

## How-To Article

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# Managing Middle School Classrooms

*Discover classroom management techniques to help you create a highly functional classroom where learning is both fun and safe.*

Middle School students experience developmental changes unparalleled by any other age group. Puberty marks a time when students' lives are filled with emotional, physical, and cognitive growth. Yet, individual students progress through this transition period at varying times and paces. A "one size fits all" formula for middle school maturity levels does not apply.

## Accepting the Maturation Process

As middle level students undergo this transformation, seeking to establish their "adult" self-concepts, certain characteristics may be manifested.

Common middle school student behavior traits

- overly concerned with appearance
- seeks approval from peers
- attempts to fit in to a group
- tests adult rules and limits

Exhibiting these traits to one degree or another is a necessary process in the transition from adolescence to adulthood. The first step in developing strategies for managing middle school classrooms is to become knowledgeable about the maturational changes that inevitably take place during the middle level years.

## Creating a Supportive Classroom Environment

Master teachers of middle level grades are expert facilitators of safe, supportive classrooms based on learner-centered knowledge and instruction. Establishing a climate of mutual respect between and among middle school students and teachers is vital to every successful classroom management plan.

The characteristics of a successful classroom management plan are as follows:

- Learners know what behaviors are expected.
- Students feel welcome to participate in learning activities.
- Classroom procedures and routines are clearly defined.
- Established rules are phrased positively and reinforced regularly.
- Classroom culture is based on mutual respect.
- Lessons and activities are well planned and learner centered.

Creating and implementing a management plan that reflects your individual instructional style as well as your expectations for student behavior is a cyclical process that requires planning, implementation, and reflection.

## Step One: Planning Lessons and Procedures

### Planning Lessons

Well-planned, interesting lessons are essential to effective middle school classroom management. Teachers

who deliver thoughtful, organized, and meaningful lessons are less likely to experience difficulties in the area of classroom management.

### Checklist for Effective Lesson Planning

- Lessons are aligned to course objectives and relevant to students' needs.
- Strategies include a variety of student-centered activities.
- Lessons are briskly paced to avoid "down-time" and subsequent off-task behavior.
- Supplementary activities and enrichments are readily available for students who finish assignments ahead of their classmates.

### Planning for Procedures

Established procedures and routines that are consistently reinforced make students feel safe in their classroom environment.

Think about the routines and procedures for situations, such as:

- setting-up the classroom
- entering the class
- sharpening pencils
- turning in assignments
- visiting the restroom
- going to lockers
- answering questions
- moving about the room
- managing tardy students
- working in groups
- assigning seats

### Step Two: Implementation

#### Implementing Rules and Procedures

After clear procedures and routines have been created, it is time to teach expectations to students. Teaching and practicing the processes expected of students is essential to a successful classroom management plan. Modeling allows students to actually see and hear desired behaviors. Frequent use of praise and reinforcement will ensure that the expected behaviors continue.

#### Low-Profile Interventions that Work

Reacting to situations in an emotional way often escalates minimal problems into full-blown conflicts. Make it a goal to use pro-active strategies for classroom management.

- *Use non-verbal cues to re-direct students' attention*—Hand signals, flipping the lights, clapping twice or other creative techniques are effective ways to focus students' attention.
- *Monitoring*—Circulate around the room frequently to make sure students are on task. The use of proximity control is very effective in reducing off-task behaviors.
- *Eye Contact and Name Dropping*—Oftentimes, making eye contact or naturally weaving a student's name into your dialogue will stop unwanted behaviors. For example: "Notice, Josh, that the map key includes a scale of miles."
- *Use "I-messages"*—Tell students what you expect from them, not what they should do. Begin directives with the word "I", not "You". For example: "I need for you to write your name on your paper and face the front of the room." Then, pause and wait for the desired behavior to occur.
- *New Seating Chart*—Sometimes just a seat change will make a big difference in the on-task behavior of classrooms.
- *Use of Humor*—Addressing your concerns while avoiding conflict is often achieved through the use of humor.

- *Ignore Attention Seeking Behaviors*—Silly comments or other actions are sometimes best ignored.
- *Distracting or Changing the Subject*—Asking a question or giving a student a special task may deflect undesired behaviors.
- *Parent Contact*—Communicating with parents regularly is a good way to enlist their support and minimize behavior problems with individual students.

### **Step 3: Reflection**

Thinking about and questioning events is an important component of an effective classroom management cycle. When teachers contemplate and critically examine their practices, they are able to make needed adjustments to their strategies.

Pro-active, reflective teachers regularly ask themselves questions such as:

- Did I think before acting?
- Did I avoid assigning blame?
- Did I use de-escalating techniques?
- Did I plan and deliver a student-centered lesson?
- Did I consistently reinforce rules and procedures?
- Did I monitor student behavior?

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