

School-wide behavioural expectations

“... the time you spend teaching your discipline plan and your rules of conduct is an investment that pays huge dividends in increased learning, on-task student behaviour and increased job satisfaction ...”

– Mark Boynton and Christine Boynton, *The Educator's Guide to Preventing and Solving Discipline Problems*

A school-wide approach to positive behaviour supports encourages staff to develop, implement and monitor school and classroom behavioural expectations in response to the needs of students, staff and the school community. Carefully chosen and clearly understood school-wide expectations:

- use clear language stated in a positive manner
- are designed to support academic achievement
- are present, visible and understood throughout the school
- include all students
- target specific types of behaviour and areas of the school and times of day
- are known and understood by all students and adults in the school
- ensure consistent reinforcement of positive student behaviour
- create a framework that guides decision making
- create a culture of consistency and encourage staff members to work collaboratively.

Clearly stated expectations communicate to students what school staff want to see. In addition, they guide student behaviour and create a focus that strengthens the effectiveness of staff monitoring.

Schools must develop and secure agreement from all school staff regarding school-wide behavioural expectations before the start of the school year. Ideally, these expectations are taught on the first day of school and positive behaviour is reinforced throughout the school year.

Developing behavioural expectations

In addition to specific behavioural expectations, school staff need to identify overarching expectations that cross over multiple settings. For example, one school used these three statements to summarize the school rules:

- Be safe.
- Respect yourself and others.
- Be responsible.

“Be safe” implies a feeling of social, emotional and physical safety, and creates a feeling of belonging. “Respect yourself” encourages students to consider their own safety and their own learning. “Respect others” promotes cooperation with teacher requests, and positive peer and adult relationships. “Be responsible” addresses goals such as being ready for class, completing work, and keeping the school and classroom clean and orderly.

Many schools make a list of school areas such as hallways, entranceways and playgrounds, and then identify specific behavioural expectations for each. For example:

- Walk, don’t run in the hallways.
- When entering the school, proceed directly to lockers or classrooms in an orderly fashion.
- Play only in safe, designated areas.

Some schools may decide to focus only on the most important expectations.

One elementary school developed these expectations for hallway behaviour.

Setting: Hallways

School-wide expectations

Respect Yourself

Respect Others

Respect Property

Related behaviour

- Walk with your head up to keep safe.
- Keep to the right when walking.
- Keep hands to self.
- Give other students room to move past you safely. Use a quiet voice.
- Put litter in trash basket.
- Look at hallway displays, but don’t touch.

Another elementary school used four school-wide expectations as a framework for outlining appropriate behaviour on the playground.

Setting: Playground

School-wide expectations

1. Be Responsible
2. Cooperate
3. Be Safe
4. Be Respectful

Related behaviour

- Return equipment to supply box.
- Use trash cans.
- Wait your turn in games.
- Share equipment with others.
- Line up when you hear the bell.
- Keep hands and feet to self.
- Walk in the breezeway.
- Use your problem-solving words.

Use positively stated expectations⁵

Research indicates that students are more likely to comply with “Do” requests. “Walk in the hallway” is more likely to promote compliance than “Don’t run in the hallway.” A negatively stated expectation may even prompt the behaviour you are trying to discourage. Also, teachers can give positive feedback when they see behaviour that relates to a positively stated expectation.

Students need to understand what the behaviour looks like. For example, “Students will *walk* in the hallway” is clearer than “Students will *behave* in the hallway.”

When teaching a specific behavioural skill, it may be helpful to identify and describe examples of what the behaviour is *not*. Use negative examples cautiously and always end the session by describing, modelling and practising the positive version of the behaviour.

Communicating and teaching expectations

Once behavioural expectations are identified, the school must consistently and clearly communicate these expectations to students, staff and parents. When asked about rules and expectations, any student or adult in the school should be able to provide a consistent answer. If students can’t quickly state what is expected, they won’t know what to do. If the adults in the school agree upon and can state all specific behavioural expectations, minor inappropriate behaviour will diminish significantly.

5. Adapted with permission from Sopris West Educational Services. *Best Behavior: Building Positive Behavior Support in Schools* by Jeff Sprague © 2005, pp. 46–47.

Staff can communicate behavioural expectations in a number of ways. For example:

- Put up posters listing behavioural expectations in student-friendly language. These positive messages focus the whole school community on targeted goals.
- Plan lessons that all teachers can use to teach and practise the behavioural expectations. Arrange to take classes to the particular area involved and practise the expectations.
- Involve parents through classroom newsletters, frequent positive home–school communications and information evenings. When parents are actively involved, students receive more consistent messages, and there is increased reinforcement when they meet expectations.

