

Behavior Management & Discipline in the ALPs

The students at the ALPs have been referred to us for any combination of emotional, behavioral, or learning disabilities. At a time of extreme budget cuts and dwindling school funds, sending schools do everything in their power to try to keep the manageable students in district in an effort to save money. Thus, students referred to the ALPs have needs so severe that their sending district's special education staff cannot meet them. It is important to realize these things for two reasons.

First, our students' behavior is their disability – it is the reason that they are here. Their behaviors need to be addressed and worked on in order for them to be successful students, and more importantly successful in life as they get older. There is a difference between behavioral concerns and academic potential. Students in the ALPs generally have average to above average intelligence. They are taught the same courses as their peers in their home schools. It is our job to provide a climate where the students are simultaneously encouraged to work on whatever behavior led them to be referred to us and at the same time held accountable if they are failing to meet the standards we have established for them.

Secondly, it is crucial not to "personalize" student behavior or perceive it as having to do with you. When a student acts out or says something derogatory towards you or another staff member, it is a manifestation of their disability and often years of mistreatment. When our students are feeling vulnerable, nervous, intimidated, overwhelmed, or unintelligent, they defend themselves against those feelings by deflecting attention from whatever is making them feel that way and by putting the staff who is addressing the situation with them on the defensive. If you take what they say or do personally, you will not be able to address the behavior consistently and correctly. All of us will have days where the students affect us emotionally, but it is important to remember that addressing student behavior effectively and consistently is the most important thing that we do.

Maintaining appropriate boundaries with our students is absolutely crucial to managing their behavior effectively. If you behave remotely unprofessionally with a student, he or she will not be able to understand when you try to switch from the role of friend to that of teacher. Students should never believe that you are anything other than their teacher. You will certainly be empathetic towards their needs and care about their success both in and out of school, but your primary role will never change. Most of our students have inappropriate relationships with several of the adults in their lives (including their parents), which make it even more important that they are consistently and frequently reminded of the limitations and restrictions of the relationship they have with staff. You should always be aware of:



- Your physical space. Students should not feel comfortable approaching staff in a physical manner or being close to them when standing, sitting down, etc. While this is true for all staff and students, it has historically been an issue most often with the male students and female staff. You should be cautious and hesitant about touching a student, even if it is in a joking or consoling manner. It is important to be aware of the ways our students can interpret the way we carry and position ourselves with them. We need to maintain a clear and well-defined bubble of physical space around ourselves and to respect that of our students.
- Conversation topics. You should always be aware of how what you talk about may be interpreted by the students. Conversations about controversial topics that may be appropriate to have with other staff or even some students should either be held in a constructive manner or in private away from students who will misconstrue what you are trying to say. For example, before talking about another student or staff person, you should make sure that what you are going to say is appropriate for everyone in the room to hear.
- Sharing personal information. While students know that you have a life outside of the school, they should not know the details of your personal life. For example, you shouldn't be discussing your relationship with your partner with the students. Sharing information in this way leads students to believe that you are something other than their teacher.
- Role modeling. The students are watching and learning from you at all times. In fact, they are probably paying more attention to how you interact with other staff and students than what you are actually trying to teach them in class. Thus, the way you act plays a large role in how students will respond to you. If a student sees you having a conversation with another staff person and then walk away upset or irritated, that will affect how they approach you in the future. For almost all of our students, **YOU ARE ONE OF A FEW APPROPRIATE ADULT ROLE MODELS.** You can never overestimate how important this role is.

While teaching your classes, there are some things that you can do to structure your class to prevent some student behavior from occurring. Modeling appropriate behavior is another primary job that we have and how you conduct yourself in regards to your classes gives the students an indication of how they should act in response.

- Be on time. If we ask it of the students, then we must expect it from ourselves.
- Always be prepared. Don't come into class acting like you don't know what you are doing. If something has thrown off what you were

planning on doing, try as much as possible to give the students the impression that you have a back up plan.

- Classes should be interactive. Even if the assignment is to read independently (which should be extremely infrequently), you should check in with the class a number of times to check in for student learning & comprehension.
- Be aware of other events. If a student comes into your class and seems particularly "off", then you should be wondering why. Understanding what is causing a student to act a certain way is central to addressing the situation appropriately.
- Set up early in the term what is and isn't allowed in your class. Telling students from day one what is expected is fair to both them and you. It is then extremely important that you consistently enforce those parameters.

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Despite your best efforts, students will act out in your class. When that happens, it is important for all members of the staff to handle situations consistently. It is also important to remember that you should follow the procedure and hierarchy of consequences in dealing with student behavior. Remember: when speaking to students about their behavior, your tone of voice is **extremely important**. You should **not** come off as upset, angry, sarcastic, or autocratic. If you are unsure about a student or a situation, ask a head or assistant teacher for guidance. You are not bothering them; asking questions is an integral part of being a staff member who knows how to meet the needs of his or her students.

