

Discipline with Dignity: New Challenges, New Solutions, 3rd Edition

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In this overview chapter on discipline, originally written 20 years ago, we explore both out-of-school and in-school causes of discipline problems. Sadly, the out-of-school causes that we originally wrote about have only worsened, and new ones have emerged. In 1988, the year of first publication, there had been no Columbine or Virginia Tech shootings. The staggering 18,000 acts of television violence witnessed by children as they entered adolescence have since grown to hundreds of thousands. The frequent "subliminal" messages of sex and violence purveyed through print and electronic media are now so overt that our airwaves are filled with violent and sexually exploitative television shows, movies, words, actions, titles, and video games. Although *Father Knows Best* was a thing of the past even in 1988, we were still a long way from Fox's *Who's Your Daddy?* There was no Internet back then offering chat rooms filled with whatever you want, whenever you want it, or blogs from people spouting any crazy message.

For all the legal advances we have made in gender, racial, and sexual preference equality, the problems of bullying are at least as bad as they have always been and have even taken new forms, such as cyberbullying. Segregation, while illegal for many years now in the United States, seems more the norm than the exception when it comes to schooling. Although we have known for many years of the correlation between socioeconomic status (SES) and achievement, white flight to the suburbs has left urban America with a preponderance of schools with a very high concentration of poverty and therefore arguably a school culture less likely to reinforce high achievement. Despite employing early intervention, monitoring academic progress, differentiating instruction, adding career-themed curricula, reconfiguring middle and high schools to create smaller classes, and emphasizing high standards with high-stakes tests, graduation rates in urban areas remain abysmal. For example, New York State Department of Education statistics show that 45 percent of high school students in the "big four" cities of upstate New York graduate four years after starting high school versus about 85 percent in the suburbs (Loudon & McLendon, 2007).

The "me generation" we talked about in the first edition has grown into a world where many expect entitlement without effort. The continued erosion of social civility, often poorly modeled by our political, civic, and entertainment leaders, has legitimized name-calling, blame, and meanness as acceptable methods by which to express disagreement. These troublesome activities are often experienced in the home by our most difficult students.

Our observations and experiences tell us that somewhere between 70 and 90 percent of discipline problems have their root causes in places outside school—the aforementioned issues as well as others, including dysfunctional families and drug and alcohol abuse. Although educators can directly do little to change these factors, it is important that we understand them and do whatever we can as citizens to make a difference. More important is to appreciate that the 10 to 30 percent of the factors we do control, which are wrapped inside the in-school causes, can change many lives when we

maximize the impact of positively affecting these factors (Marzano, 2003). An hour a day helping students to be cared about, listened to, and thought of as productive, useful members of class is better than none at all.

This chapter explores both in-school and out-of-school causes of discipline problems. It shares suggestions about each and concludes with an overview of our approach to discipline. Although social and educational changes have undoubtedly occurred since this book's first publication, the framework offered in *Discipline with Dignity* remains as relevant today as ever.

In 1907, William Chandler Bagley of the University of Illinois wrote:

Absolute fearlessness is the first essential for the teacher on whom rests the responsibility for governing an elementary or secondary school. This fearlessness is not alone or chiefly the expression of physical courage, although this must not be lacking. It is rather an expression of moral courage; daring the sometimes certain interference of parents, officious trustees [administrators] and others of like character; standing firm in one's convictions even though the community may not approve. And, after all, it is this sort of courage that is the rarest and, at the same time, the most essential. (p. 105)

In 2006, Michael Carey, a high school senior from Rochester, New York, wrote the following poem about his experiences in school:

*School, if that's what you call it ...
Even when I'm here, I'm never all there
Your work is so hard; I'm pulling my hair
My friends all do well, but I can't compare
I work really hard, but As are so rare
You yell and scream right into my face
You're not a teacher, you're a fu**ing disgrace
Not just to me but to other students too
We all hate school; the one we hate most is you
The work is so hard, the math is so tough
This school would be fun, if it wasn't so rough
Children fight each other to prove they're not weak
They fight each other, our futures so bleak.
I wish I was happy, I wish school was great
I'm 16 years old and you said "it's too late!"
For me to change and learn how to read
Why do I come? I'll never succeed
I try my best; it's not good enough*

Why do I bother so I leave in a huff!

