

EIGHTH EDITION

# Building Classroom Discipline

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# Lee and Marlene Canter's *Assertive Discipline*

OVERVIEW OF  
THE CANTERS'  
MODEL

## Focus

- Maintaining a calm, productive classroom environment.
- Meeting students' needs for learning and ensuring that their rights are attended to.
- Helping the teacher remain calmly and nonstressfully in charge of the classroom.

## Logic

- Teachers have the right to teach in a professional manner without disruption.
- Students have the right to learn in a safe, calm environment with full support.
- These rights are best met by in-charge teachers who do not violate students' best interests.
- Trust, respect, and perseverance enable teachers to earn student cooperation.

## Contributions

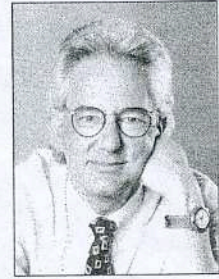
- A classroom control strategy that places teachers humanely in charge in the classroom.
- A system that allows teachers to apply positive support and corrective actions calmly and fairly.
- Techniques for teaching students how to behave and for dealing with difficult students.

## Canter's Suggestions

- Maintain a leadership role in the class but not in a hostile or authoritarian manner.
- Teach students how to behave acceptably in the classroom.
- Understand students' personal needs and show your willingness to help.
- Continually strive to build trust between yourself and your students.

## About Lee and Marlene Canter

Lee Canter is founder of Canter & Associates, an organization that provides training in classroom discipline and publishes related materials for educators and parents. Marlene Canter collaborates in the work. For many years the Canters have been refining their system of discipline, which they call *Assertive Discipline*, to help teachers interact with students in a calm, helpful, and consistent manner. The overall goal of their program is to help teachers establish classrooms where students may learn and teachers may teach effectively. Through workshops, graduate courses, and a variety of published materials, the Canters have brought *Assertive Discipline* to over one and a half million teachers and administrators worldwide. In addition to offering books, tapes, and training programs in discipline, the Canters produce materials and offer graduate-level courses on topics such as motivation, instructional strategies, homework, dealing with severe behavior problems, and activities for positive reinforcement. For lists of their publications and more information on *Assertive Discipline*, contact the Canter & Associates website at [www.canter.net](http://www.canter.net).



Lee Canter



Marlene Canter

## The Canters' Contributions to Discipline

The Canters have made several major contributions to classroom discipline. They popularized the concept of rights in the classroom—the rights of students to have teachers help them learn in a calm, safe environment and the rights of teachers to teach without disruption. They explained that students need and want limits that assist their proper conduct and that it is the teacher's responsibility to set and enforce those limits. The Canters were the first to insist that teachers have a right to backing from administrators and cooperation from parents in helping students behave acceptably and were also the first to provide teachers with a workable procedure for correcting misbehavior efficiently through a system of easily administered corrective actions. Over the years, the Canters have continually modified their popular approach to ensure that it remains effective as social realities change. Earlier they focused mainly on teachers being strong leaders in the classroom, whereas now they place more emphasis on building trusting, helpful relationships with students, providing **positive recognition** and support, and taking a proactive approach to dealing with problems of behavior.

## The Canters' Central Focus

The Canters' model focuses on establishing a classroom climate in which needs are met, behavior is managed humanely, and learning occurs as intended. This climate is accomplished by attending closely to student needs, formalizing effective class rules of behavior,

teaching students how to behave properly, regularly giving students positive attention, talking helpfully with students who misbehave, and establishing a sense of mutual trust and respect. The Canters explain how to take a proactive approach to working effectively with students.

## The Canters' Principal Teachings

- *Today's students have clear rights and needs that must be met if they are to be taught effectively.*  
These **student rights and needs** include a caring teacher who persistently works to foster the best interests of students.
- *Teachers have rights and needs in the classroom as well.*  
**Teachers' rights** include teaching in a classroom that is free from disruption with support from parents and administrators as they work to help students.
- *The most effective teachers are those who remain in control of the class while always remembering that their main duty is to help students learn and behave responsibly.*  
Teachers must continually model through their own behavior the kind of trust and respect for students that they want students to show toward others.
- *A good discipline plan, based on trust and respect, is necessary for helping students limit their counterproductive behavior.*  
Such a discipline plan contains rules and corrective actions, and the plan must be fully understood and supported by students and parents.
- *Teachers should practice positive repetitions.*  
Positive repetitions involve repeating directions as positive statements to students who are complying with class rules, for example, "Fred remembered to raise his hand. Good job," or "The equipment is all back neatly in place. Good going."
- *Students should enjoy positive support when they behave acceptably.*  
Positive support is provided through kind words or facial expressions that teachers offer when students comply with class expectations. The Canters consider positive acknowledgment to be very powerful.
- *Today's teachers must not only model proper class behavior but often must directly teach it as well.*  
It is not enough for teachers simply to set limits and apply corrective actions. They must help students understand and practice behavior that leads to success in school.
- *Teachers can successfully teach the majority of students typically thought of as difficult to manage.*  
They can accomplish this by reaching out to those students, learning about their needs, interacting with them personally, and showing a constant willingness to help.
- *Teachers are most effective when they use a proactive, rather than a reactive, approach to discipline.*  
**Reactive** means you wait until students misbehave and then try to decide what to do to get them back on course. **Proactive** means you anticipate misbehavior and plan in advance how you will deal with it in a positive manner.

