

EIGHTH EDITION

Building Classroom Discipline

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2005



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Richard Curwin and Allen Mendler's *Discipline with Dignity*

OVERVIEW OF CURWIN AND MENDLER'S MODEL

Focus

- Establishing classroom discipline based on dignity and hope.
- Reclaiming students destined to fail in school because of their misbehavior.
- Finding long-term solutions to problems of misbehavior, including violence.
- Working productively with difficult-to-manage students.

Logic

- Through dignified discipline, we can save students who would otherwise fail in school.
- Many students misbehave when their sense of personal dignity is threatened.
- It is essential to restore a sense of hope in students who chronically misbehave.
- Violence and aggression, which teachers fear, can be dealt with effectively.

Contributions

- The concept of student dignity as the cornerstone of effective classroom discipline.
- The fact that most chronically misbehaving students have no sense of hope.
- A systematic approach to discipline based on preserving dignity and restoring hope.
- Concrete suggestions for dealing with violence, hostility, and aggression.

Curwin and Mendler's Suggestions

- Recognize that helping students behave acceptably is an integral part of teaching.
- In all circumstances, interact with students in a manner that preserves their dignity.
- Do all you can to reestablish hope of success in students who chronically misbehave.
- Never use any discipline technique that interferes with motivation to learn.

About Richard Curwin and Allen Mendler

Richard Curwin, born in 1944, began his teaching career in a seventh-grade class of boys whose behavior was seriously out of control. This experience led him to a career specialization in school discipline, first as a classroom teacher and later as a university professor and private consultant and writer. He earned a doctorate in education from the University of Massachusetts in 1972. Allen Mendler, born in 1949, earned a doctorate in psychology at Union Institute in 1981. His career has been devoted to serving as school psychologist and psychoeducational consultant. He has worked extensively with students and teachers at all levels.

Curwin and Mendler attracted national attention with their 1983 book, *Taking Charge in the Classroom*. They revised and republished that work in 1988 with the title *Discipline with Dignity*, which more accurately reflects the central concept of their approach. In 1992 Curwin published *Rediscovering Hope: Our Greatest Teaching Strategy*, a book devoted to helping teachers improve the behavior of difficult-to-control students who are otherwise likely to fail in school. In 1997 Curwin and Mendler published *As Tough as Necessary: Countering Violence, Aggression, and Hostility in Our Schools*, in which they provide suggestions for working with hostile, aggressive students. They followed in 1999 with *Discipline with Dignity for Challenging Youth*, designed to help teachers work productively with students with especially difficult behavioral problems. Curwin and Mendler regularly conduct training seminars in a wide variety of locations and make available a number of products including audio and video materials, which are listed on their website at www.disciplineassociates.com. They can be contacted through their website.



Richard Curwin



Allen Mendler

Curwin and Mendler's Contributions to Discipline

Curwin and Mendler have made two major contributions to school discipline: (1) strategies for improving classroom behavior through maximizing student dignity and hope and (2) strategies for interacting effectively with students who are hostile, aggressive, or violent. Their ideas have been especially useful to teachers who work with chronically misbehaving students. Those students—formerly about 5 percent of the student population but now a growing number—are the ones who disrupt instruction, interfere with learning, and make life miserable for teachers. Described by Curwin and Mendler as “without hope,” such students deal out misery to teachers and will almost certainly fail in school unless they receive special consideration and care. Curwin and Mendler explain what without-hope students need if they are to have a chance for success in school, and they provide strategies to help teachers reclaim those students.

Curwin and Mendler's Central Focus

The central focus of Curwin and Mendler's work is on helping all students have a better opportunity for success in school through procedures that establish a sense of dignity and hope. They describe techniques that, in a dignified manner, encourage students to behave acceptably in school, and they provide a number of explicit suggestions for interacting productively with students, motivating them, ensuring success, and developing responsible behavior. In recent years they have given strong attention to working with students whose behavior is hostile and aggressive.

Curwin and Mendler's Principal Teachings

- *The number of students whose chronic classroom misbehavior puts them in imminent danger of failing in school is on the increase.*
These students are referred to as behaviorally at risk.
- *Most of these chronically misbehaving students have lost all hope of encountering anything worthwhile in school.*
A crucial responsibility of teachers is to help those students believe that school can be beneficial and that they can exert control over their own lives.
- *Students do all they can to prevent damage to their dignity, meaning their sense of self-worth.*
In attempting to protect themselves against such damage, students frequently transgress class rules and are justifiably considered to be behavior problems.
- *Five underlying principles of effective discipline should always be kept in mind.*
Those principles are that (1) discipline is a very important part of teaching, (2) short-term solutions are rarely effective, (3) students must always be treated with dignity, (4) discipline must not interfere with motivation to learn, and (5) responsibility is more important than obedience.
- *Responsibility, not obedience, is the goal of discipline.*
Responsibility, which involves making enlightened decisions, almost always produces better long-term behavior changes than does obedience to teacher demands.
- *Consequences, which are preplanned results that are invoked when class rules are broken, are necessary in discipline.*
Consequences are most effective when jointly planned by teacher and students.
- *Wise teachers deescalate potential confrontations by actively listening to the student, using I-messages, and keeping the discussion private.*
In most confrontations between teacher and student, both try to "win" the argument. The resulting struggle often escalates to a more serious level.