For at least the 10 decades between the writings of Dr. Bagley and Michael, teachers and students have often needed courage to face each other. School is a battleground for too many participants, a place where major confrontations and minor skirmishes occur daily. Why must this be so? Teachers and students share the same space, time, goals, and needs. They spend most of the day communicating with each other, thinking about each other, scheming against each other, and judging each other. When they are antagonistic, they expend as much if not more time and energy trying to outsmart each other and win, or at least achieve a standoff. If things get bad enough, they have the power to ruin each other's lives. When things go well, they share tender moments, meaningful triumphs, and genuine respect and love. Regardless of how their relationship goes, teachers and students never forget each other.

Much has been written about discipline over the years, and many programs and methods have been tried and retried with new names. The issue will always be an integral part of school because students will always learn more than the content of the curriculum. They will learn about their behavior, their choices, and their impact on others. Instead of trying to solve the discipline problem, it might be wiser to try to positively affect the lives of children. We strongly advocate and propose a model of discipline based on a positive value system and suggest many practical methods to implement such a system in the classroom. Good discipline is about doing what is best for students to make good, healthy choices, not about making the lives of educators easier. A wise educator once suggested that if you always do what's in the best interest of children, there will always be a place for you in education, and you will always make some people angry!

This book describes strategies for developing a philosophy about behavior and classroom management based on sound educational, psychological, and commonsense principles. This will include

- Developing a comprehensive classroom discipline plan,
- Preventing behavior and management problems from occurring,
- Stopping misbehavior when it occurs without attacking the dignity of the student,
- Resolving problems with students who chronically disrupt the learning process,
- Reducing student stress as well as your own, and
- Using special guidelines for rules and consequences that work.

Out-of-School Causes of Discipline Problems

Jon, a student growing up in foster care, summed it up:

I do not even have parents. I mean, not a mom and a dad the way you would think of it. You see, I live in a foster home, which means I go home every single night to paid employees. Most of the people that work at the place have their own children. They do not really care about me. Sure, they are supposed to

... but just like any other job, many are here to pick up a paycheck or wait for their next vacation. They act happy when I get a good grade, or have a good report card, but it's nothing like most children get to experience when they get home! Holidays and breaks are a disaster for me. I do not ever get to go on vacation like most of the other children here. Instead, I get to sit home thinking about where my real mom is, why she left me, and if I'll ever see her again. Honestly, your English homework is the farthest thing from my mind right now.

Sadly, this student is not alone, and success for children like him is rare. According to Christian (2003), the educational deficits of foster children are reflected in higher rates of grade retention; lower scores on standardized tests; and higher absenteeism, tardiness, truancy, and dropout rates. The poor academic performance of these children affects their lives after foster care and contributes to higher-than-average rates of homelessness, criminality, drug abuse, and unemployment among foster care "graduates."

We do not mean to imply that discipline problems in school are the responsibility of the foster care system. Some children go home to dysfunctional biological families. In these homes many of the basics are not taught. Words like *please*, *thank you*, and *share* are not used, so children never learn the appropriate way to use them. In some families, the values necessary for success at school are either untaught or, more important, unlived. Good discipline is increasingly about educators taking the time to teach parenting-type skills, so students will have the self-control to learn the basics and beyond.

Much of this book addresses what can be done about discipline problems, but it is first necessary to consider those factors responsible for the alienation experienced by too many youths in schools. The causes of discipline problems are discussed because it is our belief that discipline prevention and successful intervention hinge on an understanding of both in-school and out-of-school issues that strongly influence student behavior. Just as good medicine often depends on knowing the specifics, so, too, does good teaching. For example, imagine two people with really bad headaches. A physician determines that the first patient's headache is caused by eyestrain. She gets glasses, and the headache goes away. The second patient learns he has a brain tumor and will need immediate surgery. In this example both patients have the same symptom, but without understanding why the headache exists, each cannot be properly treated.