## Analysis of the Canters' *Assertive Discipline*

In 1976, the Canters set forth the basic premises and practices of *Assertive Discipline*, which almost overnight brought relief to teachers everywhere who were beleaguered by classroom misbehavior. They have progressively modified their approach over time. Their main assertions follow.

### Needs and Rights in the Classroom

Canter and Canter (2001) explain that students have a need for and the right to a warm, supportive classroom environment in which to learn, where teachers do all they can to help students be successful. Teachers have needs and rights in the classroom as well, which include the need and right to teach in a professional manner without disruptions and with support from administrators.

### Types of Teachers and Their Effects on Students

The Canters describe three types of teachers, differentiated on the basis of how they relate to students. They call the three types hostile teachers, nonassertive teachers, and assertive teachers.

**Hostile teachers** appear to view students as adversaries. They seem to feel if they are to maintain order and teach properly, they must keep the upper hand. They attempt to do so by laying down the law, accepting no nonsense, and using commands and stern facial expressions. They sometimes give needlessly strong admonishments such as: "Sit down, shut up, and listen!" Such messages suggest a dislike for students and cause students to feel they are being treated unjustly.

**Nonassertive teachers** take an overly passive approach to students. They fail to help the class formulate reasonable expectations or are inconsistent in dealing with students, allowing certain behaviors one day while strongly disapproving them the next. They often make statements such as, "For heaven's sake, please try to behave like ladies and gentlemen," or "How many times do I have to tell you no talking?" They come across as wishy-washy, and after a time students stop taking them seriously. Yet, when those teachers become overly frustrated, they sometimes come down very hard on students. This inconsistency leaves students confused about expectations and enforcement.

**Assertive teachers** clearly, confidently, and consistently model and express class expectations. They work hard to build trust with the class. When necessary, they teach students how to behave so they can better learn and relate to others, and they implement a discipline plan that encourages student cooperation. Such teachers help students understand which behaviors promote success and which lead to failure. Assertive teachers are not harsh taskmasters. They recognize students' needs for consistent limits on behavior but at the same time are ever mindful of students' needs for warmth and encouragement. Because they know that students may require direct instruction in how to behave acceptably in the classroom, they might be heard to say, "Our rule is no talking without raising your hand. Please raise your hand and wait for me to call on you."

Each of the response styles produces certain effects on teachers and students. The **hostile response style** takes away most of the pleasure that teachers and students might otherwise enjoy in class. Its harshness curtails the development of trusting relationships and can produce negative student attitudes toward teachers and school. The **nonassertive response style** leads to student feelings of insecurity and frustration. Nonassertive teachers cannot get their needs met in the classroom, which produces high levels of stress for them. These teachers frequently become hostile toward chronically misbehaving students. Students in turn feel manipulated and many feel little respect for their teachers. The **assertive response style** provides several benefits that the other styles do not. Assertive teachers create a classroom atmosphere that allows both teacher and students to meet their needs. They invite student collaboration and help students practice acceptable behavior. Students learn they can count on their teacher to provide clear expectations, consistency, and an atmosphere of warmth and support. All this engenders a feeling of comfort for everyone and allows teaching and learning to flourish.

### **Striking a Balance between Structure and Caring**

The Canters point out that if you want students to choose appropriate behavior and cooperate with you, they need to know that you are concerned about them personally—about their personal lives and their success in school. The Canters encourage teachers to say, "It is the way I perceive the student and the way I act toward him or her that will put me in the position to make some major changes and help the student succeed in school" (2001, p. 20). At the same time, students need structure and clearly defined limits on behavior. Teachers should strive to develop a classroom climate that is safe, peaceful, calm, and predictable, suffused with personal concern for students. Sustaining such a climate will enable teachers to help students conduct themselves responsibly despite problems they may bring with them to school.