- The behavior of difficult-to-manage students can be improved through providing interesting lessons on topics of personal relevance that permit active involvement and lead to competencies students consider important.

Students who are very difficult to manage usually have little or no motivation to learn what is ordinarily taught in school, and they have little compassion or concern for others.

Analysis of Curwin and Mendler's *Discipline with Dignity*

Why Students Misbehave

All students misbehave at times. They talk without permission, call each other sarcastic names, and laugh when they shouldn't. Some do this out of boredom, some because they find certain misbehaviors (such as talking) irresistible, and some simply for expedience's sake. These kinds of misbehavior are relatively benign. They irritate teachers but do not place students in danger of failing. In contrast, other students break rules for more serious reasons, such as "gaining a measure of control over a system that has damaged their sense of dignity" (Curwin, 1992, p. 49). They exert their control by refusing to comply with teacher requests, arguing and talking back to the teacher, tapping pencils and dropping books, withdrawing from class activities, and increasing overt acts of hostility and aggression. These students have found they can't be good at learning but can be very good at being bad and, by doing so, can meet their needs for attention and power. Although such students are relatively few in number, they are not isolated. They are frequently at risk of failure in school, and they find others like themselves with whom to bond, which motivates further misbehavior.

Dignity

Dignity refers to respect for life and for oneself. It has long been at the center of Curwin and Mendler's approach to discipline. In their book *Discipline with Dignity* (2001), they point out that students with chronic behavior problems see themselves as losers and have stopped trying to gain acceptance in normal ways. In order to maintain a sense of dignity, those students tell themselves it is better to stop trying than to continue failing and that it is better to be recognized as a troublemaker than be seen as stupid.

The importance of personal dignity can hardly be overstated. Students try to protect their dignity at all costs, even with their lives when pushed hard enough. Teachers must take pains, therefore, to keep dignity intact and bolster it when possible. Curwin (1992) advises:

We must . . . welcome high risk students as human beings. They come to school as whole people, not simply as brains waiting to be trained. Our assumptions about their social behavior need to include the understanding that their negative behaviors are based on

protection and escape. They do the best they can with the skills they have under the adverse conditions they face. . . . When they are malicious, they believe, rightly or wrongly, that they are justified in defending themselves from attacks on their dignity. (p. 27)

It is very difficult for most teachers to remain understanding and helpful when students behave atrociously. A steady diet of defiant hostility makes many teachers become cynical and give up trying to help students. Teachers who have to face such behavior on a daily basis often leave teaching because they don't feel its rewards are commensurate with the turmoil they must endure.

Students Who Are Behaviorally at Risk

Behaviorally at risk is a label given to students whose behavior prevents their learning and puts them in serious danger of failing in school. Like most labels, *at risk* is often misinterpreted and misapplied, and although helpful for communication, it provides no guidance for dealing with the problem. Curwin and Mendler, therefore, make plain that they use the term to refer solely to behavior, not to the nature of the student: "It is what students do under the conditions they are in, not who they are, that puts them at risk" (Curwin, 1992, p. xiii).

The students Curwin and Mendler refer to are those whom teachers consider to be out of control—students often referred to as lazy, turned off, angry, hostile, irresponsible, disruptive, or withdrawn. They are commonly said to have "attitude problems." They make little effort to learn, disregard teacher requests and directions, and provoke trouble in the classroom. Because they behave in these ways, they are unlikely to be successful in school. Curwin (1992) describes them as follows:

- They are failing.
- They have received, and do not respond to, most of the punishments and/or consequences offered by the school.
- They have low self-concepts in relation to school.
- They have little or no hope of finding success in school.
- They associate with and are reinforced by similar students.

The number of behaviorally at risk students is increasing steadily. Many can see no role for themselves in the mainstream. Increasingly, they experience depression and many contemplate suicide, which accounts for almost one quarter of all adolescent deaths (Curwin, 1992). Students without hope do not care how they behave in the classroom. It does not worry them if they fail, bother the teacher, or disrupt the class.

Behaviorally at risk students are difficult to control for several reasons. They usually, though not always, have a history of academic failure. Unable to maintain dignity through achievement, they protect themselves by withdrawing or acting as if they don't care. They have learned that it feels better to misbehave than to follow rules that provide no payoff. Curwin (1992) illustrates this point.

Ask yourself, if you got a 56 on an important test, what would make you feel better about failing? Telling your friends, "I studied hard and was just too stupid to pass." Or, "It was a stupid test anyway, and besides I hate that dumb class and that boring teacher." (p. 49)

When students' dignity has been repeatedly damaged in school, it makes them feel good to lash back at others. As they continue to misbehave, they find themselves systematically removed from opportunities to act responsibly. When they break rules, they are made to sit by themselves in isolation. When they fight, they are told to apologize and shake hands. In such cases they are taken out of the very situations in which they might learn to behave responsibly. Curwin (1992) makes the point as follows:

No one would tell a batter who was struggling at the plate that he could not participate in batting practice until he improved. No one would tell a poor reader that he could not look at any books until his reading improved. In the same way, no student can learn how to play in a playground by being removed from the playground, or how to learn time-management skills by being told when to schedule everything. Learning responsibility requires participation. (p. 50)

Students who are behaviorally at risk know and accept that they are considered to be discipline problems. They know that they can't do academic work as expected and that they are considered bothersome and irritating. Wherever they turn, they receive negative messages about themselves. They have become, in their own eyes, bad persons. How can teachers help students who see themselves as bad persons and whose only gratification in school comes from causing trouble?

