> "Even the most skilled [school staffs] need to include clearly defined and articulated consequences within [their school] discipline plan. Although necessary, consequences should be the least-used component of the plan."
>
> – Mark Boynton and Christine Boynton, *The Educator's Guide to Preventing and Solving Discipline Problems*

Students learn to comply with school-wide expectations and routines though direct and *differential* feedback about the acceptability of their behaviour. School staff employ differential feedback when they provide clear limits, use positive reinforcement and give corrective feedback to make the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour obvious to students. Effective feedback is given consistently across school staff, throughout the school day and across school settings.

Simply punishing specific types of behaviour may not result in long-term behaviour change or help students to learn new behaviours and skills. Research shows that punishing problem behaviour without a school-wide positive support system results in increased:

- aggression
- avoidance
- vandalism
- truancy
- early school leaving (Mayer and Sulzer-Azaroff 1991; Skiba, Peterson and Williams 1997).[8]

In addition to rewards and reinforcement, a school-wide system needs a continuum of fair and predictable consequences for negative behaviour. The consequences for minor types of negative behaviour can be natural and easily implemented procedures such as low-key corrective feedback. For more serious negative behaviour, the consequences involve more comprehensive and intensive procedures that require advance planning for individual students.

---

8. Adapted with permission from Sopris West Educational Services. *Best Behavior: Building Positive Behavior Support in Schools* by Jeff Sprague © 2005, p. 26.

Examples of corrective consequences:

- giving corrective feedback
- completing self-reflection reports
- removing or withdrawing reinforcement
- making restitution
- communicating with parents
- after-class problem-solving sessions
- office referrals
- alternatives to suspension.

Giving corrective feedback

Generally, the continuum of negative consequences begins with corrective feedback, that can include:

1. taking students aside and, as much as possible, avoiding reprimands or embarrassment in front of others
2. describing the problem behaviour in a calm, nonjudgemental way
3. encouraging students to describe positive behaviour that would have been more appropriate
4. (if necessary) prompting them with a specific reminder
5. asking them to commit to that positive behaviour
6. thanking them for their attention.

Encouraging self-reflection

Self-reflection refers to sending a student out of the classroom for a time to reflect on his or her actions and make a written plan for better choices in the future.

Through written self-analysis, students think about:

1. how they feel they contributed to the conflict
2. how they feel others contributed
3. how they believe it should be resolved
4. how they can stop it from happening again
5. their final agreement relative to the incident.

Self-reflection can take place immediately after a negative behaviour occurs, and it is easy to implement. It can serve as a powerful warning, and it gives students a chance to calm down. It often eliminates the need for an office referral.

To make this approach work, have a supervised area where students can go as required, and have a receiving teacher available to:

- accept students as they arrive
- monitor their completion of a self-reflection process
- track referrals.

Staff should work together to set up a self-reflection system, develop behaviour reflection forms and identify which kinds of negative behaviours are best addressed in this way (by analyzing data collected throughout the process).

Tool 4: Behaviour Reflection A and *Tool 5: Behaviour Reflection B* in Appendix A are sample templates of forms for students to complete.

Removing or withholding preferred activities

Removing or withholding preferred activities (sometimes called "response cost") is a logical consequence that can sometimes be administered quickly and efficiently. For example, students who fight or engage in name calling during a soccer game at recess might receive the following consequences.

- The supervising teacher denies these students access to soccer during the next recess.
- During that recess, a staff member works with the students to identify and practise what good sportsmanship looks and sounds like.
- Other school staff are informed of this event so that follow-through will be reinforced consistently.

Making restitution

Negative behaviour, particularly treating others unkindly, may provide an opportunity to teach students how to repair damage they have done to someone else. Teachers and students can work together to create a list of ways to make up for mistakes that hurt others (sometimes called a "caring menu").

51

This approach offers students choices and teaches them how to say "I'm sorry" in an individualistic rather than a prescriptive way. Students may be able to connect saying "sorry" with an action and a change in their behaviour.

One elementary school created this caring menu.

- Write a note.

- Draw a picture.

- Help with a project or chore.

- Share a book.

- Play a game.

- Make a card.

The school displayed these examples on a poster. Then, when students violated the school rule of "Be kind to others," they chose one of the options on the menu and followed through on it.

Communicating with parents

Communication with parents can be both a positive reinforcement and a negative consequence.

Following are some suggestions about contacting parents.

- Develop a systematic, school-wide system for contacting parents in the event of problem behaviour. Strive for consistent parent contact for rule infractions so the process is perceived to be fair.

- Provide an objective description of the behaviour, not a judgement about the student.

- Suggest that parents discuss the behaviour with their child and communicate an expectation of more positive choices in the future.

