

Establish classroom rules

Summary

Some students, including those on the autism spectrum, may not understand the 'hidden curriculum' of social and behavioural expectations of your classroom. Establishing and clearly communicating rules helps students understand classroom expectations. When students understand what is expected of their behaviour, the classroom becomes a productive working environment. This practice will explain how to establish and reinforce class rules to support all students to understand what is expected when learning.

Australian Professional Standards for Teachers related to this practice

- 4.2 - manage classroom activities
- 4.3 - manage challenging behaviour

For further information, see [Australian Professional Standards for Teachers AITSL page](#)

Preparing to Teach

Develop classroom rules

Establishing and teaching class rules will support all students and assist in classroom management. It will ensure all students know what you expect.

- Identify 3–5 behavioral expectations and write them out as classroom rules.
 - Evidence suggests it is best to have 3–5 rules that are measurable and observable.
 - Limiting the number of rules helps students to remember the rules and not feel overwhelmed by restrictions.
- Positively frame your expectations.
 - Rules should be phrased positively so that they clarify what is expected of students rather than what students are not allowed to do, e.g. 'speak quietly' is positive, while 'no yelling' is negative; 'always be on time to class' is positive, while 'don't be late to class' is negative.
 - Check that you can clearly explain the logical reasons for these.
 - Check that each rule is short, specific and simple.
- Use student input where appropriate.
 - Prepare to further develop rules and consequences with the class
- Ensure that classroom rules are consistent with broader school rules.
- Identify the highest priority situations where you anticipate potential behavioural issues.

Class rules should:

- be short
- be specific
- tell students how they are expected to behave when in the classroom
- be age appropriate
- be positively stated
- be limited in number (approximately 3-5).



Planning for the consequences

Having positive reinforcement when students are following class rules and logical, natural consequences when they are not, lets students know when and what they are doing is:

- positive and valued by both you and their peers
- not okay and that it affects not only themselves but others.

Plan consequences by thinking about, and choosing, consequences that are:

- natural
- short-term
- forward-looking
- have an empathy-teaching component

and can be delivered

- consistently
- immediately or as soon as practicable.

It is important to reflect on why the behaviour has occurred. This will help you manage the behaviour, and support you and the student to identify and recognise factors that led to the behaviour.

Ensure rules have logical, natural consequences

Logical and natural consequences:

- are responses & actions that are implemented when students engage in unproductive behaviours
- are logical consequences related to the original behaviour
- occur within the same environment and/or learning experience as the original behaviour
- reduce the likelihood of students engaging in unproductive behaviours in the future.

These logical consequences can have input from your students and:

- maintain the factors contributing to productive behaviour including reward systems
- address the social and learning factors that contribute to unproductive behaviour
- should be visually displayed in a central, adjacent to visual rules
- provide an age-appropriate supportive response based on the classroom rules.

It works better if:

- the teacher asks students to contribute to the rules
- the rules are displayed clearly in the classroom
- the rules are written clearly and simply and positively expressed
- rules are reviewed regularly

It doesn't work if:

- there are too many rules or the rules are vague
- rules are phrased negatively or are not clear
- rules are reinforced inconsistently





- the reasoning behind the rules is not clear
- students feel no sense of ownership over their classroom rules
- classroom learning and/or social factors that underlie student unproductive behaviour are not investigated, understood, and supported.

In the classroom

Step 1: Establish your classroom's rules

Some teachers like to brainstorm rules with students at the start of the school year, involving them in the process. Other teachers prefer to set the rules and then allow for some negotiation with students.

Explain and discuss the rules with your students and provide specific, concrete examples. Discuss the reasoning behind your rules – this helps students to see that the rules are fair and allows them to take some ownership over them.

Write rules that are:

- simple
- positive
- specific
- age-appropriate
- most necessary.

Step 2: Provide direct instruction

Directly instructing students in behavioural expectations and including concrete examples will help students to:

- understand the rules
- avoid confusion
- remember the rules.

Step 3: Display the rules

Display the classroom rules prominently using both visual and written material – students will be more likely to remember the rules.

Give students a handout of the rules to stick in their exercise book or folder so they have a consistent reminder.

Step 4: Refer to the rules

Regularly refer to the rules to confirm that students are remembering them and adapting to them if needed.

When explaining a task, refer to the rules displayed in your classroom to highlight behavioural expectations that are particularly relevant to that task, e.g. during an individual work task, remind students of the rule about working quietly.



Step 5: Use positive reinforcement when students follow the rules

Provide positive reinforcement as soon as possible to students who meet or exceed expectations. Use specific praise or more elaborate forms of positive reinforcement, such as a token economy (see the [‘Respond constructively to student behaviour’](#) practice).

Step 6: Review the rules regularly

Review the rules regularly. Do they still apply?

Materials informing this practice

[Establishing classroom expectations video](#) by AITSL (18 April 2016)