Helping Students Regain Hope

Teachers can do little about the depressing conditions in society, but they can do much to help students regain a **sense of hope**. Hope is the belief that things will be better for us in the future. It inspires us and helps us live meaningfully. It provides courage and the incentive to overcome barriers. When hope is lost, there is no longer any reason to try. Students who are behaviorally at risk have, for the most part, lost hope that education will serve them. Curwin and Mendler contend that such students can be helped to regain hope and that as they do so their behavior will improve. This can be accomplished, they say, by making learning much more interesting and worthwhile. If students are to get involved in the learning process, they need something to hope for, something that will make their efforts seem worthwhile. Learning activities become successful when students see they build competence in matters students consider important (Curwin, 1992, p. 25).

Learning must not only be made attractive but, as mentioned, must bring success as well. At-risk students will not persevere unless successful, despite the initial attractiveness of the topic. To ensure success, teachers can explore ways to redesign the curriculum, encourage different ways of thinking, provide for various learning styles and sensory modalities, allow for creativity and artistic expression, and use grading systems that provide encouraging feedback without damaging the students' willingness to try.

Disciplining Difficult-to-Control Students

It should be recognized that traditional methods of discipline are ineffective with students who are behaviorally at risk. These students have grown immune to scolding, lecturing, sarcasm, detention, extra writing assignments, isolation, names on the chalkboard, or trips to the principal's office. It does no good to tell them what they did wrong; they already know. Nor does it help to grill them about their failure to do class work or follow rules. They already doubt their ability, and they know they don't want to follow rules. Sarcastic teacher remarks, because they attack students' dignity, only make matters worse. At-risk students need no further humiliation. Punishment destroys their motivation to cooperate. They see no reason to commit to better ways of behaving and, therefore, cannot achieve the results teachers hope for.

How, then, should teachers work with these students? Curwin and Mendler set forth principles and approaches they believe work significantly better than the discipline approaches normally used. They acknowledge that dealing with the chronic rule breaker is never easy and admit that the success rate is far from perfect, but they claim it is possible to produce positive changes in 25 to 50 percent of students considered to be out-of-control. Curwin (1992, pp. 51-54) would have teachers base their discipline efforts on the following principles:

1. *Dealing with student behavior is an important part of teaching.* Most teachers do not want to deal with behavior problems, but their attitude can change when they realize that being a professional means doing whatever they can to help each individual student. Teachers can look on misbehavior as an ideal opportunity for teaching responsibility. They should put as much effort into teaching good behavior as they put into teaching content.
2. *Always treat students with dignity.* Dignity is a basic need that is essential for healthy life; its importance cannot be overrated. To treat students with dignity is to respect them as individuals, to be concerned about their needs and understanding of their viewpoints. Effective discipline does not attack student dignity but instead offers hope. Curwin and Mendler advise teachers to ask themselves this question when reacting to student misbehavior: "How would this strategy affect my dignity if a teacher did it to me?"
3. *Good discipline must not interfere with student motivation.* Any discipline technique is self-defeating if it reduces motivation to learn. Students who become involved in lessons cause few discipline problems. Poorly behaved students usually lack motivation to learn what is being offered them. They need encouragement and a reason to learn. Curwin suggests that teachers, when about to deal with misbehavior, ask themselves this question: "What will this technique do to motivation?"
4. *Responsibility is more important than obedience.* Curwin differentiates between obedience and responsibility as follows: Obedience means "do as you are told." Responsibility means "make the best decision possible." Obedience is desirable in matters of health and safety, but when applied to most misbehavior it is a short-term solution against which students rebel. Responsibility grows, albeit slowly, as students have the opportunity to sort out facts and make decisions. Teachers should regularly provide such opportunities.

Consequences

Consequences refer to what teachers have students do when they break class rules. Curwin and Mendler differentiate among four types of consequences: logical, conventional, generic, and instructional. **Logical consequences** are those in which students must make right what they have done wrong. The consequence is logically related to the behavior. If students make a mess, they must clean it up. If they willfully damage material, they must replace it. If they speak hurtfully to others, they must practice speaking in ways that are not hurtful.

Conventional consequences are those that are commonly used in practice, such as time-out, removal from the room, and suspension from school. They are rarely logically related to the behavior. Curwin and Mendler suggest modifying conventional consequences so as to increase student commitment. For time out, they suggest that instead of banning the student for a specified length of time, teachers should say something such as "You have chosen time-out. You may return to the group when you are ready to learn."

