounter in each class. The bright student who questions your teaching has to be dealt with very differently from the lower ability child who shouts out because of their frustration at failing in the tasks set. The student who "messes about" to disrupt others needs different tactics to the 'Class Lawyer' type. But whatever type of behaviour there will be the chance to plan for it in advance and thus avoid being caught off guard and taking the risk of 'off the cuff' reactions that might make the situation harder to deal with.

A good strategy that allows the more experienced teachers with the greater expertise in this area to help the younger and less experienced staff is to run workshops to highlight effective tactics for dealing with examples of the behaviours experienced. This can be made into a handbook of tactics, but it must go along with training on the background to how the tactics fit into the wider Responsible Discipline picture.

Paired observation with identifying effective tactics is another way to spread the use of Responsible Discipline throughout the staff. This should be done with real sensitivity so as not to reinforce the idea of an "elite" group, but it has the advantage that it can be done in smaller one off groupings of staff who already trust each other as well as being a whole school approach. It can be done by an external consultant observer if relationships between staff are an issue. In other words it is very flexible.

It is important to bear in mind that if Senior Staff are being used to support others in the classroom, then they MUST NOT do so in such a way as to diminish their authority. It is no use leaving a class with the impression that You can control them, but their normal teacher needs your help. Tactics such as agreeing that Senior Staff would use codes such as " *There is a message in the office for you Mr Smith - I will look after the class for a few minutes while you go check it out*" when what you are really doing is giving that member of staff time to collect themselves and come back with dignity in tact. Equally supporting a teacher having trouble with a difficult student is best done away from the class by using a ruse such as asking for the teacher to nominate a number of students to help the Senior Teacher with a task, as the excuse for taking them out of the lesson.





Training Activities

A wide range of support and training is available to schools and groups of schools from Response Education. This could be one of a range of standard packages or it could be a tailored programme to suit your needs.

These Packages are as follows

- q Staff Training Programme -
- q Individual/ Small Group Staff Support
- q In-School Consultation
- q Individually Tailored Programmes
- q Production of Individually Tailored Resource materials
- q

(For details of the costs of each of these packages please contact Response Education.)



Response Education Website - (www.response-education.org)



Contact Response Education