In figuring out why a disruption happens, it is sometimes wise to ask the student. To get a valid answer, we must press beyond students saying, "I don't know" and "He did it first." In a calmer moment, it is appropriate to say, "I do not like being called a fu**ing a**hole and talking to me in that way is entirely unacceptable. You are better than that! Before we look at an appropriate consequence, what happened to make you so angry?" When a student does something inappropriate, it is important to teach a better way to respond, model the behavior we want the student to exhibit, and maintain everyone's dignity.

Without our belaboring the social ills of our world, the fact is that we live in a society where resolving problems through shootings, knifings, fist fights, extortion, bullying, and threats of injury are commonplace. Children are

constantly exposed to violence, and many have become insensitive to it. The backdrop of war has been a theme for the entirety of entering kindergartners' lives. Loss of American soldiers while fighting the war on terror is so common that their deaths rarely make front-page news anymore. In addition, children do what is done to them. If parents hit, yell, or humiliate their child on a regular basis, we can expect the same behavior from the child.

Effects of the Media

Although it is impossible to know the full extent of the influence of standard programming, we believe that television and other media have a potentially damaging effect on children. A recent study that reviewed a decade of research concerning television and youth concluded that children will have viewed 200,000 acts of violence—including 16,000 murders—by the time they are 18 years of age (Media Education Foundation, 2005). According to another study (Curwin, 2006), 75 percent of 4th graders claimed to have watched an R-rated movie, 65 percent said they had played a violent video game, and 84 percent said they had witnessed at least one killing on television in the prior year.

A Sense of Entitlement

A sense of entitlement has gripped our culture. An informal study in *Newsweek* (Tyre, Scelfo, & Kantrowitz, 2004) found that children expect to nag their parents nine times before getting what they want. The net result is that too many students have a "me first" attitude: "Meet my needs first. I do not intend to wait. I come first." Unwittingly, many schools reinforce this sense of entitlement through the proliferation of reward and bribe systems in which stickers, stars, and points become substitutes for doing the right thing because it is the right thing to do.

With just the push of a button, we can communicate with anyone anywhere in the world. We can download thousands of songs in seconds on our iPods, be entertained nonstop by DVDs that we start and stop at our command, and enter a virtual world doing almost anything instantly with amazing graphics. When students realize that *As* and *Bs* at school aren't just given but must be earned and that timely thought and study is at least sometimes required to master a concept, some become frustrated and angry at the audacity of an "unfair" teacher trying to hold them accountable in a world for which they have been poorly prepared.

Lack of a Secure Family Environment

Perhaps the largest single influence on children is the quality of their home life. Throughout the last century, our society has undergone major shifts in values and traditions. The extended family has been replaced by smaller nuclear units in a multitude of configurations. Single-parent families, two-working-parent families, two-mommy or -daddy parents, blended families, and one- and two-child families are likely to exist in just about every

community. Amid constantly shifting family patterns, a discipline problem is often symptomatic of anxiety and insecurity.

The U.S. divorce rate has steadily risen so that some states have more divorces than marriages. It is not a secret that children of divorced parents perform worse than their peers in most academic settings (Crow & Ward-Lonergan, 2003). Although divorce is not necessarily a predictor of problems at school, children with divorced parents are more likely to be struggling with issues of emotional security than their classmates from more stable families. In 1970, 12 percent of children were born to unwed parents, compared with almost 35 percent more recently (Sigle-Rushton & McLanahan, 2002). Data from the National Center for Health Statistics found that in 2004, more than 1.5 million babies were born to unwed mothers. Although the birthrate for teenagers 15 to 19 years old showed a recent modest decline of 2 percent in 2005 (Hamilton, Martin, & Ventura, 2006), it is still far too high.

Students are coming to school more concerned for their basic security needs than for learning. These security issues have created a large group of needy children seeking emotional support from just about anybody available.

Diminished Social Civility

When our political and civic leaders cannot discuss issues without pointing the finger of blame, calling each other names, and painting their opponent as evil, is it any wonder that children see name-calling and put-downs as acceptable methods of communication? When song lyrics sometimes include offensive language and use of hateful and unacceptable words like *nigger*, *faggot*, *wetback*, *Jew-down*, and *ho* is considered OK as long as you belong to a certain ethnic group, the boundaries of civility and decency have been ruptured. Good discipline is far more difficult when these boundaries are hard to identify.