Generic consequences are reminders, warnings, choosing, and planning that are invoked when misbehavior is noted. Often simple *reminders* are enough to stop misbehavior: "We need to get this work completed." *Warnings* are very firm reminders: "This is the second time I have asked you to get to work. If I have to ask you again, you will need time-out." *Choosing* allows students to select from three or four options a plan for improving their behavior. *Planning*, which Curwin (1992) calls "the most effective consequence that can be used for all rule violations" (p. 78), requires that students plan their own solution to a recurring behavior problem. *Planning* conveys that the teacher has faith in the student's competence. That faith often engenders a degree of commitment. The plan should name specific steps the student will follow and should be written, dated, and signed.

Instructional consequences teach students how to behave properly. Simply knowing what one ought to do does not ensure correct behavior. Some behaviors, such as raising one's hand or speaking courteously, are learned more easily when taught and practiced.

Curwin (1992, pp. 79-80) makes a number of suggestions concerning how teachers should use consequences, such as the following:

- Always implement a consequence when a rule is broken.
- Select the most appropriate consequence from the list of alternatives, taking into account the offense, situation, student involved, and the best means of helping that student.
- State the rule and consequence to the offending student. Nothing more need be said.
- Be private. Only the student(s) involved should hear.
- Do not embarrass the student.
- Do not think of the situation as win-lose. This is not a contest. Do not get involved in a power struggle.
- Control your anger. Be calm and speak quietly but accept no excuses from the student.
- Sometimes it is best to let the student choose the consequence.
- The professional (teacher) always looks for ways to help the client (student).

An **insubordination rule** should be established that removes the student from the classroom when the student refuses to accept an assigned consequence.

Preventing Escalation

When teachers respond to student misbehavior, students often dig in their heels and a contest of wills ensues, with neither side willing to back down. Curwin and Mendler remind teachers that their duty is not to win such contests but to do what they can to help the student. This requires keeping the channels open for rational discussion of problem behavior. That cannot be done if the teacher humiliates, angers, embarrasses, or demeans the student. This point is critical for high-risk students, who are predisposed to responding negatively. Curwin (1992) suggests that teachers do the following toward **preventing escalation** of incipient conflicts:

- Use active listening. Acknowledge and/or paraphrase what students say without agreeing, disagreeing, or expressing value judgments.
- Arrange to speak with the student later. Allow a time for cooling off. It is much easier to have positive discussions after anger has dissipated.
- Keep all communication as private as possible. Students do not want to lose face in front of their peers and so are unlikely to comply with public demands. Nor do teachers like to appear weak in front of the class. When communication is kept private, the chances for productive discussion are much better because egos are not so strongly on the line.
- If a student refuses to accept a consequence, invoke the insubordination rule. Don't use this provision until it is clear the student will not accept the consequence.

Motivating Difficult-to-Manage Students

Rules, consequences, and enforcement are necessary in all classrooms, but the key to better student behavior lies elsewhere—in motivation. Most students make an effort to learn and behave properly in school, whether because they find school interesting, like to please the teacher, or simply want to avoid failure. Such is not the case for students behaviorally at risk. It would be foolish to suggest that a magical set of techniques exists for helping such students. But teachers do know what motivates students in general. Students who are behaviorally at risk have the same general needs and interests as other students, but they have encountered so much failure that they have turned to resistance and misbehavior to bolster their egos. Curwin (1992, pp. 130–144) makes the following suggestions for increasing motivation among students who are behaviorally at risk:

- Select for your lessons as many topics as you can that have personal importance and relevance to the students.
- Set up authentic learning goals—goals that lead to genuine competence that students can display and be proud of.
- Help students interact with the topics in ways that are congruent with their interests and values.

- Involve students actively in lessons. Allow them to use their senses, move about, and talk. Make the lessons as much fun as possible. Lessons needn't be easy if they are important and enjoyable.
- Give students numerous opportunities to take risks and make decisions without fear of failure.
- Show your own genuine energy and interest in the topics being studied. Show that you enjoy working with students. Try to connect personally with them as individuals.
- Each day, do at least one activity that you love. Show pride in your knowledge and ability to convey it to your students. Don't be reluctant to ham it up.
- Make your class activities events that students look forward to. Make them wonder what might happen next.

Dealing with Aggression, Hostility, and Violence

Curwin and Mendler have concluded that students are becoming increasingly aggressive, hostile, and violent, and they are doing so at an earlier age. Teenagers are two and a half times more likely to experience violence than people over age 20. Curwin and Mendler say the increase in violence has occurred in part because society has been rewarding and punishing students in school, home, and community rather than teaching them values—such as that it is wrong to intimidate others, hurt them physically, or destroy their property. A large proportion of students who use violence lack a sense of compassion or remorse and, thus, do not respond to normal discipline techniques. This makes it especially difficult for teachers to work with them productively.

Curwin and Mendler have addressed this problem in their 1997 book *As Tough as Necessary: Countering Violence, Aggression, and Hostility in Our Schools*. They point out that by "as tough as necessary" they do not mean the zero-tolerance tactic now used in many schools. Instead, they mean using "a variety of ways to help aggressive, hostile, and violent children learn alternatives to hurting others" (p. ix). They contend that "behavior change among hardened, antisocial, and angry students cannot occur simply by offering more love, caring, and opportunities for decision making" (p. 16). They say that if schools are to deal with violence, they must adopt schoolwide approaches that (1) teach students how, when threatened or frustrated, to make nonviolent choices that serve them more effectively than do violent choices, (2) model for students nonhostile methods of expressing anger, frustration, and impatience, and (3) emphasize the teaching of values that relate to cooperation, safety, altruism, and remorse.