### **Moving toward Trust as an Element of Discipline**

The Canters (Canter, 1996) stress that good discipline does not depend on many rules linked with harsh corrective actions. Rather, good discipline grows out of mutual trust and respect. The Canters provide abundant advice to help teachers develop this sort of discipline in their classrooms. In order to develop trust and respect in the classroom, teachers must always model the trust and respect they wish to see in their students. They must listen carefully to students, speak to them respectfully, and treat everyone fairly. Furthermore, they should get to know their students as individuals and acknowledge them as such. Toward this end the Canters suggest that teachers greet students by name with a smile, acknowledge birthdays and other important events in students' lives, learn about students' interests and preferences, and chat with them individually in and out of the classroom. They also suggest establishing strong ties with parents or guardians. This can be done through purposeful communication via positive notes and occasional phone calls.

### Teaching Students How They Are Expected to Behave in the Classroom

Students do not automatically know how to behave in all settings and situations. Therefore, teachers must make sure to teach acceptable behavior through modeling, explanation, and practice. The Canters say that the most important classroom rule is "Follow directions." Recognizing that different teachers have their own ways of doing things, the Canters suggest you remind students they need to follow your expectations, not another teacher's expectations. The Canters advise teachers to identify the academic activities, routine procedures, and special procedures for which directions are needed and then determine the specific directions that students need. The following are two examples, one for an academic activity and one for a routine procedure (Canter and Canter, 1992, pp. 126–127):

*Teacher conducting a directed lesson teaches students how to follow these directions:*

1. Please clear your desks of everything but paper and pencil.
2. Eyes on me. No talking while I'm talking.
3. Raise hand and wait to be called on before speaking.

*For routine procedure for entering the room, the teacher teaches students how to:*

1. Walk into the room.
2. Go directly to their seat and sit down.
3. Cease talking when the bell rings.

The best time for teaching directions is immediately prior to the first (or next) time the activity is to take place. For young children, give demonstrations and have children act them out. Frequent reteaching and reinforcement are necessary.

For older students, explain the reasons behind the directions and the benefits they provide. The Canters (1992, pp. 131–138) suggest the following procedure:

1. Explain the rationale for the direction.
2. Involve the students by asking questions.
3. Explain the specific directions.
4. Check for student understanding (by asking questions or having students role-play).

Once taught, the specific directions should be reinforced regularly through **positive repetition**. Rather than correcting a student who is not following directions, the teacher repeats the desired behavior. For example, a primary-grade teacher notes one or more who are following directions and says, "Joshua has remembered to raise his hand. So has Elsa." A secondary teacher addresses the class rather than individuals: "Practically everyone began work quickly. I appreciate that very much." Directions should be reviewed each time the activity is repeated for the first two weeks. For the next month the directions should be reviewed each Monday as a refresher, and for the remainder of the year they

should be reviewed after vacations and before special events such as holidays and field trips.

### Establishing Discipline That Provides Structure and Identifies Behavior Limits

The Canters advocate a written discipline plan that clarifies rules, positive recognition, and corrective actions. **Rules** state exactly how students are to behave. They should indicate observable behaviors such as "Keep your hands to yourself" rather than vague ideas such as "Show respect to other students." Rules should be limited in number (three to five) and refer only to behavior, not to academic issues. They remain always in effect. **Directions**, in contrast, only last for a given activity.

**Positive recognition** refers to giving sincere personal attention to students who behave in keeping with class expectations. Positive recognition should be used frequently, as it tends to increase self-esteem, encourage good behavior, and build a positive classroom climate. Common ways of providing recognition include giving encouragement, expressing appreciation, and communicating with positive notes and phone calls to parents.

**Corrective actions** are applied when students interfere with other students' right to learn. **Positive support** is given when students behave appropriately. Corrective actions are never harmful physically or psychologically, although they will usually be slightly unpleasant for students. The Canters stress that it is not severity that makes corrective actions effective, but rather the teacher's consistency in applying them. Students have full knowledge of probable corrective actions in advance. When corrective actions must be invoked, students are reminded that, by their behavior, they have chosen the consequence. Teachers usually don't like to invoke corrective actions, but the Canters remind us that we fail our students when we allow them to disrupt or misbehave without showing we care enough to limit their unacceptable behavior.

