

REDIRECTING STUDENTS' BEHAVIOR

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Class management skills are crucial to the success of any instructional time because control of your class allows efficient and effective teaching. It also enhances your opportunities to develop a positive rapport with your students and makes the experience fun for you and for your class!

To begin, we firmly believe that the best way to promote excellent student behavior is by encouragement, or "pulling" them to desire making good choices. We refer you to an article by Steve Greeley, "Discipline: the Real Answer," and by Beth Gardner, "Organized Chaos: There's an Anaconda in our Class!" Jeff Lulla is another wise author to research. There is one principle that we and most veteran coaches and teachers agree upon: prevention is key. The best prevention is keeping students on task, challenged, and having fun. When you put enough forethought and effort into preventing misbehavior, you rarely have to

spend time correcting it. Establishing a distinct class culture with clear expectations is the foundation of sound class management. Communication and delivery style are two other major considerations.

Since many of today's children are growing up with significantly less discipline and rule enforcement at home, and with increases in biological influences (i.e. Autism Spectrum Disorders, ADD, ADHD, etc.) on behavior, teachers need to have progressive, effective techniques that will help them guide students to make good behavior choices. Keep in mind that it only takes one student to make the learning experience for the several other clients a poor one.

THE GOLDEN RULE

Try to anticipate behavioral challenges in order to prevent or respond to them calmly, instead of reacting intensely. Challenging behavior in children is expected. Misbehavior

rightly perceived is an opportunity to teach good choices, respect for others and self-control. While some students display more of these "teachable moments" than others, it is still a privilege to have the chance to shape their development. It is also vital that your focus in these instances is to correct the behavior and not to judge the student.

In redirecting behavior choices, we separate techniques into three progressive categories: stealth, subtle, and direct.

STEALTH

We named this first set of strategies "stealth" because the students and their peers may not even realize that you are redirecting their behavior.

- 1. Physical proximity:** Do you change your driving when you see a police car behind you or 50 yards ahead on the side of the road? Simply

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Redirecting Students' Behavior...continued.

walking over and standing beside the students who are misbehaving is often enough to stop the offense. No words are necessary.

2. **Distract them with a helpful task:**

If you have a specific student who continues to offer teachable moments, you may want to make them your special helper on a certain event. You might ask them to help move a mat or to help a newer student get acquainted with the gym. Young children often love to be helpful, and putting them in a leadership role might be a great motivator for better behavior choices.

3. **Stop and wait:**

A common mistake of beginner teachers is to speak before all the students are listening. By stopping and waiting to give instructions, they will soon get the message that they need to pay attention politely. Other students will re-direct their peers for you. Remind them of the rule that only one person can speak at a time and that you were courteously waiting for your turn.

4. **Redirect class focus:**

If there is a scenario where the students are distracted by a certain event or item in the gym, try using it to motivate good behavior choices rather than getting irritated. For example, if a student is fixated on the gym's trophies, offer trophy-admiring time at the end of class if she/he can stay on task for the class. (Or, for younger children, have a trophy minute at the

end of the event rotation.) Gardner's "There's an Anaconda" is wonderful demonstration of this concept.

5. **Parent help:**

You may also speak with the parent/guardian privately to ask for guidance. They might tell you what works for them and will likely talk to their child about making better choices in the gym.

SUBTLE

At this level, the student or class will know you are addressing a behavior challenge. The key is to do it in a fashion where no one is shamed or embarrassed. Children often forget to behave because they are so excited. Self-control is a learned skill.

1. **The look:**

Perhaps the most common one is the look, often paired with a brief silence, especially if you are giving instructions. The goal is to silently communicate to the student that you are aware of their misbehavior and that they need to stop it. Beware: students on the autism spectrum will most often not be able to discern this message because they have difficulties reading body language and social cues.

2. **The walk:**

Call the student over to you. Here, the walk over is the actual consequence. By the time they get to you, you only need to briefly and gently address their behavior. Or, you may wish to say nothing about the behavior but simply tell them that you really enjoy having them in class.

3. **Secret signals:**

If a student has persistent behavior issues, call them aside privately before class starts. Negotiate a secret signal with them, something the other students are not likely to notice. Examples include rubbing your earlobe, scratching your head, etc. This is a private cue to say, "Please stop your behavior and follow directions."

4. **Time out (in disguise):**

Picture a pre-school class doing an obstacle course. One child is exhibiting poor behavior choices. Gently hold the hand of the student and pull them out of line, allowing the entire group to do a rotation and then invite them to re-join. While he is beside you, ask if he knows why you removed him from the course. If he knows, ask him to make the right choices when he re-joins the group. If he does not know, encourage him to reconsider his recent behavior, perhaps giving him a clue, until he can state his wrong choice and how to fix it. This avoids the embarrassment of being publicly chastised. If you have two students who tend to set each other off, use the same technique and place the student back in play at the opposite part of the obstacle course.

5. **Name dropping:**

Calmly call out the student's name. Sometimes a simple reminder is sufficient, "Johnny, we don't do that here." There is no shame or criticism.

6. Ask for their cooperation: At a slightly higher level of intervention, you could speak with the student privately and ask for their cooperation, briefly discussing why it is so important. Remember to get down on their physical level, and to speak in a calm tone that encourages them to make better choices.

DIRECT

When entering to this level, a few things are imperative. First, you are addressing the behavior and not the person. Secondly, this is a side-by-side evaluation of the poor behavior, not a face-to-face confrontation. Say what you mean, mean what you say, and say it without being mean.

Ken once counseled a couple on their son's poor behavior. Their complaint: *"He does not get ready for bed when we tell him. We have to tell him seven times."*

Ken: *"What do you do differently on the seventh time?"*

Couple: *"We go over to him and escort him upstairs."*

Ken: *"Why don't you do this the first time?"*

The point is that your students need to know that you are in charge and that you actually mean what you say. Responding immediately to overt misbehavior has worked very well with our own children. They quickly get the message that you are truly serious about your expectations and requests.

1. The Parent trap: Suggest to the student that you would like to talk to their parent regarding poor behaviors. Even more effectively, you might

suggest that the student speak to his/her own parent in your presence.

2. See me after class: If you are fortunate to have a five-minute buffer between classes, you can take the student aside. Look into their eyes and ask them, *"Do you know why I am disappointed in you?"* Speak calmly and firmly.

3. Remove a reward: Jeff Lulla offers a wonderful tip: give two stamps at the end of class, a "listening" stamp, and a "best cartwheel ever" (performance) stamp. If needed, withhold the first stamp. Then, at the start of the next class ask, *"Are you*

be reserved for the students who behaved well.

OTHER POINTS OF CONSIDERATION

Never take a student's behavior personally because he or she could be facing serious challenges outside of the gym. It's not about you.

Teach to the students — not the lesson plan. Be flexible; if the plan is not working, ask for help or change it. Back-up plans are worthwhile; you may want to consult veteran or mentor coaches.

Expect behavior issues because you are working with humans, and even more so, youth.

If you have a particularly challenging group, ask the director to close enrollment for that class (limit number of students) and ask for help.

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going to earn two stamps today?" Maybe the class gets a reward of playing a short game at the end of class. Students who consistently behaved poorly might not play for that day, or leader roles might only