Concentration of Poverty

Numerous studies over many years have shown a strong correlation between socioeconomic status and success in school. Generally speaking, students from wealthier families do significantly better than those from poorer families. In nearly every community across America, parents seek the best schools for their children. Although there are exceptions, the schools with the best reputations are almost always in upper-middle-class suburbia with a preponderance of white children. Although these schools are typically blessed with greater resources, just as many boring teachers work at these schools as at others. Could it be that these schools have a cultural expectation of success bred by the vast majority of students who are from homes that strongly value the importance of educational achievement? Isn't it probable that the majority of students in these schools have parents who are themselves more likely to be highly educated and therefore successful in our culture? If lower-SES students tend to achieve more poorly than their wealthier peers, isn't it likely that when you put lots

of these children together at the same school, a culture that does not value high achievement is more likely to emerge?

The "best schools" have a culture among their students where it is cool to be successful in school. In too many poorly performing schools, achievement is considered to be uncool or a sign of selling out. Top students often feel like they need to hide being smart.

On a recent visit with 11-year-old Victor, one of the authors' "little brothers" in the Big Brothers Big Sisters program, Victor spontaneously said that he would never want to go away to college because he wouldn't want to leave his family. When this very bright boy was asked if he knew anyone in his neighborhood who was going to college, Victor could not think of a single person. Sadly, he is one of many who face an uphill struggle to success because he has no community context for how education can really improve life. A recent discussion with one of the authors' friends makes a similar point. The friend, who lives in a small enclave of beautifully maintained homes within an otherwise decaying city, matter-of-factly noted that all the young families move out as soon as their children reach school age because they do not want to send their children to an urban school. In a gang-infested middle school in San Jose, one of the authors interviewed several students who, when asked about their plans for the future, said, "Go to prison." When asked why, they responded, "That's how you get respect around here."

Radical solutions to this problem may be necessary. Perhaps the time has come to use socioeconomic status (or perhaps even race) to define school enrollment. We would like to see how students perform in schools where no more than 20 percent of its students are on free and reduced lunch. Our speculation is that all schools should have approximately 10 to 20 percent of its population be of lower-SES status but no more. We believe that no school should open when its low-SES students exceed 20 percent unless geographically impossible. Exceptions would be in some rural areas in which great distances might make economic diversity unrealistic. Although problems are likely to arise that would need to be addressed, we would hypothesize sufficient diversity within such schools amid a culture that values school success.

Although there are few quick-fix solutions to the factors cited here, an impressive base of research strongly suggests that a caring, mentoring relationship often plays a huge role in contributing to the resiliency of at-risk youth (Ellis, Small-McGinley, & De Fabrizio, 1999; Werner & Smith, 1989). Educators get daily opportunities to offer students this type of nurturance that can dramatically impact student behavior and sometimes change lives.

In-School Causes of Discipline Problems and Some Solutions

Competitive Environment

Most schools remain highly competitive environments where students compete for recognition, grades, and spots on sports teams. It is important to realize that academic competition is very different from real-life competition. In life, people get a chance to compete in a field, profession, or industry of their own choice. If unsuccessful, they can switch to a different career or profession. By contrast, in school we drop all 7-year-olds in 2nd grade and say, "Go at it." When some do not succeed, we begin labeling them as problem students. Competition is fine when playing on the football field or basketball court and when trying out for the school musical. When limited roles exist, competition is necessary to get the best people for the job. Competition between people is fine when children know there is a chance they will not make the team or the show, but they want to try anyway.

With regard to academic achievement and behavioral improvement, replace the concept of competition *between* students with competition *within* each student. Whenever possible, evaluate student performance and offer assignments based on getting each student to be better today than he was yesterday. An individual's improvement is primarily what should be acknowledged. Conversely, if a student shows lesser performance than her capability, she should be challenged to do better even if her initial performance is best in the class. One of the authors recently asked his 17-year-old sister if she had made honor roll. Looking surprised, she said, "What's honor roll?" When told it was a list you make when you get really good grades for a semester, her response was "At Brighton High School [a top 100 high school in America located in a suburb of Rochester, New York], everyone is expected to get good grades. We do not get on a list for that. And besides, why would I want to be on a list for doing well? It would just make my friends who didn't get on the list feel bad!" Although honor rolls are institutional fixtures at most schools, we believe their elimination would make schools better places. How about replacing competition between students for an "honor roll" spot with daily recognition for all students who are "on a roll"?