### Using the Discipline Hierarchy

With advance preparation, misbehavior can be dealt with calmly and quickly. The Canters advise making what they call a **discipline hierarchy** that lists corrective actions and the order in which they will be imposed within the day. (Each day or secondary class period begins afresh.) Each consequence in the hierarchy is a bit more unpleasant than its predecessor. The Canters (1992, p. 85) illustrate the discipline hierarchy with the following examples:

*First time a student disrupts.* Consequence: "Bobby, our rule is no shouting out. That's a warning."

*Second or third time the same student disrupts.* Consequence: "Bobby, our rule is no shouting out. You have chosen 5 minutes time out at the back table."

*Fourth time the same student disrupts.* Consequence: "Bobby, you know our rules about shouting out. You have chosen to have your parents called." The teacher



informs Bobby's parents. This is done by telephone and is especially effective if Bobby is required to place the call and explain what has happened.

*Fifth time the same student disrupts.* Consequence: "Bobby, our rule is no shouting out. You have chosen to go to the office to talk with the principal about your behavior."

*Severe clause.* Sometimes behavior is so severe that it is best to invoke the *severe clause*—being sent to the principal—on the first offense. Consequence: "Bobby, fighting is not allowed in this class. You have chosen to go to the principal immediately. We will talk about this later."

To employ the discipline hierarchy effectively, teachers must keep track of offenses that students commit. This can be done by recording on a clipboard students' names and the number of violations. Other options include recording this information in the plan book or, in primary grades, using a system of colored cards that students "turn" or change after each violation. The Canters advise that names of offending students *not* be written on the board.

### Teaching the Discipline Plan

The Canters stress that in order to make a discipline plan work effectively, teachers must **teach the discipline plan** to their students. It is not enough just to read it aloud or display it on a poster. The Canters provide a number of sample lessons showing how the plan can be taught at different grade levels. The plans follow this sequence:

1. Explain why rules are needed.
2. Teach the specific rules.
3. Check for understanding.
4. Explain how you will reward students who follow rules.
5. Explain why there are corrective actions for breaking the rules.
6. Teach the corrective actions and how they are applied.
7. Check again for understanding.

### Providing Positive Support

The Canters (2001) say that the best way to build responsible behavior is regularly to provide positive support and recognition to students who are on task. Both should be integrated naturally into lessons being taught. The Canters go on to say that **verbal recognition** is the most effective technique for encouraging responsible behavior, and they provide guidelines for its use:

- Effective verbal recognition is personal. The student's name is mentioned along with the desired behavior: "Jack, thank you for working quietly back there."

- Effective verbal recognition is genuine. It must be related to the situation and behavior, and the teacher's demeanor should show that it is sincere.
- Effective verbal recognition is descriptive and specific. It lets students know when and why they are behaving appropriately: "Good, Susan. You went right to work on your essay."
- Effective verbal recognition is age appropriate. Young children like to be praised publicly. Older students like praise but usually prefer to receive it privately. The Canters make several recommendations concerning how to go about providing positive verbal recognition and support, such as scanning the room to note students who are working appropriately, circulating around the classroom to give one-on-one attention, and for young children writing names on the board of those who are behaving responsibly. They suggest setting a goal with the class for getting at least 20 names on the board each day.

### Redirecting Nondisruptive Off-Task Behavior

Often students break class rules in a nondisruptive way. They may look out the window instead of working, read a book instead of doing their assignment, or doodle instead of completing their work. Rather than applying corrective actions for these benign misbehaviors, teachers should redirect students back to the assigned task. The Canters describe four techniques teachers can use in these circumstances:

- Use "the look": Make eye contact and use an expression that shows awareness and disapproval.
- Use **physical proximity**: Move beside the student. Usually there is no need to do more.
- Mention the offending student's name. The teacher says, "I want all of you, including Tanya and Miguel, to come up with the answer to this problem."
- Use **proximity verbal recognition**: Jason is not working, but Suni and Maria, seated nearby, are working. The teacher says, "Suni and Maria are doing a good job of completing their work."

These redirecting techniques are usually quite effective. If they do not produce the desired results, the teacher should assume that the offending student needs more help for self-control and should turn to the discipline hierarchy and issue a warning.