A Four-Phase Plan for Schools and Educators

Curwin and Mendler suggest a four-phase plan for schools and educators to help students move toward value-guided behavior. The four phases are (1) identifying the core values that the school wishes to emphasize, (2) creating rules and consequences based on the core values identified, (3) modeling the values during interactions with students and staff, and (4) eliminating interventions that violate the core values. The following are some suggestions they offer within each of the four phases.

Identify the Core Values of the School

Curwin and Mendler suggest that each school have faculty, staff, students, and parents work together to specify a set of core values that shows how they want individuals in the school to conduct themselves and relate to each other. A set of core values might include statements such as the following (1997, p. 24):

- School is a place where we solve our problems peacefully.
- School is a place where we protect and look out for one another rather than attack or hurt one another.
- School is a place where we learn we are responsible for what we do.
- School is a place where we learn that my way is not the only way.

Create Rules and Consequences Based on the Core Values

Rules are needed to govern classroom behavior, and those rules should be based on the school's stated values. Whereas the values state broad intentions, rules say exactly what one should and should not do. This can be seen in the following examples (1997, p. 31):

- | <i>Value</i> | <i>Rule</i> |
|---|---|
| ■ School is a place where we protect and look out for one another rather than hurt or attack one another. | ■ No put-downs allowed. |
| ■ School is a place where we solve our problems peacefully. | ■ Keep your hands and feet to yourselves. |

Model Values with Students and Staff Members

It is essential that teachers and administrators continually model behaviors that correspond with the school values. Teachers must express their emotions nonviolently, use positive strategies to resolve conflict with students, and walk away when they receive put-downs from students. Curwin and Mendler (1997, p. 32) suggest the following as helpful to teachers. Individually or in staff meetings write on paper how you want students to express their anger toward you and how you want them to resolve classroom conflicts with you and other students. Then teach your students these techniques and use them yourself in practice.

Eliminate Interventions That Violate Core Values

Teachers everywhere tend to rely on their past experiences when responding to student misbehavior. Their responses often take the form of threats, intimidation, and using students as examples for others. Responses of these types fail to model behavior consistent with school values and tend to produce further conflict. Threats, for example, destroy student comfort in the classroom. If carried out vengefully, they produce a backlash of resentment. If made but not carried out, student behavior worsens, which calls for still more

dire threats that cannot be carried out. Students in turn conclude that it is all right to threaten others, since the teacher does so. That cycle is broken by showing students the dangers of threats and teaching them alternative behaviors.

The same applies to intimidation and using students as examples. Those were mainstay tactics of a majority of teachers years ago and are still evident in many classrooms. When teachers intimidate students, students may cower (or may not), but the students in turn become more likely to treat others in the same way. It is also self-defeating to reprimand one student as an example for others. The resultant humiliation felt by the disciplined student produces a permanent effect. The primary goal of interventions is to help students learn more responsible behavior. We cannot accomplish this through hurtful tactics but instead must model positive, nonviolent behavior, use it when intervening in student behavior, and help students to use it in their interactions with others.

Specific Suggestions for Dealing with Conflict

Teachers who agree with approaches to deter violence still ask the legitimate question, "What specifically do I do when . . . ?" To answer that question, Curwin and Mendler provide many concrete suggestions, such as (1997, p. 66):

- Use privacy, eye contact, and proximity when possible. Speak privately and quietly with the students. This preserves their dignity and takes away the likelihood of their fighting back.
- Indicate to the student politely but clearly what you want. Say "please" and "thank you" (e.g., "Bill, please go to Mr. Keene's room. There's a seat there for you. Come back when you are ready to learn. I hope that doesn't take very long. Thank you, Bill.")
- Tell the student that you see a power struggle brewing that will do no one any good. Defer discussion to a later time. (e.g., "Juan, you are angry and so am I. Rather than have a dispute now, let's calm down and talk later. I'm sure we can help each other out after we cool off. Thanks a lot.")

Techniques for Dealing with Violence in the Classroom

Curwin and Mendler suggest several strategies for teachers and students to use when they encounter violence. These strategies are designed first to help everyone calm down, decide how to proceed, and take positive steps. Teachers should teach the procedures to students and model them in practice. The following are a few of the many techniques suggested (1997, pp. 94–118):

Use the six-step solution: (1) Stop and calm down. Wait a moment, take a deep breath, and relax. (2) Think—quickly explore options and foresee what will happen if you use them. (3) Decide what you want to have happen. (4) Decide on a second solution in case the first doesn't work. (5) Carry out the solution you deem best. (6) Evaluate the results—have you accomplished what you hoped? Will you use the tactic again in similar circumstances?

Solving my problems: First, name the problem, indicating specifically what somebody has said or done. Second, say what you would like to have happen. Third, say what you will do to make things happen as you would like. Fourth, make a backup plan to use in case the first doesn't work. Fifth, carry out the plan.

