

## Start Off On the Right Foot: Classroom Management Strategies and Tips

Are you ready? First day jitters aren't limited to students alone. There isn't a teacher who doesn't experience them too. Starting a new school year is an emotional process for both students and teachers. Through the summer until the first day of school, your mind may be churning with new ideas, plans, and perhaps a little apprehension too. Getting off to a good start takes careful thought, creativity, and no small amount of physical effort.

To ease your nervousness and use up some of that extra adrenaline, start with setting up your classroom. You'll want a room that is safe, inviting, and reflects your personality. Study centers with lots of pictures and color invite enthusiasm for your subject. Students like to know about your interests, so include personal items in your classroom. A few items from a hobby will trigger conversation from your students. As they get to know you better, you may see fewer problems with discipline.

Some teachers create a bulletin board with a childhood picture and a short piece of writing (in their own hand) from each of their siblings, parents and grandparents. Students are immediately curious about the teacher's family. One fourth grade teacher hangs her own fourth grade picture on her door. "I can tell they feel more secure and comfortable when they see my picture, and it is a reminder to me that I was once a nine year old girl, wondering what my teacher was going to be like."

Although you want to enrich your classroom, you may also want to create a calm area where you can occasionally steer students who are pulled off task by distractions.

The first days of school are filled with more new experiences than at any other time in the year. There are new sights, sounds, schedules, children, adults, challenges and expectations. There is so much to be curious about. Learning is driven by curiosity, which leads to exploration, discovery, practice, and mastery. Mastery then leads to the confidence to once again explore. One thing that can stop this cycle of wonder and learning is fear. When a child feels safe, curiosity thrives and she desires novelty. When the world around her is strange and overwhelming, she longs for familiarity and will be less capable of learning. It is critical to provide an emotionally safe classroom environment.

Safety is created by predictability, and predictability means consistent behaviors. It is you, the teacher, who creates safety and stability by **consistent** interaction with each child. Your personality, smile, voice, and touch provide assurance and create an emotional climate that will foster curiosity, exploration, and learning. Here's how you can provide the emotional predictability that children need:

- Keep the first weeks of school simple. Repeat the schedule and rules frequently.
- Be predictable in your interactions with the students.

- Be attuned to each child's overload point.
- Find quiet time during each day for them to process the day's new experiences.
- Keep the first challenges light and the feedback positive.
- Remember that *you* make all the difference.

*What you do on the first day of school will determine your success for the rest of the year.* Your room is now ready for instruction. It is both safe and inviting. Stand at the door to greet your students. Give each student a seating assignment and note it on the seating chart. Make sure an assignment is posted in a consistent location when the students enter the room. Start each class with a task (see Warming Up the Classroom on Page 2), and then take attendance. Position yourself near the students and move around throughout the lesson to keep students' attention and monitor their progress. Dress in a professional way to model success and expect achievement. Don't forget to display your diploma and credentials with pride.

The three most important things that must be taught the first week of school are **discipline, procedures and routines**. Without these, your year will be an emotional roller coaster and the students' learning will suffer. Create your list of class rules, making sure your rules reflect your educational beliefs. Phrase rules in the positive (YES – this is a beverage-free classroom). Implementing rules is easier when students participate in their creation. (cont. on Page 2)

## NYS Teacher Center Online Academy

The Online Academy can be found at the Rockland Teacher Center website at [www.rockteach.org](http://www.rockteach.org). Click on Online Courses, then Online Academy Catalog and follow the directions. Be sure to check with your district for course approval.

*Those who  
dare to teach  
must never  
cease to learn.*

Harry Wong

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## Start Off on the Right Foot (continued)

Many teachers list several of their own rules and then invite the class to work on the rest and come to consensus. Once the rules are established, post them prominently. Give a copy of the rules to each student, request his/her signature, and send the rules home for the parents to read and sign. Inform the students that their first test will be on classroom rules and procedures.

Learning is most effective when it takes place in a supportive community of learners, so involve students' families. You may want to call (or write) each home before school begins and again within two weeks. Teachers plus parents equal good students. Cooperative learning adds to this support. The more time stu-

dents work together and the greater responsibility they take for their work as a group, the greater the learning. In the spirit of cooperation, grade each student on his own efforts (criterion-referenced) rather than in comparison with the efforts of his peers (norm-referenced).

The expectations you have of your students will greatly influence their achievement. Treat students as though they already are what they can be, and you help them to become what they will be. You set the example with your values, your conduct toward them, and even your expectations of yourself. Remember that inside every great teacher, there is an even better one waiting to come out. Best wishes for a successful year! (*excerpted from Harry Wong's The First Day of School and Dr. Bruce Perry's Creating an Emotionally Safe Classroom*).

## Warming Up the Classroom Climate

Icebreakers are an important first step to getting student buy-in. They are great tools for helping students to get to know each other in a fun and non-threatening way and excellent tools for you to gain insight into how your students interact with each other at the very start of your school year.

**Crossword Connection.** Teacher prints his name on board and tells the class something about himself. He picks a student to come to the board, tell something about herself and print her name crossing the teacher's as in a crossword puzzle. Students take turns telling something about themselves and adding their names. The completed puzzle can be copied as a classroom poster.

**Take A Stand.** Teacher puts one long line of tape down the center of the room. The teacher reads statements with either-or answers such as I prefer night to day, lizards to snakes, warm days to cool days, etc. After hearing each statement,

students agreeing with the first response move to one side of the tape, with the second to the other. Undecided students straddle the line. Instruct the students to watch each other to get a feel for their positions on various matters. Statements can range from silly trivia to serious content.

**Jigsaw Search.** Prepare construction paper shapes of different colors. The shape may be symbolic of a topic being introduced. These are cut as a jigsaw puzzle with the number of pieces matching the group size (2-4). As students enter the room, ask them to select one piece from a container. When all are there, instruct them to find those who have puzzle pieces that fit theirs and then team up to perform a task. Some tasks might be to introduce a partner, make a poster together about a concept, decorate the puzzle pieces for display, or make a mobile. Having them write their names on the puzzle pieces facilitates name learning during the search activity. Note: Number of pieces must match number of students in the class. More first day introductory icebreakers can be found at <http://www.kimskorner4teachertalk.com/classmanagement/firstday.html>.

## Graduate Programs at the Teacher Center

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