1. **Warn** – When a student does something that is not allowed, you should first warn them that the behavior is not O.K., using a neutral, non-authoritarian tone of voice, e.g. ("David, I need you to stop talking please. If you don't, you will not be earning number 3"). Of course, some behaviors don't require a warning – physical abuse, verbally attacking staff or students – but most times students should get a warning before a more serious consequence is earned. When you warn you should set up for the student what is going to happen if the behavior persists.
2. **"You haven't earned number 1/2/3/4"** – If the student continues the behavior, you then **must tell** him/her that s/he has not *earned* the corresponding number. You cannot give him/her a consequence after s/he has left your room and not let him/her know. Not only is it unfair to the student, but it also undermines the whole point of addressing the behavior. Also remember, there is a big difference between a student's simply not *earning* a token and your *taking* one away. Placing the responsibility of student behavior back on the student (again in an

appropriate tone of voice) is extremely important. At each step, you **must** tell the students what will happen if the behavior persists.

3. **"You need to leave class"** – Based on what you have set up previously, you may need to ask the disruptive student to leave class. At this point it is important that you tell the student whether or not they are out for a "cool down" period, or if they "have lost the ability to attend class". You should alert a head teacher or adjustment counselor to let them know that the student has been asked to leave class for disciplinary reasons and what his/her options are at that point. If you are consistently asking one student to leave your class you should **ASK FOR HELP!** Remember, student misbehavior is not a reflection on you or your ability to teach.
4. **Student refuses staff direction** – While it is important not to get into power struggles with students, it is also important to remember that when you ask a student to do something (as long as it's reasonable) they need to comply. When dealing with one of these more serious situations, it is important to:
 - *Remember your tone of voice/body language.* Many of our students have difficulty processing verbal instructions and read more from your tone of voice and your body language than from the actual words that are coming out of your mouth. Directions from them should be in a low, calm tone and resemble the same style you would use to help them with their academic work.
 - *Give them time to save face.* Once you have asked them to do something, don't stand there looming over them until they do it. Make up a reason to divert your attention or leave the room. Let them know if they have not complied by the time you return your attention to them then more serious consequences will follow.
 - *Once you've asked them more than once...* If you have asked a student to do something and they are refusing, you should say to them, "I need you to do/go/stop_____, if you are going to refuse then I will have to get (Head Teacher/Adjustment Counselor), and that will probably mean you will earn annex." It is important and fair to let the student know what the consequences of his/her actions will be, so that s/he can decide what to do and know what will result from his/her decision.
 - *Inform your teacher.* Once you have made the decision to get a head teacher to help manage the situation, you should be ready to present (calmly) what is happening. Ask to speak to the head teacher/Adjustment counselor **IN PRIVATE**. Let them know the sequence of events that has led to this point, any other pertinent information, and what you expect to happen at this point. Your head teacher will tell you before s/he addresses the student what the outcome will be.
5. **Return to class** – It is important that the other students in your class return to their academic work as soon as possible. Students will often want to discuss/glorify the acting out student's "event". It is important that

you minimize the occurrence and return to whatever you were doing. It is important that the other students know that one student acting out will not halt their academics any longer than necessary or will lessen what you expect of them. If appropriate, you should thank the other students for maintaining their composure and return to task.

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In addition to your individual classroom management, you have a responsibility to work to create a successful school environment for all students. You cannot operate as if your classroom is isolated and that you only have to watch your particular students. There are times during the day when you will be required to take an active role and participate in non-academic tasks. Always remember that as with most people, our students have more difficulty when they have unstructured time. It is during these times that **staff need to be most vigilant and aware of what is happening around them.**

- Your primary responsibility is to manage your own students and class; however, you are expected to help with situations as they occur throughout the day. If you feel that there is a situation that needs addressing, you should make an effort to see what you can do to help.
- Although you must be careful not to overstep, if in your opinion another staff is mishandling a situation with a student, you should report it to a head teacher. This is not "ratting somebody out"- it is acting in the best interest of the students. You may talk to the head teacher and s/he may shed light on the situation.
- Free times such as homeroom, structured study, lunch, gym class, passing in the halls need extra staff attention. Come out of your room and make contact with students and ask them where they are going or if they need help. Remind them that they need to get to class on time. Making contact with specific students will help them find direction and avoid trouble.
- If you find yourself free, you should always check in with your head teacher to see if there is a class that needs to be covered, a therapy run that needs a driver, or some other task that needs to happen.
- Lunch is the busiest time of the day. It is also the worst time for staff to try to eat. During lunch actively seek out students to engage whether it be in basketball, walking to get lunch, or helping with academics. You will always be given time to eat and make your own lunch. Often if you eat in the period after lunch, you will be interrupted less frequently.

