

P-5: Establish behavior management plans

What should I keep in mind when I create consequences?

Choose consequences that you're comfortable with

Consequences must fit your own style since you need to be able to implement them with confidence and comfort at the appropriate times.

Keep in mind your students' developmental levels

- Develop consequences that will fit your students' needs and interests. For example, writing a behavior reflection will likely not be appropriate for kindergarteners. You need to get to know your students in order to determine the most effective consequences for them.
- Get to know students over time in order to determine which consequences will be most effective.
- Differentiate your plans for students who need extra support in managing their behavior, including students with behavior-related disabilities

Align your expectations with those of the school

- As you develop and set your behavioral expectations, you should take into account the broader school context. The culture of your school, for better or for worse, has a significant impact on the way discipline and routine practices will play out within your classroom and the school at large. If your school has a strong, positive culture of behavior, you should align your classroom expectations and rules with those used by your colleagues to every extent possible so that your classroom environment is consistent with the school environment in which your students are used to operating. In some cases, especially at the middle school level, you may be on a team of teachers who work with the same group of students. This is a wonderful opportunity to collaboratively create a rules and consequences system that every student will be expected to follow in every classroom.

Some corps members are in schools with school-wide point systems for misbehavior (students get five points for chewing gum, ten points for horseplay in the hallways, 25 points for defying a teacher, etc.). When a student reaches a certain level of points, there are set consequences administered by the principal or behavior management officer. Teachers in schools with these types of structures need to determine how to integrate their own classroom discipline system with the school's system. Often, a combination of the two systems is best, as one corps member reports:

I found that a balance between using my own series of consequences and giving students school points at the last stage of the consequence hierarchy (or when there was an egregious offense) was most effective. Students saw me as the authority figure and the behavior management officer appreciated the fact that I handled my own discipline problems and only involved him in the most extreme situations.

- In some cases, you may feel personally uncomfortable with certain behavioral policies of your school or believe a more effective approach exists. When a policy does not conflict with your personal values, but you feel it will be ineffective in your classroom, carefully consider the possible ramifications of circumventing or objecting to the policy. In some cases, the ramifications may outweigh the benefits. In other cases, it may be appropriate to ask your principal or other supervisor whether you can depart from the policies to accommodate the particular needs of your class or an individual student in your class.

More difficult are situations in which you believe that a school policy conflicts with your own personal values or sense of what is an appropriate punishment for children. When faced with this challenge, you should follow your personal comfort level after weighing the options, keeping in mind that any departure from the standard procedure could be perceived as disrespectful to the school or community. When determining what you are personally comfortable with, it is often helpful to try to understand the policy from the school or community's point of view before making a judgment. This may in fact alter your own beliefs of what is appropriate. Also, keep in mind that it may be difficult to teach your students and uphold a behavioral system that is unfamiliar to them. Ultimately, you must determine how

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to effectively balance the culture in which you are operating with your own personal philosophy. Often a compromise is possible, in which you begin with the expected approach and gradually modify the system to fit your personal style.

A Note on Corporal Punishment

Perhaps the most marked example of the kind of dilemma described above is corporal punishment, which could include spanking or striking a child with a paddle, having a student stand for extended periods of time, or requiring a student to hold a book in each hand with arms extended to the side. Many schools in which corps members teach include corporal punishment as one of the consequences of misbehavior. (Note: corporal punishment policies must comply with strict legal regulations, including the prior consent of parents or guardians and the presence of a witness.) Every teacher in such a school must make a personal decision as to whether to implement this consequence, and that decision should reflect both the teacher's own value system and a clear understanding of community expectations.