

# DOINGWHATWORKS



## Presentation

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

### Modifying the Classroom Environment to Reduce Behavior Problems

July 2009

Topic: Reducing Behavior Problems

Practice: Modify Environment

#### Highlights

- Classroom environment has a profound effect on student behavior, attitudes, and ability to learn. Classroom environment encompasses the physical arrangement of the classroom (seating, lighting, layout, posters) as well as classroom management techniques, rules, routines and regulations.
- Involving the class in developing classroom behavior expectations early in the school year and revisiting those expectations regularly creates a space where students feel safe, cared for, and respected. In this kind of environment, they are better able to focus and learn.
- It is important for the teacher to model the classroom behaviors and routines and provide ample opportunities for practice to make sure students understand what is expected of them. When students improve their behavior or act in accordance with class rules, teachers can provide praise and rewards to reinforce this type of behavior.

## Full Transcript

### Slide 1: Welcome

Welcome to the overview on modifying the classroom environment to reduce behavior problems.

### Slide 2: Ms. Rosenthal's observation

Vice Principal Rosenthal finds classroom observations to be a little depressing. Everywhere she looks, teachers are engaged in discipline instead of instruction, students are acting out or detached and distracted. She knows her teaching staff, and knows how committed and talented they are. She knows the kids, too, and knows that every child has the ability to learn. "If the problem isn't the staff, and isn't the kids," she thinks, "what needs to change?"

### Slide 3: Positive classroom environment

Many things can affect a student's capacity for learning, and while there is little a school can do about a student's environment off-campus, a positive classroom climate can have an enormous impact on student learning. Making behavior expectations clear early in the school year and revisiting those expectations regularly creates a space where students feel safe, cared for, and respected by others. In this kind of environment they are better able to focus and learn.

### Slide 4: Communication and modeling

To promote a sense of responsibility among students, teachers can work with them to identify a few classroom behavior rules. Teachers need to clearly explain what these behaviors look like and provide reminders throughout the school year.

When teachers continually model positive behaviors, students are given concrete examples of appropriate behavior. For example, teachers can model the vocabulary and respectful tone they would like students to use when addressing their fellow students, school staff, or other adults. They can also provide practice opportunities through role play and regularly provide feedback to reinforce appropriate behavior in their classroom.

### Slide 5: Physical environment

The way a classroom is arranged can impact student behavior. Clutter and disarray can send the message that "order is not kept in this classroom." Alternatively, a clean, organized classroom can signal that it's

time to focus and work. Rooms can be set up in ways that reinforce awareness of positive behavior, such as a corner dedicated to conflict resolution or a section of wall for acknowledgment of good class citizenship and/or academic achievement. Where students sit can also affect their behavior. For example, some students may get easily distracted if seated next to high traffic areas such as the door or the classroom library.

#### Slide 6: Routines and practices

Even before the school year begins, teachers should identify parts of the day that take away time from instruction so that students can get organized. These may include the first half hour of the school day, transitions from whole class to small group activities, and time spent in getting and putting away books and other materials. Transition periods have a great deal of potential for disruptive behavior, and can become very time consuming. Maintaining consistent, orderly routines can be highly effective at minimizing “off-track” time. Teaching students how to signal when they want to speak, go to the restroom, or ask for help is one way to minimize noise interruptions.” Specifying orderly class exit and entrance procedures, establishing standardized sequences for small group task assignments, and maintaining well-specified places for materials can keep things moving swiftly and with a minimum of incident. Teachers should establish routines for these transitions and practice them with students early in the school year.

#### Slide 7: Varying instructional methods

In some cases, students act out because they are bored. To engage students, teachers can incorporate hands-on activities and opportunities for students to get up from their seats. They can spice up their lessons with new materials such as visual aids, manipulatives, art, music, and science experiments.

Another common reason for disruptive behavior is instructional pace that is too fast or too slow relative to students’ level of knowledge and skills. Differentiating instruction by providing tasks aligned with student ability can help increase student engagement. Another way to help students remain interested and engaged throughout the class period is embedding tasks that involve group work or peer tutoring.

#### Slide 8: Rewarding the positive

Research has shown that giving attention to positive behavior through praise and reinforcement can result in increased positive behavior. Teachers may choose to reward a single student or a team of students or the entire classroom for specific instances of good behavior. This kind of feedback signals that teachers are paying attention to—and providing rewards for—good behavior. It also highlights role models for peers and provides examples of how the teacher expects all students to behave inside and outside the classroom.

Slide 9: A changing school

Ms. Rosenthal worked with her teachers and staff on a consistent set of behavior guidelines, and had teachers spend time role-playing different scenarios to practice focusing on positive student behavior, even in the midst of a disruption. She worked with individual teachers on identifying physical issues in their classrooms, and several of them have made significant changes in how their rooms are arranged. She looks forward to classroom observations now and can feel the change in attitude everywhere she goes.

Slide 10: Learn more

To learn more about modifying the classroom environment to reduce behavior problems, please explore the additional resources on the [Doing What Works](#) website.