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Failure to earn number 2 is one of the most common consequences for our students. Basically, anything inappropriate that a student says or does usually falls under one of this numerical category. They are marked on token sheets carried by students. The token sheet serves as a reflective tool to allow students to track their behavior over the course of a week. A swear is usually fairly easy to detect- any word that is normally considered a swear in every day usage is a swear in school as well. This includes any racial epithets or hate speech against any group. Although swearing is increasingly frequent and acceptable in society, our students must become able to differentiate among various settings and moderate their language and behavior accordingly. The repeated appearance of the word "ass" on MTV and on the radio in the middle of the day doesn't make the word acceptable for our students to use. It is important that staff do not let students occasionally slip with swearing. Although we might occasionally swear outside school and think that it isn't a big deal if a student slips and says a swear, allowing them breaks on one of the most basic of rules not only compromises your ability to consequence them in the future, ("Oh come on! You let me get away with it yesterday!") but also undermines the efforts of staff who do not let swears slide.

Remember: it is much easier to start out on the stricter side of discipline and loosen up once you have developed relationships with students and a sense of the rules than it is to try to get more strict after you realize you have been too lenient.

If you think something is inappropriate, it usually is. If you inform a student about the loss of a token and then find out that maybe you shouldn't have, you can always discuss it with the student later. What is harder to erase is a pattern of allowing students to get away with a behavior and then finally trying to consequence it. Specific students can also have special token programs. For one student who has particularly bad table manners, any violation of common etiquette could be a loss of the number 3 token for not following directions, for another student it could be using tone of voice that they have been asked not to use. With specific behaviors it is always important to warn the student first and ask them to stop the behavior, but once you ask them to stop it is vital that you then consequence *the next time* the behavior occurs. Letting students know that you will follow through with what you have said is not only correct role modeling, but also makes your life easier as well. If a student knows that every time they yell in the hallway they are going to lose a token, chances are they won't do it again.

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Annex is *The Consequence* for our students. It covers everything from swearing, to fighting, to refusing to leave a class when asked. There are two types of annex: runnable and non-runnable. Runnable annex occurs when a student does not earn three number 2s in one day or uses hate speech. The student then has the option of "serving" his or her annex time or "running it off". When a student chooses to run, s/he must complete one of two options. S/he can either run a mile and a half without stopping or complete a set of calisthenics (Calisthenics are only allowed once a week per student. They are a recent addition to the behavior management plan designed to provide an easier option for those students who earn annex less frequently). Students who choose to serve their annex must go with a staff out of the program and complete a half-day of academic work. Once the half-day is up, the student is allowed back in the program. While the student is in annex, he or she is ineligible to earn token money or take part in any other of the incentive programs. Annex allows students a time to cool down and take space from whatever situation has caused them to earn consequences. When you go to annex the following steps need to be taken:

1. You need to plan your classes for the remainder of the day or for the next if you are going the following day. Since all of your classes should be planned in advance, this probably only means rewording your lesson plans so that anyone can cover your class and leaving stacks of necessary materials out, labeled, and accessible. You should post the list of assignments in your classroom and give copies to your Head and Assistant Teachers.
2. If you are told that a student you have is going to annex, you need to gather work to send with them to annex. With fewer distractions, students often complete work much more quickly in annex, and you should send more than one period of work to allow for that likelihood. Also, try to make assignments as manageable and simple as possible, as the staff person in annex with the student will not be able to replicate your class.
3. Students need to complete work in order to return to the program. This means they need to be working on their academic assignments, not talking with staff. When you are with a student in annex, you should facilitate academics and not talk to them about anything else. This is extremely hard at first, but it is important. If students can enjoy annex even remotely, the purpose of annex is defeated.
4. Annex is not therapy. Some initial venting of frustration is allowed, although students can and will lose tokens. You can allow students to talk briefly about what has led them to this point, but it should not take up any more than 5-10 minutes. Direct all conversation in this manner to their therapist or head teacher. Important: if a student says anything that would require immediate staff attention (i.e. suicide threats, reports of abuse)

YOU NEED TO CONTACT A HEAD TEACHER IMMEDIATELY. Do not wait until you get back from annex; it will not give the teacher time to deal with whatever situation has arisen.

5. While at annex it is your job to keep track of the work the student completes and property they damage. Survey the area when you arrive and note the condition of the desk, walls, or other things in the area that could be targets of student vandalism. Let the students know that if they write on, break, or damage anything, that they will have to pay for the cost of repair. When you return to school, let the head teacher know what the student completed for work ("Riley slept for 3 ½ periods, and worked the rest") as well as any property damage that may have occurred.
 6. While at annex if you need to use the restroom, the student must accompany you to a place nearer to the bathroom than the desk where s/he is working. It could be as simple as waiting in the hall or at another desk closer to the bathroom. If a student refuses to follow you, you should remind/inform him/her that students in annex need to be with staff at all times and that failure to go with you will result in their being AWOL. If this occurs, call the head teacher, pick up your belongings and head back to school. The student will be suspended.
 7. Remember: the underlying principle of annex is that negative behavior is followed by negative consequences. You should not try to engage the student in a way that gives them an alternative to the work that needs to be completed. If students are asking to go to annex with you, something is wrong.
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