### Invoking Corrective Actions

When the discipline program is first implemented, students are clearly informed of positive recognition and negative corrective actions associated with class rules, and they may have role-played situations involving both. They realize that negative corrective actions naturally follow misbehavior. The Canters make these suggestions for invoking negative corrective actions:

- Provide corrective actions calmly in a matter-of-fact manner: "Nathan, speaking like that to others is against our rules. You have chosen to stay after class."
- Be consistent: Provide a consequence every time students choose to disrupt.
- After a student receives a consequence, find the first opportunity to recognize that student's positive behavior: "Nathan, I appreciate how you are working. You are making a good choice."
- Provide an escape mechanism for students who are upset and want to talk about what happened: Allow the student to describe feelings or the situation in a journal or log.
- When a younger student continues to disrupt—move in: Nathan again speaks hurtfully to another student. The teacher moves close to Nathan and quietly and firmly tells him his behavior is inappropriate. She reminds him of the corrective actions he has already received and of the next consequence in the hierarchy.
- When an older student continues to disrupt—move out: Marta once again talks during work time. The teacher asks Marta to step outside the classroom, where she reminds Marta of the inappropriate behavior and possible corrective actions. All the while, the teacher stays calm, shows respect for Marta's feelings, and refrains from arguing.

### Working with Difficult Students

The Canters have found that the techniques described to this point help almost all students behave in a responsible manner, but they recognize that a few students require additional consideration. Those are the difficult-to-handle students the Canters (1993) describe as:

... students who are continually disruptive, persistently defiant, demanding of attention or unmotivated. They are the students who defy your authority and cause you stress, frustration and anger. Many of these students have severe emotional or behavioral problems. They may have been physically or psychologically abused, or born substance-addicted to alcohol, cocaine, or other drugs. Many of them come from home environments where parents have very little influence or control over their behavior.

Difficult students are *not* the students in your class who act up occasionally. They're not the ones who once in a while may cause you to lose your temper. Difficult students are those who engage in disruptive, off-task behavior with great intensity and frequency. (p. 6)

Teachers do not like having to contend with these students, but they are most in need of attention and adult guidance. The Canters acknowledge that "You can't 'cure' or change these students, but you can create an environment that will help (them) achieve" (1993, p. 11). This is accomplished in three phases, which the Canters call (1) reaching out to difficult students, (2) meeting the special needs of difficult students, and (3) communicating with difficult students.

### Reaching Out to Difficult Students

Teachers must take the initiative in working with difficult students. Instead of continually reacting to misbehavior, they have to reach out to those students and try to gain their trust. The Canters remind us that most students arrive in the classroom feeling they can trust the teacher and they, therefore, accept teacher guidance. But difficult students are different. For a number of reasons, they do not see teachers as positive, caring role models. They do not trust teachers, do not like school, and do not see any point in behaving properly in school. They find satisfaction in ignoring teacher requests and behaving impudently. A teacher's first priority in working with such students is, therefore, to build a sense of trust.

The process is not an easy one. Teachers can begin by trying to put themselves in the student's place, trying to see teachers and school from the student's point of view. Then they can change the ways they *respond* to the difficult student. They need to decide beforehand how they will react when the student behaves defiantly or confrontationally. This involves **proactive teacher behavior**, which the Canters contrast with **reactive teacher behavior**. When responding reactively to a difficult student, teachers usually lose their tempers, fail to impose their will on the student, and end up sending the student to the principal's office. This accomplishes nothing positive. The teacher feels bad, stress is increased, and a sense of frustration and failure remains. The student does not become more willing to comply with teacher requests but rather more resistant and less trusting, and the class is left feeling uneasy.

By preparing proactive responses, teachers can avoid much of the uneasiness and begin building a sense of trust. The Canters (1993, pp. 32-34) advise teachers as follows:

- Anticipate what the difficult student will do and say. Think through how you will respond.
- Remember that you have a choice in your responses. You can choose *not* to respond angrily or defensively. You can choose *not* to let your feelings get hurt.
- Do not give up on difficult students. They need to see that you care about them.

### Building Trust with Difficult Students

Teachers can show that they care about students as individuals by treating every student as they would want their own child to be treated. Furthermore, they can reach out to students in ways such as the following:

- Take a student interest inventory. Find out about brothers and sisters, friends, preferred activities, hobbies, favorite books and TV shows, future hopes, and what students like their teachers to do.
- Greet students individually at the door. Say something special to each, personally.
- Spend some individual time with students. Give one-on-one attention when possible.
- Make a phone call to the student after school and express appreciation, empathy, or regret, as appropriate.
- When a student is ill, send a get-well card or use the phone to convey best wishes.

### Meeting Difficult Students' Needs

Some of difficult students' strongly felt needs are not being met at school. Teachers must find ways to meet those needs if they are to be successful with these students. The Canters explain that difficult students typically have three kinds of special needs: (1) a need for extra attention, (2) a need for firmer limits, and (3) a need for motivation. The way to succeed with difficult students who are disruptive or noncompliant is to attend to these three special needs.