- Avoid implying that the parents should punish the child at home, or make him or her behave.

- Communicate the idea that school staff and parents can work as partners to help the student reduce negative behaviour and succeed in school.

After-class problem-solving session

After-school and lunch hour detentions are challenging to manage, and they may have a number of unintended results. However, in some cases individual students will benefit from staying after school or during the lunch hour for a collaborative and solution-focused problem-solving session.

A problem-solving session involves these steps.[9]

1. Focus on the solution.

2. Agree on the goal.

3. Agree on the conditions that contribute to the problem or cause it to continue.

4. Agree on a single task, skill or behaviour that the student can work on.

Office referrals

An effective office referral system is a critical component of a school-wide discipline system. Although schools need to record all discipline issues, office referrals should be reserved for only the most serious and visible incidents. They should be the exception rather than the rule.

Office referrals as a data-gathering system

The main purpose of an office referral system is to provide critical and contextual data for decision making, motivation and evaluation. School-wide, classroom and individual student data on office referrals can be used to support teaching and learning.

Staff can review where, when and how often problem behaviour occurs on a daily, monthly or annual basis. They can then use this information to make their interventions more specific. Armed with information about which students are displaying how many problem behaviours, staff can take action before the problems intensify.

Schools are increasingly adopting practices that decrease the effort and technical complexity involved in data management. Many schools are using software programs that facilitate data input, summaries and displays.

---

9. Adapted from Patricia Sequeira Belvel and Maya Marcia Jordan, *Rethinking Classroom Management: Strategies for Prevention, Intervention, and Problem Solving*, p. 199, copyright 2003 by Corwin Press, Inc. Adapted by permission of Corwin Press, Inc.

Many schools have adopted guidelines such as the following to help make office-referral data meaningful and user-friendly.

- Regularly ask a limited number of key evaluation questions.
- Collect only data that is linked to these questions.
- Review office-referral data before selecting new interventions or modifying current interventions.
- Communicate regularly with staff on this topic.

A system of collecting and reviewing school-wide, classroom and/or individual student data on office referrals helps to make interventions:

- more contextually relevant
- more aligned with problem behaviours of concern
- more likely to improve students' behaviour and teachers' effectiveness.

Sending students to the office

An effective office-referral process is based on agreed-upon criteria for sending students to the office. The school administrator then monitors all referrals, identifies patterns and looks for ways to support teachers who have a high number of referrals—which may indicate that the teacher is struggling with classroom management.

To maintain a positive atmosphere in the office, establish a system for quickly and effectively dealing with students who are referred and communicating the consequences to the referring teacher. Have a plan for dealing with referred students when the school administrator is out of the building.

Since office referrals are reserved for serious issues, make the consequences appropriately serious. At the least, the consequences should involve contacting the parents.

See *Tool 6: Student Referral Form* in Appendix A for a template for recording and communicating information about office referrals.

Suspensions and expulsions

Under Section 24 of the *School Act*, principals have the right to suspend a student from school for up to five days. Out-of-school suspensions and expulsions are considered extreme forms of timeout from positive reinforcement. Principals may use suspension and expulsion to ensure the safety of students and staff. Suspensions can also:

- provide the school and staff with an opportunity to regroup and retool for the student's return

- provide the student with an opportunity to think about what has led to the suspension.

Disadvantages of suspension

When students are out of school, they miss out on instruction, and often cause inconvenience and stress for their families. Many parents are unavailable or unwilling to supervise a student's suspension and, as a result, the student may spend the time watching television, playing video games or enjoying the community. The student may also have unstructured and unsupervised time that leads to further negative behaviour.

Parents often object to suspensions on the basis of lost instructional time. They also argue that some students do not regard suspension as a negative consequence and that suspensions can inadvertently become positive reinforcement for negative behaviour.

Suspensions can have a number of unintended consequences. Research conducted by the British Columbia Ministry of Education (1999) suggests that suspension:

- does not have the same effect as in years past due to the changing nature and extent of behaviours, and changes in family and community structures

- contributes to a student's alienation from school

- increases dropout rates

- contributes to academic failure

- appears to be a factor in students' involvement in risky or antisocial behaviour

- may precipitate more serious crimes in the community

- may have no effect or even increase the likelihood of the behaviour recurring

- may increase aggressive or avoidance behaviour.

Given that out-of-school suspensions may or may not change student behaviour and may cause hardships for families, a number of schools in Alberta are looking for more effective alternatives.

For more information on alternatives to suspension, see "Rethinking the Effectiveness of Suspensions" by Brenda Sautner in *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, Volume 9, Issue 4 (Winter 2001), pp. 210–214.