Student Boredom

Some students sit up straight, appear attentive by making eye contact, nod their heads every so often, and present themselves as interested and somewhat involved, even when they are downright bored. But there are others who show no desire to hide their boredom. They quietly withdraw into themselves and look unmotivated, or they act out, being unconcerned with the consequences of poor grades, a trip to the principal's office, a mark on the chalkboard, or a phone call home.

Powerlessness

Powerlessness is another factor in school and classroom discipline problems. Some students rebel as a way of voicing their dissatisfaction with their lack of influence. In most schools, students are told for six hours every day where to go, what time to be there, how long to take for basic biological necessities, which learning is

relevant, what to learn, and how their learning will be evaluated. They are told the rules, the consequences, how to dress, how to walk, and when to talk. When one group (adults) develops rules and procedures that define behavioral standards for another group (students) that has had little or no input, a conflict of control and power can result. When school is unfulfilling, this lack of power can trigger anger and opposition.

Unclear Limits

Limit setting is very important to good discipline and improved behavior. Teachers and administrators need to be very clear and specific as to the behaviors they will and will not tolerate. In addition, we promote respect for and among our students when we explain why the limits are as they are. Although many educators intuitively know this, our busy lives too often preclude spending adequate time to address this issue.

Requiring Students to Earn Educational Opportunities

Most schools require that education opportunities be earned instead of given. These opportunities include field trips, pizza parties, playground privileges, and even staying in the classroom. The students who need these opportunities the most are the ones who rarely earn them. Because they feel left out, students tend to denigrate the opportunities denied them by calling the activities "stupid," or worse. The good students get increased opportunities to learn social skills and to feel wanted, while the poor students rarely get the experience needed to improve behavior. Most just feel left out.

Lack of Acceptable Outlets to Express Feelings

Another source of discipline problems is the lack of acceptable outlets for expressing feelings (for both students and teachers). Students and teachers need to have acceptable ways to release emotions, thoughts, and feelings.

Attacks on Dignity

Finally, and most significant, many students with chronic behavior problems believe that they cannot and will not be successful in school. Such students often appear to give up before they have even tried. They do not believe they can receive the attention and recognition they need through school achievement. They see themselves as losers and have ceased trying to gain acceptance in the mainstream. Their self-message is "Since I can't be recognized as anything other than a failure, I'll protect myself from feeling hurt. To do nothing is better than to try and fail. And to be recognized as a troublemaker is better than being seen as stupid."

Schools Do Make a Difference: Discipline with Dignity

Discipline problems have existed for as long as schools. Any time a group of 25 to 30 people are in close proximity to each other for six hours every day, 10 months of the year, a variety of interpersonal conflicts occur. Discipline with Dignity offers a three-pronged approach to taking charge of such conflict.

Prevention—what can be done to prevent problems from occurring?

Action—what can be done when misbehavior occurs to solve the problem without making it worse?

Resolution—what can be done for students who are chronically challenging?

Foundation of the Program

If we allow ourselves to become helpless in the face of the many causes of misbehavior, it becomes very difficult to teach. Discipline with Dignity is designed to help the teacher work effectively with children despite these numerous problems. The 12-step plan that follows is a guide for teachers. Each step represents specific things educators can do to ensure the success of their students, help prevent discipline problems, and intervene when disruption does occur.