How does a teacher identify which of these three needs is predominating at a given time? By doing the following, the Canters say: (1) Look at the student's behavior, (2) look at your own response to the student's behavior, and (3) look at the student's reaction to your response. Suppose fourth-grader Juan continually makes silly noises, gets out of his seat, makes irrelevant comments, shouts out, and grins at others. His behavior annoys you greatly, and after days of it you feel he is driving you crazy. Every time you reprimand Juan he gets quiet for a little while, then begins disrupting again. Juan is annoying you (a sign of persistent attention-seeking behavior) and is satisfied temporarily when you give him attention. It is clear that Juan has a need for extra attention.

Suppose ninth-grader Alicia talks back to you, argues with others, and refuses to do what you ask of her. She doesn't want you or anyone else telling her what to do. Alicia's behavior makes you angry, and after a time you feel threatened. You want to put her in her place. When you reprimand and redirect her, she refuses to comply with your reasonable requests. Alicia shows a need for firmer limits.

Suppose eleventh-grader Arthur is always reluctant to begin an assignment, never completes one, continually makes excuses, and projects an "I-can't" attitude. Arthur's behavior over time frustrates you. You try everything you know to get him going. He doesn't fight back, but nothing you do seems to work. In the Canters' scheme, Arthur has a need for extra motivation.

**Meeting the Student's Predominant Need** Once a difficult student's predominant need is identified, the teacher can address it in a beneficial manner, in accordance with the following suggestions (Canter and Canter, 1993, pp. 68-73):

If the student needs *attention*, provide the maximum amount of attention in the shortest amount of time. Plan some proactive steps, such as greeting the student at the door, taking him or her aside for occasional brief chats, giving personal attention during directions and work time, and providing positive recognition for effort and attentiveness. Through the process, help the student see how to obtain recognition through appropriate, rather than inappropriate, behavior.

If the student needs *firmer limits*, enforce class rules in a nonconfrontational way. Do not give these students occasion to show how tough and defiant they can be. Quietly and privately remind them of rules and show appreciation when they comply.

If the student needs *greater motivation*, show faith in his or her ability. Make sure the assignment is within the student's capability. Break the task down into small parts if possible. Compliment the student on any effort or progress he or she makes.

**Providing Positive Support** Positive interactions with difficult students are one of the keys to success, but most teachers find this task difficult, since they are so often provoked

by the students' misbehavior. For these situations, the Canters (1993, pp. 100–116) provide a number of suggestions, including:

- In the plan book, enter reminders of whom you wish to acknowledge, what for, and when.
- Post reminders at strategic points in the classroom, such as beside the clock.
- Put a sticker on your watch face, so that every time you look at your watch you will be reminded to provide positive recognition to someone in need of it.
- Walk around the room and look for positive behavior, then supply recognition.

As noted earlier, the Canters believe positive support is best provided in the form of *verbal recognition*. It can also be given effectively in notes and phone calls home, special privileges, behavior awards, and tangible rewards.

### **Redirecting Nondisruptive Misbehavior**

Difficult students often misbehave in ways that do not disrupt the class, such as day-dreaming, doodling, looking out the window, and withdrawing. Teachers usually react to this kind of misbehavior by either ignoring it or giving an immediate consequence. The Canters suggest, however, that nondisruptive misbehavior offers a good opportunity to build positive relationships with the student. The strategy proceeds this way (Carter and Canter, 1993, pp. 120–124): The teacher says quietly to the student, "Your behavior is inappropriate, but I care about you and I'm going to give you the chance to choose a more appropriate behavior." This gives the student an opportunity to meet the teacher's expectations. Further help will probably be needed, which the teacher provides by establishing eye contact, moving into physical proximity, or softly calling the student's name. If this is not sufficient, the student can be reminded of the rules and seated near the teacher. Teachers must remember to give encouragement as the student shows signs of complying with the rules.

### **Interacting with Difficult Students**

The Canters make a number of suggestions for interacting with difficult-to-manage students, related to how to handle oneself, how to defuse confrontations, and how to use one-to-one problem solving. They begin by cautioning against "reactive responses" that usually make relationships worse, not better. They remind us that when a student becomes increasingly upset or defiant, we should stay calm and deescalate the situation. When meeting in a problem-solving conference with a student, we can communicate both firmness and caring. And by using effective communication skills we can build trust with a student even in difficult circumstances (1993, p. 190).

