

Reframing Classroom Management

As a FoodCorps member, you can spend hours preparing to lead a creative, engaging, standards-aligned lesson, but that lesson will be of little use if taught in a chaotic or unsafe environment, be it the classroom, garden, or cafeteria. In fact, when anyone experiences others in an environment like a classroom that is inattentive or hostile, the body picks up that information through the autonomic nervous system and sends it up to the reticular activating system (the portal through which most information enters the brain) and amygdala (the part of the brain that processes memory, decision-making, and emotional response). There, the amygdala gets the information that it's not socially, emotionally, or intellectually safe and sends out a distress signal to the body. The body starts to produce stress hormones that make learning nearly impossible (Hammond 2015).

Effective classroom management is critical to supporting student engagement and achievement. This requires an understanding of what is realistic to expect of the children based on what we know of their personal circumstances, the message their behavior sends, and their developmental level. Children enter classrooms with unique personalities and challenges; these factors must influence educators' assessments of how to support student success within the school community.

This section is adapted from Patricia Belvel's *Rethinking Classroom Management* and the *Reframing Classroom Management Toolkit* developed by Teaching Tolerance. It is also informed by social emotional learning practices.

Respond to the Child, Not the Behavior

Responsive classroom management honors the whole child, respects his or her unique characteristics and experiences, and acknowledges the child's critical role in the class-room community. It also seeks to decode behavior rather than focus exclusively on power and control.

Returning the classroom to order by any means necessary may seem desirable in the short term, but harsh or punitive classroom management practices actually exacerbate behavioral problems by fostering resentment and humiliation; they also do nothing to change the environment or to address the underlying and unexpressed needs of the child. Students often lose respect for teachers who discipline them in a dismissive or punitive way and are also more likely to misbehave in their classes.

When teachers engage in dialogue with students and create spaces where it is safe to make mistakes and learn from them, students are better equipped to understand and regulate their emotions and improve their problem behaviors.

Functions and Explanations of Student Behavior

All behavior is communication. Social scientists view behaviors as serving functions or purposes. Each student’s behavior is a puzzle educators are tasked with solving. As soon as we know the function or purpose of a behavior, we can design interventions that teach students how to meet their needs in more appropriate ways. You can remember the four most common needs driving student behavior by using the acronym **EATS**.

- **Escape:** Students engage in inappropriate behaviors to try to escape a task or situation they find aversive.
- **Attention:** Students engage in inappropriate behaviors to gain or escape attention from peers or teachers (this can include negative attention).
- **Tangible gains:** Students engage in inappropriate behaviors to gain access to a preferred activity or object.
- **Sensory needs:** Students engage in

STUDENT BEHAVIOR	EXAMPLE	POSSIBLE NEED
Distracting others; making unnecessary noise	Rashad is often disruptive during silent reading, making noises that make his peers laugh.	Attention
Not listening; not following directions	Savannah sweeps materials off her desk and stomps on the ground each time she is asked to transition from a workstation to independent seat work.	Escape
Talking back; being disrespectful	Each time Juan enters the classroom late, and the teacher tells him to go to the office for a pass, Juan argues with her, eventually calling her a name and slamming the door as he exits the classroom.	Attention, escape
Physical aggression	Eli struggles to make friends in class and often appears to be “pushing the buttons” of peers. It is not uncommon for him to push other students when in line, causing multiple children to fall.	Tangible, sensory
Fidgeting	Chris often drums his pencil on his desk. Sometimes he appears aware of this behavior, but other times he does not. The noise distracts his classmates and annoys his teacher.	Sensory

Reprinted with permission of the Southern Poverty Law Center:

<https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/reframing-classroom-management>

inappropriate behaviors to meet a sensory or internal need that may be difficult to detect from the outside.

Understanding the reasons behind behaviors also allows you to focus on prevention, as opposed to punishment. Properly understanding and distinguishing behaviors also reduces the likelihood that an educator will personalize student misbehavior. It is important to remember that each student is a dynamic, complex individual and that the same behavior may indicate different needs in different students. FoodCorps members will ideally work with a classroom teacher to determine the needs of a specific student and the appropriate intervention. The chart below shows some common student behaviors and the needs they function to address.

Managing Student Behavior: The 4 Ps

When we think of group management, we often think of enforcing rules or following through on consequences. The vast majority of an educator's work, however, is ideally done before any problem even arises. This is the art of prevention: how can we create the optimal conditions to bring out the best behavior in our students? These are the 4 Ps of prevention: personal relationships, perceptions, participation, and parameters.

Personal Relationships

Take time to get to know your students, and help them get to know one another. Students' behavior often improves when they know, respect, and feel comfortable with their peers and their leader.

Tips

- **Learn names:** When you are first working with a group of students, learn everyone's name. Remember and use their names throughout your time with the class.
- **Use icebreakers:** Include icebreakers in your lessons to help continue creating a sense of community in your group. You can find many icebreaker ideas by searching the term "icebreakers" online.
- **Show you care with the first assignment:** An early lesson in any group of students should involve explicitly getting to know each other—collages for writing journals, discussions about favorite foods at home, sharing personal food and garden knowledge, icebreakers, and opportunities for self-expression.
- **Interact with students at different times during the school day:** Sharing nonacademic experiences can help you and your students see each other as whole people. Eat lunch together. Invite them to the garden if they haven't been there yet. Watch their athletic or extracurricular events. Attend community events in their neighborhoods.
- **Listen to students:** What are your students saying—and what are they not saying? From the intricately detailed stories of some students to the quiet silence of others, listening to the message and reading between the lines will tell you a lot about them.
- **Model humility and fallibility:** We are all human, and we are all fallible. There are times when we will react to students in ways we wish we hadn't. It's OK to tell your students that you've made a mistake and that you will try to do better. This will help them know that it's OK for them to make mistakes as well.
- **Use "gifts without strings":** When teaching, use "gifts without strings," an idea from Patricia Belvel's Rethinking Classroom