1. **Let students know what you need, and ask them what they need from you.** Most teachers only do the first part. It is easy for us to tell them what we need. However, the best teachers also ask students what they need.
2. **Differentiate instruction based on each student's strengths.** If a student is acting out, assume that this is his defense against feeling like a failure because he cannot, or believes he cannot, handle the material. If you are unable or unwilling to adapt your teaching style to lower or higher academic levels based on the student's needs, then you should not be surprised when that student is disruptive.
3. Just as expectations that are too high lead to frustration, those that are too low lead to boredom and the feeling that success is cheap and not worthy of effort. When we make learning too easy, students find little value in it and little pride in their achievements. It is important to increase the challenge without increasing the tedium.
4. **Listen to what students are thinking and feeling.** There is probably no skill more important than active listening to defuse potentially troublesome situations. For example, Denise says, "Mrs. Lewis, this lesson is soooo boring. I hate it." A "button-pushed" response would be "Well, maybe if you paid more attention and did some work once in a while, you'd feel differently." A better response that defuses might be "I hear you, and I'm sorry you feel that way. Why not give me a suggestion or two that will help make it better? Please see me right after class."

5. **Use humor.** We are not paid to be comedians, nor should we be expected to come to class prepared with an arsenal of jokes. But many frustrating situations can be lightened by learning how to poke fun at ourselves and by avoiding defensiveness.
6. Make sure students are not the butt of your jokes. Bill, a 7th grade student obviously intent on hooking Ms. Johnson into a power struggle, announced one day in class as he looked squarely at his teacher, "You are a mother fu**er!" Ms. Johnson responded by looking at the student and saying, "Wow, at least you got it half right!" The class laughed, and a tense moment had abated. It is important to note that it is almost always better to give a consequence or otherwise more fully explore what to do about highly inappropriate behavior at a time that does not take away further from classroom instruction. We explore this issue in more depth in Chapters 6 and 8.
7. **Vary your style of presentation.** Older children have a maximum attention span of 15 minutes and younger children 10 minutes for any one style of presentation. If we lecture for 15 minutes, it helps to have a discussion for the next interval. If we have a large-group discussion, switch to small groups. Continually using the same approach will create inattentiveness and restlessness, which may lead to disruption.
8. **Offer choices.** Teachers and administrators need to constantly be looking for places during the school day to allow children to make decisions. For example: "You can do your assignment now or during recess." "You can borrow a pencil or buy one from me." "When people call you names you can tell them you don't like it, walk away, or ask me for a suggestion." Allowing students to make decisions and then live with the outcome of the decision goes a long way in teaching responsibility.
9. **Refuse to accept excuses, and stop making them yourself.** When students are allowed to explain away their misbehavior, you place yourself in the uncomfortable position of being judge and jury. Students with good excuses learn that a good excuse will avoid trouble. Students with bad excuses learn that they need some practice in improving their excuse making. Either way, accepting excuses teaches students how to be irresponsible. If you consider certain excuses legitimate, try to include them as part of the rules so they are clearly stated before an incident occurs. It can be helpful to provide students with an explanation as to why certain excuses are considered legitimate while others are not.
10. Teachers should hold themselves accountable, too. For example, if the rule is that all students will turn in their homework within 24 hours, promise your students feedback within 24 hours or an automatic A if you are late. Holding ourselves accountable keeps us from making the same kinds of excuses we hate hearing from our students.
11. **Legitimize misbehavior that you cannot stop.** If you have done everything possible to stop a certain behavior and it continues, think of creative ways to legitimize it. If there are daily paper airplane flights buzzing past your ear, consider spending five minutes a day having paper airplane contests. If abusive language persists, ask the student to publicly define the offensive words to ensure understanding. If your students like to complain about one thing or another, have a gripe session or a suggestion box in which students are encouraged to deposit their complaints. If your school has chronic disruptions in study hall, then offer a game-filled, nonacademic study hall in addition to one that is quiet for those who really want

to study. When misbehavior is legitimized within boundaries, the fun of acting out often fizzles.