Learning to have patience: As we grow up we learn that our needs can't always be met when we'd like and that often we have to wait. If we don't learn to have patience, we will feel frustrated and angry because we are not getting what we want when we want it. Learning to be patient requires practice on actions such as walking away from a fight, waiting in line with a smile, and remaining calm when somebody cuts in line.

Wearing an invisible shield: Pretend you are wearing an invisible shield that deflects all bad thoughts and unkind words. It makes you immune to them. You cannot be hurt as long as you are wearing it.

Using words that work: Instead of being provoked into retaliation, you can practice saying things that will stop almost all attacks, such as (1) being polite, using words such as "please" and "thank you," (2) asking if you have done something that has upset the other person, and (3) apologizing if you have offended the person.

Planning for confrontations: Name five situations you recall in which people got into a dispute. Next to each, write down strategies you think would bring the situation calmly to a close. Practice what you would say and do should you find yourself in one of the situations.

Suggestions to Help Teachers Retrain Themselves

It is helpful for teachers to prepare themselves in advance for situations they might encounter. Curwin and Mendler suggest doing the following (1997, p. 71):

- Write down things students do or say that you find irritating.
- Determine why students do those things. What basic needs are they trying to meet? What motivates them?
- What do you presently do when students say or do irritating things?
- Are your current tactics effective in solving the problem?
- What response strategies can you think of that address the reasons for the irritating behavior while at the same time model behavior consistent with school values?
- Practice the strategies beforehand and then put them into practice at the next opportunity.

Suggestions for Working with Challenging Students

Most teachers have to work at times with students who are unusually defiant, hostile, stubborn, offensive, or unmotivated. To help those teachers be more successful, Mendler and Curwin (1999) developed an approach outlined in their book *Dignity with Discipline for Challenging Youth*. A cornerstone of the approach is helping teachers make changes in themselves that enable them better to meet the needs of their students. In this work, Curwin and Mendler make many practical suggestions for dealing with three major problem areas—lack of student motivation, attention problems, and gang-related behavior.

You have seen that *Discipline with Dignity* urges teachers to treat all students with dignity while emphasizing student responsibility. For working with challenging students, Curwin and Mendler add or reemphasize these suggestions:

1. *Take steps to overcome your natural resistance to working with challenging youth.* Adopt the stance that we teachers are responsible for teaching all students. Although we may not be successful with all of them, we must treat all as being worthy of our best effort. Take advantage of the fact that difficult students offer us opportunities to educate for better behavior in all aspects of life. Think of discipline as instruction for such behavior change. As a point of departure, identify the reasons for student misbehavior, do what you can to correct the causes in your class, and teach students about the causes and how to deal with them. Curwin and Mendler say students misbehave because they want to be noticed and feel connected, want to hide feelings of inadequacy, are impulsive, desire fun and stimulation, see little connection between school and life, do not empathize well with others, and need to express anger.

2. *Develop a repertoire of effective discipline strategies and be patient and persistent.* Think of discipline strategies as falling into three categories—crisis (e.g., fighting), short term (stopping misbehavior while preserving the dignity of teacher and student), and long term (working to meet the needs of students over time.) Effective crisis strategies call for specific plans of action you will take when crises arise. Short-term strategies include I-messages, PEP (privacy, eye contact, proximity), PEP notes or cards with words or phrases of appreciation or correction, privacy 3-step (privately set a limit, offer a choice, or give a consequence), and LAAD tactics (listening, acknowledging, agreeing, deferring action). Ongoing and longer-term strategies include remedying the causes of misbehavior and reframing the context in which we consider challenging students, using affirmative rather than negative labels, such as “sticks up for himself” rather than “defiant,” or “has yet to find the value in lessons” rather than “lazy.”

Other long-term discipline strategies include creating a caring classroom, teaching student self-control, teaching student concern for others, setting clearly defined limits on behavior, emphasizing responsibility more than obedience, teaching conflict-resolution skills that students can apply, and helping students network with others, such as classroom peers, older students, staff members, volunteers, and mentors. It is important that we always look for common ground with troublesome students and maintain the conviction that all students can change. One of the great challenges is to stay personally involved with each student without taking obnoxious, irritating, disruptive, and hurtful behavior personally. We are reminded that 70 percent of school misbehavior has its roots at home rather than at school. It is our obligation to break the cycle of hostility and aggression by not retaliating in kind.

3. *Always strive for responsible student behavior rather than mere obedience.* Do this by establishing sensible limits on behavior and allowing students choices within these limits, such as writing or drawing as a way of expressing anger. Help students learn from the consequences of their behavior and, in the process, develop a commitment to change. In all cases, place more emphasis on motivation than on discipline.

4. *Use tactics that tend to overcome student resistance.* Such tactics include personal interest, personal interaction, kindness, helpfulness, encouragement, acknowledgment of effort, and use of challenge rather than threat. Check each strategy you consider against the following:

- Does it promote dignity or humiliation?
- Does it teach responsibility or obedience?
- Does it motivate students to learn?
- Does it foster commitment?

Strengths of Curwin and Mendler's *Discipline with Dignity*

Most teachers have found ways to deal with minor behavior infractions such as talking, speaking out, chewing gum, and failing to complete homework. But all teachers dread dealing with students whose behavior is so unacceptable they not only disrupt learning but also threaten others. Such behaviors make teachers feel trapped and overwhelmed. Curwin and Mendler have provided realistic help for working with such students and for reducing behavior that is hostile, aggressive, and violent.