Using a step-by-step approach

Following is an example of a step-by-step approach to communicating and teaching a specific hallway behavioural expectation: Maintaining a reasonable noise level.

1. Post school-wide behavioural expectations in the hallways. For example: “Use quiet, ‘inside’ voices.”
2. Discuss the behavioural expectations in the classroom.
3. Demonstrate “loud voices” and “quiet voices” so students learn to identify the difference.
4. Model and practise this behaviour in the hallway.
5. Encourage and reinforce this behaviour in the hallways throughout the school day. Correct students as necessary.
6. Measure the impact of the systematic intervention by comparing baseline data (e.g., noise levels before intervention) with current hallway behaviour.



Consider developing a template that all staff can use to communicate about behavioural expectations. *Tool 2: School Settings Template* in Appendix A describes a way to organize this information. An Alberta school developed a similar organizer (as illustrated on the following page) and included it in its school handbook.

School-wide Behavioural Expectations

	Be organized	Be cooperative	Be kind	Be safe
Playground	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respond promptly to bells Bring in equipment and belongings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listen to all supervisors Respect others' space, property and feelings Take turns Choose teams fairly Follow game rules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use encouraging words instead of teasing words Include others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follow playground rules Stay in perimeter Think before you act Hands to yourself
Hallway/ Bootroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eat in assigned areas and at assigned times Keep boot racks, cubbies, hooks and lockers neat Lock up personal property 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enjoy hallway displays, but don't touch 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use positive language Be courteous 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep hands, feet and objects to self Walk Older students yield to younger students Walk to your right
Classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be on time and prepared for class Keep desk area tidy Complete assigned tasks in a timely manner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talk and work quietly Work as a team Ask permission to leave Listen to all supervisors Let others learn without interruption Respect school property and the property of teachers and other students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use positive and encouraging language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wear shoes Walk Keep hands and feet to self
Cafeteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be prepared to place order Have money ready Sit where assigned Keep eating area clean 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use table manners Clean up after yourself Treat cafeteria workers with respect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use polite language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eat your OWN lunch Use microwaves safely Throw away your garbage Clean up spills
Computer Lab	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only print school-related material Leave your area neat and tidy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use Internet only as directed by supervisor Share equipment as directed Respect equipment and other people's work Keep food and/or drink out of lab Wear headsets when sound is on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use appropriate language when communicating with others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only visit appropriate Web sites Use lab only when supervised by an adult
Gym	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be ready on time Return equipment to proper location Wear proper gym clothes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include others Show good sportsmanship Wait for directions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be encouraging Be kind about both winning and losing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Play by agreed-upon rules Use equipment properly Follow directions
Library	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Push in chairs Keep food or drink out of library 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Return materials to shelf Use computers properly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use a quiet voice Respect property Return borrowed material/equipment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Walk Use only when supervised

One school that wanted to reduce noise in the hallways used decibel meters to measure baseline noise and then posted intervention results throughout the school and in the school newsletter. At another school, students prompted each other to be quiet in the hallway and staff reported perceptions that hallway noise was significantly reduced.

Team Leader's Story

We made a floor plan of our school and used office referral data and teacher observations to identify problem areas or “hot spots” such as the boot rooms, washrooms, hallways, playground, library and telephone area. The team went to those areas, walked around and noted the types of things that could happen. The team then developed behavioural expectations and tips for teaching these expectations.

We used the acronym STARS as a framework for talking about and teaching the behavioural expectations:

- for Safe and caring
- for Teamwork
- for Accountability
- for Respect
- for Success.

The team also developed sample lesson plans to help classroom teachers share and practise these expectations with the students.

We encourage teachers to review the rules for common areas throughout the year. Now our students will tell you that STARS are the school rules.

– Team leader, urban elementary/junior high school

Striving for consistency

Consistency makes a difference. Students need to know that:

- behavioural expectations are consistent from one class or setting to another
- if a behaviour is unacceptable in one school setting, it is unacceptable throughout the school
- all adults in the school will reinforce similar positive behaviour and correct similar negative behaviour.

Reactive approaches that rely on reprimands and punishment actually make problem behaviour worse, because staff are giving most of their attention to inappropriate behaviour. Communication needs to be clear and all staff need to have the skills and commitment required to consistently and proactively support positive behaviour throughout the school.