12. **Use a variety of ways to communicate with children.** In addition to the spoken word, caring gestures and nonverbal messages can be effective. Some students do better when they get feedback on a sticky note, in an e-mailed note, or on a cell phone message. Since the original publication of this book, there have been numerous reports of inappropriate relationships between teachers and students. Although touch can be a very effective way to communicate caring, we understand that many educators have become wary. Certainly, we need to be respectful of physical boundaries, and we must never touch a student when seduction or abuse is even a remote possibility. Although there is no substitute for good judgment, a pat on the back, touch on the shoulder, handshake, or high five can help form bonds with many tough-to-reach children.
13. **Be responsible for yourself, and allow children to take responsibility for themselves.** Teachers are responsible for coming to class on time, presenting their subject in as interesting a fashion as they can, returning papers with meaningful comments in a reasonable period of time, providing help for students having difficulty, and ending class on time. Students are responsible for bringing their books, pencils, and completed homework.
14. **Realize that you will not reach every child, but act as if you can.** Some students, after all is said and done, must be allowed to choose failure. However, there is a difference between reality (we won't reach everyone) and belief (we work each day as if today will be the breakthrough). It is important that we access and sustain optimism so that we can continually persist in making it difficult for our students to fail our class or themselves.
15. **Start fresh every day.** What happened yesterday is finished. Today is a new day. Act accordingly. Stop listening to negativity from other faculty members. Instead, make a point to have a positive attitude every time you step foot in the school building.

For the Administrator

The Safe School Study (U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1978), followed by more recent research (Postlethwaite & Ross, 1992; Rosen 2005), clearly indicates that administrators are extremely important in reducing discipline problems and maintaining a safe school. In these schools, many principals provided extra academic work for outstanding students and encouraged students to challenge themselves. Administrators made special attempts to get children to take Advanced Placement classes. One principal even made himself available one hour per day as a tutor. Students were able to sign up for 15-minute blocks of time where he would work with them on academic concerns. Strong educational leadership had principals setting goals, evaluating performance, monitoring teachers and students, and modeling appropriate ways to behave and act (Blase & Kirby, 2000).

We suggest that the first step the administrator can take to improve discipline at school is to set up an atmosphere that encourages faculty members to discuss problems freely and openly, without fear of censure. Teachers often worry that they will be considered weak or incompetent if they admit to problems with student

behavior. When we do staff development training, we usually ask the teachers who have discipline problems to raise their hands. Only one or two hands go up. But when we ask, "How many of you know another teacher in the school who has discipline problems?" every hand is raised. Once an open atmosphere exists, positive things can begin to happen. Also, it is important to encourage less experienced teachers to speak up. There is an unwritten code in most schools that says, "The more experience the better." This statement is partially true. But we have found that veteran teachers and administrators can learn as much, if not more, from less experienced educators.

We find that most school faculties represent a wide range of feelings, beliefs, and attitudes when it comes to discipline. Some teachers support having many rules, strictly enforced, with the administration being tough in every case with student violators. Other teachers feel that it is best to have few rules, with an emphasis on students solving their own problems. Effective school discipline requires a common vision predicated on what is best for students. We need to challenge our teachers and encourage them to challenge each other to clearly articulate how their beliefs and practices are in our students' best interests.

To help focus discussion, begin with the list of in-school causes of misbehavior described earlier. Set up working groups or task forces on each of the following causes: competitive environments, student boredom, powerlessness, unclear limits, lack of acceptable outlets for expressing feelings, and attacks on dignity. Each group should include teachers, administrators, parents, and students (both high- and low-achieving). Then have them develop a specific plan for your school to address each area. You will get differing opinions and thoughts. Arguments will occasionally erupt. But remember, if we always do what's best for children, the decision will become clearer.

A group in a suburban middle school tackled the issue of giving students a greater sense of control over what happens in their school by involving them in the following ways:

- A student council of "poor achievers" and "in-trouble students" (different labels were used) was created to help set school policy and to help modify rules and consequences.

- Students who served detention were given the job of commenting on how school climate could be improved.

- Students took the job of running the school for a day once a year, with the teachers and administrators taking student roles.

- Each class was required to have at least two student rules for the teacher.

Committees such as the ones suggested here are most beneficial when they are expected to develop a specific plan for action. The plan should state what will be done, who will do it, when it will be done, and how it will be evaluated. Each member of the school community (teachers, parents, administrators, students, librarians, nurses, bus drivers, and other staff) should know clearly and specifically what his or her responsibilities will be for the success of the plan. Strive for at least 75 percent agreement on any aspect of the plan before it is implemented unless the committee was given authority to develop binding recommendations.

Finally, encourage your staff members to use the practice scenarios in Appendix A as a way of generating meaningful discussion as well as providing staff with practical ways of handling challenging situations.