Initiating Curwin and Mendler's *Discipline with Dignity*

Suppose you teach a class that contains several chronically misbehaving students, and you feel the Curwin and Mendler model can help you deal with them more effectively. How do you get it in place and make it operational?

Before using the approaches Curwin and Mendler propose, you must subscribe to four principles that support their model. The first of these principles, and the most important, is that student dignity must be preserved. Students will do all in their power to protect their dignity. They don't want to appear stupid, feel incapable, or be denigrated, especially in front of their peers. When faced with a threat, students, especially the chronically misbehaved, use antisocial behavior to counter it. You must be willing to guard against threatening students' dignity, even when they threaten yours.

A second principle is that dealing with misbehavior is an important part of teaching. You are in the classroom to help your students. Those whose behavior puts them at risk of failure especially need your help, though their behavior may suggest that they want nothing to do with you. The best thing you can do for them is to find ways to encourage prosocial behavior.

A third principle is that lasting results are achieved only over time. There are no quick-fix solutions to chronic misbehavior, but by finding ways to motivate students and help them learn, you will enable many to make genuine improvement.

A fourth principle is that responsibility is more important than obedience. The ability to weigh facts and make good decisions is far more valuable in students' lives than obedience to demands. You must be willing to put students into situations in which they can make decisions about matters that concern them, be willing to allow them to fail, and then help them try again. Progressively, they will learn to behave in ways that are best for themselves and others.

Curwin and Mendler (1999, pp. 13–16) identify 12 points that provide functionality to *Discipline with Dignity*.

1. Let students know what you need.
2. Provide instruction at levels that match students' abilities.
3. Listen to what students are thinking and feeling.
4. Use humor.
5. Vary your style of presentation.
6. Offer choices.
7. Refuse to accept excuses.
8. Legitimize behavior you cannot stop.
9. Use hugs and pats when communicating with students.
10. Be responsible for yourself and allow students to be responsible for themselves.
11. Accept that you will not effectively help every student.
12. Start fresh every day.

You will have given much thought to the kind of classroom you want and how you want your students to behave. When you first meet the students, spend as much time as necessary discussing goals for the class, activities that might be helpful, and class behavior that will improve enjoyment and accomplishment for everyone. In those discussions, teacher and students should agree to class rules and consequences. It is important that students contribute to those decisions and agree to abide by them. The rules and consequences should be written out, dated, and signed by teacher and students. The document should be posted in the room and copies sent to parents and administrators.

From the outset you must seek to structure lessons to help students be active and successful. It is far better that students engage in activities they find interesting than be dragged perfunctorily through the standard curriculum. Your own energy, enjoyment of learning, and pride in teaching will affect students positively, while your willingness to help without confrontation will slowly win them over.

KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS PRESENTED IN THIS CHAPTER

The following terms are central to the Curwin and Mendler model of discipline. Check yourself concerning their meanings:

dimensions and principles of discipline: prevention, action, resolution, no short-term solutions

instructional consequences
conventional consequences
generic consequences

logical consequences
violence
social contract

insubordination rule
behaviorally at risk
challenging youth

sense of hope
dignity
responsibility

preventing escalation

SELECTED SEVEN—SUMMARY SUGGESTIONS FROM CURWIN AND MENDLER

Richard Curwin and Allen Mendler suggest that you emphasize the following, as well as their many other suggestions:

- 1 Safeguard and support student dignity in all class matters. Students make every effort to preserve dignity, even if doing so requires misbehavior.
- 2 Do what you can to foster students' sense of hope that they will benefit from education. Students who have lost hope usually don't care how they behave.
- 3 Approach discipline as a very important part of teaching. It can teach students how to conduct themselves in ways that bring success in life.
- 4 Do not rely on short-term solutions to behavior problems. They are rarely effective.
- 5 Focus on student responsibility, not obedience, as the primary goal of discipline.
- 6 Use personal attention and good teaching to experience success with students who are considered to be chronic troublemakers.
- 7 In accordance with suggestions provided, prepare yourself to respond effectively to students who are hostile, disobedient, and inconsiderate.

CONCEPT CASES

■ CASE 1 *Kristina Will Not Work*

Kristina, in Mr. Jake's class, is quite docile. She never disrupts class and does little socializing with other students. But despite Mr. Jake's best efforts, Kristina rarely completes an assignment. She doesn't seem to care. She is simply there, putting forth virtually no effort. *How would Curwin and Mendler deal with Kristina?*

They would suggest the following sequence of interventions: Consider that Kristina's behavior might be due to severe feelings of incapability. She may be protecting herself by not trying. Relate to Kristina as an individual. Chat with her informally about her life and interests. Find topics that interest Kristina and build some class lessons around them. Assign Kristina individual work that helps her become more competent in her areas of special interest. Have a private conversation with Kristina. Ask for her thoughts about how you could make school more interesting for her. Show her you are interested and willing to help. As Kristina begins to work

and participate, continue private chats that help her see herself as successful.