Management. These are acts of kindness done with every student, not as a reward for good behavior, but just because every child deserves to be shown kindness. They might include the following:

- Greeting each student at the door with a high-five
- Smiling and making eye contact
- Asking students to share highlights from their weekends
- Talking one-on-one with a student about something unrelated to FoodCorps topics, like their favorite book, their hobbies, or their pets

Perceptions

How can you help your students perceive FoodCorps Time as fun, rigorous, and exciting? This can be tricky because FoodCorps classroom time might initially feel to students like a time for free play. After all, it's hands on, you may be outdoors or cooking, and it can happen outside of school time. Shifting their perception to understand FoodCorps classroom time as relevant to their learning, however, will help students be focused and engaged during structured activities.

Tips

- **Establish routines:** Establish, practice, and continually revisit consistent routines, such as gathering quietly whenever students hear the callback, putting on aprons or garden gloves when it's time to work, and doing a FoodCorps cheer at the end of a session.
- **Wait for quiet:** If students are having side conversations while you are addressing the group, stop and wait until they are quiet to continue. If it happens when another student is addressing the group, ask that student to stop and wait until everyone is listening.

- **Build in time for free play, if possible:**

There's nothing wrong with play time! If you are leading an after-school session and sense that your students just came off a long day at school and need some time to run around and play before they can engage, make some time for that. Make sure that you clearly distinguish it from the other time: Let's go play on the field and unwind from our day, and then we'll come back here in about ten minutes when we're ready to learn about building compost.

Participation

Behavior issues often arise when children don't have a meaningful way to engage in a group activity. You can prevent many issues by creating as many opportunities as possible for all students to get actively involved in whatever you're doing.

Tips

- For hands-on activities, whenever possible, provide enough tools for everyone. For discussions, use the tips under "Structuring Student Participation" on p. 93 to maximize active participation.

Parameters

Give students clarity, and encourage them to feel bought into the rules of FoodCorps Time (see next section Developing Group Agreements). Work with students to establish clear, simple behavior expectations and consequences early in your time with them, before any issues arise.

Tips

- It is easier starting the year off being a bit strict than trying to be buddies with your students. Once you've developed strong

relationships and mutual respect with students and teachers, you can give your groups more freedom, but it's hard to get control of classes if you start out too loose.

- Familiarize yourself with existing behavior protocols in your school, after-school, or summer camp program.
- Describe consequences for when agreements are broken. These should be consistent with existing behavior protocols from your school, after-school, or summer camp program.
- Identify a "cool-off" space for students. This could be a corner of the classroom or garden with a few books, some paper and pencils, or similar materials.
- Provide consistent follow through on your consequences. If, for example, a student is calling another student names, offer a reminder for that student to stop. If it continues, remove the student from the activity, and instruct them to head to the cool-off space for a few minutes. If you are available, you can talk one-on-one with the student there about what's happening. If you're busy, explain that, and ask the student to write about what's happening and why. If you feel the student has calmed down, then he or she can rejoin the group. If, however, the problem persists, work with a teacher, who may set up a meeting with the student and his or her parents or guardians to problem-solve together.

Six Ways to Redirect Classroom Disruption

1. **Refocus the energy.** Instead of pausing your teaching to reprimand, ask the misbehaving student to answer a lesson-related question. This gets the student back on task and keeps the pace of the lesson moving forward without taking the focus off academics.
2. **Give students a break.** Have a disruptive student take a physical break or a break from the current assignment. Ask the student to move seats, or give the student a special responsibility or errand.
3. **Give nonverbal cues.** Eye contact and body language are effective nonverbal communication tools—if handled with sensitivity. A gentle hand on a desk, a silent tally on group points, catching a student's eye, and circulating throughout the classroom all have the power to help students refocus and stay on task. Open, nonthreatening body language tells students you are calm, in control of the class, and mean to be taken seriously, but it also tells students that you see them, care about them, and want them to do better. Be sensitive to the ways in which different communities view eye contact and physical proximity between adults and children.
4. **Address the disruption quickly and quietly.** Get the class focused on another task, and pull the disruptive student to the side. Start with a question that is not accusatory: It looks like you may have a question; or What's up? Then remind the student of the rules and assignment, and direct him or her back to work with an expectation. If a student is engaging in the behavior to seek attention, drawing focus away from the behavior will likely cause it to stop.
5. **Offer kinesthetic movement options.** Many students (and adults) benefit from some sort of kinesthetic movement while listening to instructions. If a student is squirming or making noise, hand him or her a stress ball, a fidget cube, Velcro, or other

sensory stimulus to reduce the desire to fidget and help the student stay on task.

6. **Give anonymous reminders.** “We are just waiting on two scholars to take their seats.”

Recommended Resources

- *Conscious Classroom Management*
by Rick Smith
- *Positive Discipline in the Classroom*
by Jane Nelsen
- Reframing Classroom Management: A Toolkit For Educators by Teaching Tolerance:
<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/reframing-classroom-management>
- Rethinking Classroom Management
by Patricia Belvel