

Six Simple Rules

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Classroom management is not simple. All teachers must have the talent or learn it. Few of today's students accept what the teacher says. Fewer still obey without question. Part of the reason for this situation is the sad state of affairs in most families. It is no longer a simple go home, eat supper, do homework, relax and head for bed routine.

Most students are involved in extracurricular activities. They eat on the run. They don't get enough sleep and there is never enough time to get homework done. Many parents are not available for either quantity or quality time. Many students are so tired; they just can't seem to concentrate on the work at hand. I used to wonder what I could do that would make a difference to their reaction to life in general and to school in particular.

Some students are Patrick's - only child, badly spoiled, and convinced that he can always get his way by feigning an asthma attack.

Others are Molly's - quiet wallflowers whose main hope is to remain unnoticed. They feel incapable of facing any new challenge.

Still others are Mike's - angry as hornets - ready to sting anyone in their path. They are burning with the certain knowledge that they are not getting what they deserve.

"If I ignore the teacher perhaps she won't call on me," thinks the shy child with the drooping head, as she tries to hide in the shadow of the child in front of her. "If I look really agitated she sure won't call upon me," thinks the breakfastless child, who had torn out the door leaving screaming parents behind. "If I stare right at her, then she will ignore me," hopes the student who didn't review his lessons last night. And the list goes on.

The wise teacher surveys her class and reads the weather forecast as she enters the room: twenty students means twenty different weather reports. The weather may be rough today, she thinks as she lifts up her class in silent prayer. There is only one solution. Let the Lord run the show. Acceptable classroom behaviour is not an accident. The following simple strategies usually result in a cooperative classroom.

Rule #1 - The first antidote to classroom problems is daily prayer for each student and for each family involved in the school. As students learn that their teacher prays for them they begin to share their prayer needs.

Rule #2 - Know your students. Patrick had been his usual, talk instead of work, self all morning. I decided that it was time for a more than a repetitious 'Patrick please be quiet,' I sent him out to the hall. He kept on with the verbiage from his new position. As soon as the other students were busy, I stepped out into the hall. I looked at Patrick. "As I see it", I said, "you have two choices. You can get back to work or you can go home." He was taken aback by the options. This was no fun at all. In the school he had come from, he got to sit in the hall all day and torment other students as they passed by. I had dared

to burst his bubble. He looked up at me and remarked, "I'm going to have an asthma attack!" "Go ahead," I replied. "You will just hyperventilate and pass out. When you come to, you will have the same two choices - Get back to work or I'll call your Mom to come and get you." I knew Patrick well enough that I was certain of the outcome. He sat on the step for a long minute. Then he stood up and went back to class. I had won out. He never threatened to have an asthma attack again.

Rule #3 - Make your responses predictable. Students thrive best in a situation where they know what to expect. If the teacher changes the rules every day, it confuses the students. Molly's shy little 'I love you teacher' might have been a mystery, if I hadn't taken the time to find out what her home life was like. I was the one dependable adult in her young life. Her parents were so busy with their own lives that they had little time for Molly. As a result, she had withdrawn into herself. As she came to realize that I would be there for her, she gradually opened up and became more able to handle challenges.

Rule #4 - Stick to your guns. Mike's anger was generated by parents at war with each other and grandparents that supported his every whim. These adults continuously argued about what was best for Mike. Mike learned to manipulate those four adults. He had also learned that if telling didn't work, temper would. He found me to be a difficult challenge. I didn't back down when he ranted and threw things. He took a whole term before he admitted defeat.

Rule #5 - Have students keep journals. They are allowed to write anything they like in the journal. Often it is an opportunity to communicate their troubles to me in a non threatening way. I get to think about the situation and respond appropriately to the concerns. Many a hurricane has been thwarted by asking students to write a daily journal.

Rule #6 - Pray continually. More miracles are wrought by prayer than by any other activity. I find it necessary to lift up my soul to God's leading many times a day. This walking talk with the Lord is my source of energy. He knows what storms I will face each day and He is always ready for the weather.