■ CASE 2 *Sara Cannot Stop Talking*

Sara is a pleasant girl who participates in class activities and does most, though not all, of her assigned work. She cannot seem to refrain from talking to classmates, however. Her teacher, Mr. Gonzales, has to speak to her repeatedly during lessons, to the point that he often becomes exasperated and loses his temper. *What suggestions would Curwin and Mendler give Mr. Gonzales to help with Sara's misbehavior?*

■ CASE 3 *Joshua Clowns and Intimidates*

Larger and louder than his classmates, Joshua always wants to be the center of attention, which he accomplishes through a combination of clowning and intimidation. He makes wise remarks, talks back (smilingly) to

the teacher, utters a variety of sound-effect noises such as automobile crashes and gunshots, and makes limitless sarcastic comments and put-downs of his classmates. Other students will not stand up to him, apparently fearing his verbal and physical aggression. His teacher, Miss Pearl, has come to her wit's end. *What do you find in Curwin and Mendler's work that might help Miss Pearl deal with Joshua?*

■ CASE 4 *Tom Is Hostile and Defiant*

Tom has appeared to be in his usual foul mood ever since arriving in class. On his way to sharpen his pencil, he bumps into Frank, who complains. Tom tells him loudly to shut up. Miss Baines, the teacher, says, "Tom, go back to your seat." Tom wheels around and says heatedly, "I'll go when I'm damned good and ready!" *How would Curwin and Mendler have Miss Baines deal with Tom?*

QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. In your journal, enter ideas from *Discipline with Dignity* that apply to the five principles of building a personal system of discipline.
2. In small groups, conduct practice situations in which classmates act as students who make hurtful comments to you, the teacher. Begin with the examples given here and explore new ones you have seen or think might occur. Take turns being the teacher and responding to the comments in some of the ways Curwin and Mendler suggest.

Example 1

Teacher: Jonathan, I'd like to see that work finished before the period ends today.

Jonathan: [Sourly] Fine. Why don't you take it and finish it yourself if that's what you want?

Teacher:

Example 2

Teacher: Desirée, that's the second time you've broken our rule about profanity. I'd like to speak with you after class.

Desirée: No thanks. I've seen enough of your scrawny tail for one day.

Teacher:

Example 3

Teacher: Marshall, I'd like for you to get back to work, please.

Marshall: [Says nothing but nonchalantly makes a derogatory face at the teacher. Other students see it and snicker.]

Teacher:

Compose additional occurrences. Practice deescalating the confrontations without becoming defensive, fighting back, or withdrawing your request.

3. One of the suggestions given for motivating reluctant students was "Make your class activities events that students look forward to. Make them wonder what might happen next." For a selected grade level, brainstorm ways of complying with this suggestion.
4. Many suggestions were made for anticipating and dealing with violent, aggressive, or hostile behavior. What would you do to prepare yourself for situations involving such behavior?

YOU ARE THE TEACHER

Continuation High School Photography Lab

You teach photography lab, an elective class, in a continuation high school attended by students who have been unsuccessful for behavioral reasons in regular high school settings. Many of the students want to attend this particular school, as it is located in what they consider their turf. Some of the students are chemically depen-

dent and/or come from dysfunctional homes. The photography lab class enrolls 15 students, all of whom are on individual study contracts.

Typical Occurrences

As students begin work, you busy yourself with a number of different tasks such as setting out needed materials,

giving advice on procedures, handing out quizzes for students who have completed contracts, examining photographs, and so forth. You see Tony sitting and staring into space. You ask him if he needs help. He shrugs and looks away. You ask him if he has brought his materials to work on. He shakes his head. You tell Tony he can start on a new part of his contract. He doesn't answer. You ask what's the matter. When Tony doesn't respond, Mike mutters, "He's blasted, man." At that moment, you hear heated words coming from the darkroom. You enter and find two students squaring off, trying to stare each other down. You ask what the problem is but get no reply. You tell the boys to leave the darkroom and go back to their seats. Neither makes the first move. As tension grows, another student intervenes and says, "Come on, you can settle it later. Be cool." You call the office and inform the counselor of the incident. The boys involved hear you do so and gaze at you insolently. The class settles back to work, and for the remainder of the period you circulate among them, providing assistance, stifling horseplay, urging that they move ahead in their contracts, and reminding everyone that they only have a limited amount of time in which to get their work done. From time to time you glance at Tony, who does no work during the period. You ask Tony again if something is bothering

him. He shakes his head. You then ask him if he wants to transfer out of the class, since it is elective. Tony says, "No, man, I like it here." "That's fine," you say, "but this is not dream time. You do your work, or else we will find you another class. You understand?" "Sure, I understand." You turn away, but from the corner of your eye you are sure you see Tony's middle finger aimed in your direction.

Conceptualizing a Strategy

If you followed the suggestions of Richard Curwin and Allen Mendler, what would you conclude or do with regard to the following?

1. Preventing the problem from occurring in the first place.
2. Putting a clear end to the misbehavior now.
3. Involving other or all students in addressing the situation.
4. Maintaining student dignity and good personal relations.
5. Using follow-up procedures that would prevent the recurrence of the misbehavior.
6. Using the situation to help the students develop a sense of greater responsibility and self-control.

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