School Act requirements

Schools using suspensions and expulsions must comply with all requirements of the *School Act*, including:

Suspension

24 (1) A teacher or a principal may suspend a student in accordance with subsection (2) or (3) if in the opinion of the teacher or principal

    (a) the student has failed to comply with section 12, or

    (b) the student's conduct is injurious to the physical or mental well-being of others in the school.

(2) A teacher may suspend a student from one class period.

(3) A principal may suspend a student

    (a) from school,

    (b) from one or more class periods, courses or education programs, or

    (c) from riding in a school bus.

(4) A principal may reinstate a student suspended under subsection (2) or (3).

(5) When a student is suspended under subsection (3), the principal shall

    (a) forthwith inform the student's parent of the suspension,

    (b) report in writing to the student's parent all the circumstances respecting the suspension, and

    (c) if requested, provide an opportunity to meet with the student's parent, and the student if the student is 16 years of age or older, to discuss the reasonableness of the suspension.

(6) If the student is not to be reinstated within 5 school days after the date of the suspension, the principal shall

    (a) forthwith inform the board of the suspension, and

    (b) report in writing to the board all the circumstances respecting the suspension and the principal's recommendations, and the student remains suspended until the board has made a decision under subsection (8).

(7) The principal may recommend that the board expel the student if

    (a) the student has displayed an attitude of wilful, blatant and repeated refusal to comply with section 12, or

    (b) the student's conduct is injurious to the physical or mental well-being of others in the school.

(8) The board shall within 10 school days after the date of the suspension

    (a) reinstate the student, or

    (b) expel the student from school in accordance with section 25.

(9) Before the board makes a decision under subsection (8), the student and the student's parent may make representations to the board with respect to the principal's recommendation to expel the student.

Expulsion

25 (1) On considering the report provided to it under section 24(6)(b) and any representations made to it under section 24(9), the board may expel the student if

  (a) the principal has recommended that the board expel the student, and

  (b) the student has been offered another education program by the board.

(2) An expulsion must be for a period of more than 10 school days.

(3) When a student is expelled under this section, the board shall forthwith notify, in writing, the student's parent, and the student if the student is 16 years of age or older,

  (a) of the expulsion, and

  (b) of the right to request a review under section 124.

(4) The board may re-enrol a student who has been expelled.

Suspension is generally reserved for serious behaviour that compromises the safety and well-being of other students, but schools also have a right to use suspension if a student does not follow the code of conduct outlined in Section 12 of the *School Act*, as described below.

Students

12 A student shall conduct himself or herself so as to reasonably comply with the following code of conduct:

  (a) be diligent in pursuing the student's studies;

  (b) attend school regularly and punctually;

  (c) cooperate fully with everyone authorized by the board to provide education programs and other services;

  (d) comply with the rules of the school;

  (e) account to the student's teachers for the student's conduct;

  (f) respect the rights of others.

Things to consider

Before deciding to use suspension as a consequence, school staff may wish to answer these questions.[10]

- What is the purpose of the suspension? Would other alternatives produce better results? Is the suspension effective in improving student behaviour?

- Where are the behaviours occurring? Is there a pattern to the behaviour?

- What steps can we take to ensure that learning is not compromised during the suspension?

- How will a suspension affect the parents? The community?

- Can we manage the suspension within the school? Where and how can we supervise the suspension in the school?

- Have we developed an individual support behaviour plan for students who have repeated difficulties?

If suspensions (in or out of school) are used as a consequence, the school must plan to follow up with a re-entry meeting and a plan for facilitating a positive return to school.

Alternatives to suspension

A number of schools are developing in-school suspension programs that decrease family hardship, ensure students are supervised and provide opportunities for students to engage in learning activities on their own. This approach requires a dedicated physical space away from other students as well as adult supervision throughout the day. Generally, students serving in-school suspensions do not have access to the school grounds, lunchroom or cafeteria, or to other opportunities for social interaction with peers.

Several urban junior and senior high schools have worked out reciprocal agreements with neighbouring schools so that individual students serve their suspension in a supervised setting in another school or in a nearby outreach program. Students lose their access to familiar peers and enjoyable daily activities but still engage in some academic work in a supervised school setting. This approach requires cooperation between schools, strong communication about the expectations of students and staff, and some preparation of learning materials for individual students. The assignments are often a mix of academic assignments and writing assignments that ask students to reflect on their current behaviour and make action plans for improvement.

---

10. Source: Manitoba Education, Training and Youth. *Towards Inclusion: From Challenges to Possibilities: Planning for Behaviour*. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education, Training and Youth, 2001, p. 6.18. Adapted by permission. All rights reserved.