**Defusing Confrontations** The Canters point out that when you set limits and hold difficult students accountable, there will be confrontations. Teachers intensely dislike confrontations with students, which put teachers on the defensive and stir up heated emotions. How do you deal with them? The Canters (1993, pp. 162–175) make suggestions that include the following:

- Tell yourself to stay calm. Do not speak for a moment or two. Take a slow, deep breath and count to three, four, or five. This will help you relax.
- Depersonalize the situation. Realize that the student is not attacking you personally, but rather the situation. Think of it as a scene in a movie. The calmer you remain, the harder it is for the student to stay upset.
- Differentiate between covert and overt confrontations. In covert confrontations, the student mumbles or sneers but does not attack you verbally. In this case, step away from the student, but later speak to him or her privately. Overt confrontations are treated differently. Here, the student reacts defiantly to the teacher's requests, drawing other students' attention. In this case, remain calm and refuse to engage the student hostilely. Instead, acknowledge the student's emotion and restate what the student needs to do. If the student remains hostile, take him or her aside, acknowledge the student's feelings, and again request cooperation.
- If the student is especially hostile, you should back off. Drop the matter temporarily so the class may continue. Later, talk with the student privately.

Difficult though it may be, teachers should not view confrontations as setbacks, but rather as new opportunities to show commitment to the student. A calm, caring attitude will do much toward building trust between teacher and student.

**One-to-One Problem Solving** Students who continue to misbehave seriously require still more in-depth, personal guidance from the teacher. This can be provided in what the Canters call one-to-one problem-solving conferences, useful when the student's misbehavior is chronic, when there is a sudden change in behavior, or when there is a serious problem (such as fighting) that cannot be overlooked. The Canters (1993, pp. 180–189) provide these guidelines for personal conferences:

- Meet privately with the student and keep the meeting brief.
- Show empathy and concern. The meeting is about the student's behavior, not about your classroom and not about you.
- Focus on helping the student gain insight into the misbehavior and into more appropriate behavior that will meet the student's needs. Try to find out why the problem behavior persists—is there a problem at home, with other students, with the difficulty of assignments? Listen and show respect for the student.
- Help the student determine how his or her behavior can be improved.
- Disarm the student's criticism of you. Ask for specific examples of what you are doing that bothers the student. Show empathy. Focus on the student's needs.
- State your expectations about how the student is to behave. Make it clear (in a calm, friendly manner) that you will not allow the student to continue disruptive behavior.

### **Strengths of the Canters' *Assertive Discipline***

The Canters have developed and refined a system of discipline for helping promote a pleasant, supportive classroom environment that frees teachers to teach and students to

learn. Their approach has broken new ground in several ways—effectiveness, ease of implementation, meeting teachers' and students' needs, teaching students how to behave responsibly, and insistence on support from administrators and parents. A great many teachers are very enthusiastic about *Assertive Discipline* because it helps them deal with students positively and teach with little interruption. It also preserves instructional time and helps relieve the annoyance of verbal confrontations. In the past, *Assertive Discipline* was criticized for being unnecessarily harsh and too focused on suppressing unwanted behavior rather than on helping students learn to control their own behavior. The Canters have been sensitive to those concerns and have taken pains to make sure that teachers understand this central point: Students must be taught, in an atmosphere of respect, trust, and support, how to behave responsibly. Perhaps the most telling evidence of the strength of *Assertive Discipline* is its continued widespread popularity, which indicates it provides tactics that work well for students and teachers alike.

### Initiating the Canters' *Assertive Discipline*

*Assertive Discipline* can be introduced in the class at any time, although the first few days of a new school year or semester are especially appropriate. Decide on behaviors you want from students, what you will do to build trust, what positive recognitions you will provide, and what corrective actions you will invoke. Meet with your class and discuss the kinds of behavior that will make the classroom pleasant, safe, and productive. Solicit students' ideas. Using their input, jointly formulate three to five rules to govern behavior. Sincerely ask all students if they can agree to abide by the rules. Discuss with students the positive recognitions you will provide and the hierarchy of corrective actions that you will invoke. Make sure students realize that the rules apply to every member of the class all the time. Take your plan to the principal for approval and administrative support. Send a copy of the discipline plan home for parents to read. Ask parents to sign and return a slip indicating their approval and support. With students, role-play rules, recognitions, and corrective actions and emphasize repeatedly that the plan helps everyone enjoy a safe, positive environment.

### KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS PRESENTED IN THIS CHAPTER

The following terms are emphasized in the Canters' *Assertive Discipline*. Check to make sure you understand them:

student rights and needs  
teacher rights  
assertive response style  
assertive teachers  
hostile response style  
hostile teachers  
nonassertive response style  
nonassertive teachers

positive recognition  
proactive posture  
reactive posture  
setting limits  
corrective actions  
severe clause  
teaching the discipline plan  
teaching proper behavior

positive support  
verbal recognition  
positive repetitions  
physical proximity  
rules  
directions  
discipline hierarchy  
proximity verbal recognition



## SELECTED SEVEN—SUMMARY SUGGESTIONS FROM LEE AND MARLENE CANTER

The Canters suggest that you emphasize the following, as well as their many other suggestions.

- 1 Make sure that your students' needs, and your own needs, get met in the classroom. That is necessary for happy, productive classes.
- 2 Maintain focus on your main duties in the classroom, which are to help students learn and to help them behave responsibly.
- 3 You must model appropriate behavior and may have to teach it to students as well.
- 4 Your discipline system should establish limits on behavior and provide the necessary structures to help students behave acceptably. You must teach your discipline plan to students so they understand and accept it.
- 5 You are far more effective when you use a proactive approach to teaching rather than a reactive one. This means thinking through and anticipating situations and how to deal with them rather than trying to react without prior consideration.
- 6 Good student behavior is best maintained by providing students continual positive support and the help they need.
- 7 The crucial factors in working with difficult students are (1) reaching out to these students, (2) gaining their trust, and (3) meeting their needs.

## CONCEPT CASES

### ■ CASE 1 *Kristina Will Not Work*

Kristina, a student in Mr. Jake's class, is quite docile. She socializes little with other students and never disrupts lessons. However, despite Mr. Jake's best efforts, Kristina will not do her work. She rarely completes an assignment. She is simply there, putting forth no effort at all. *How would the Canters deal with Kristina?*

They would advise Mr. Jake to do the following: Quietly and clearly communicate class expectations to Kristina. Redirect her to on-task behavior. Have private talks with her to determine why she is not doing her work and what Mr. Jake might do to help. Provide personal recognition regularly and try to build a bond of care and trust with Kristina. Contact Kristina's parents about her behavior. See if they can provide insights that will help Mr. Jake work with Kristina. If necessary, make an individualized behavior plan for helping Kristina do her work. As she shows signs of progress, provide positive corrective actions.

### ■ CASE 2 *Sara Cannot Stop Talking*

Sara is a pleasant girl who participates in class activities and does most, though not all, of her assigned work. She cannot seem to refrain from talking to classmates, however. Her teacher, Mr. Gonzales, has to speak to her repeatedly during lessons, to the point that he often becomes

exasperated and loses his temper. *What suggestions would the Canters give Mr. Gonzales for dealing with Sara?*

### ■ CASE 3 *Joshua Clowns and Intimidates*

Larger and louder than his classmates, Joshua always wants to be the center of attention, which he accomplishes through a combination of clowning and intimidation. He makes wise remarks, talks back (smilingly) to the teacher, utters a variety of sound-effect noises such as automobile crashes and gunshots, and makes limitless sarcastic comments and put-downs of his classmates. Other students will not stand up to him, apparently fearing his size and verbal aggression. His teacher, Miss Pearl, has come to her wit's end. *Would Joshua's behavior be likely to improve if the Canters' techniques were used in Miss Pearl's classroom? Explain.*

### ■ CASE 4 *Tom Is Hostile and Defiant*

Tom has appeared to be in his usual foul mood ever since arriving in class. On his way to sharpen his pencil, he bumps into Frank, who complains. Tom tells him loudly to shut up. Miss Baines, the teacher, says, "Tom, go back to your seat." Tom wheels around, swears loudly, and says heatedly, "I'll go when I'm damned good and ready!" *How would the Canters have Miss Baines deal with Tom?*

## QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. Make notes in your journal from what you encountered in the Canter model that applies to the five principles of building a personal system of discipline.
2. Each of the following exemplifies an important point in the Canter model of discipline. Identify the point illustrated by each.
  - a. Miss Hatcher, on seeing her class list for the coming year, exclaims, "Oh no! Billy Smythe in my class! Nobody can do a thing with him! There goes my sanity!"
  - b. "If I catch you talking again during the class, you will have to stay an extra five minutes."
  - c. "I wish you would try your best not to curse in this room."
  - d. Students who receive a fourth check mark must go to the office and call their parents to explain what has happened.
  - e. If the class is especially attentive and hardworking, students earn five minutes they can use for talking quietly at the end of the period.
3. For a grade level and/or subject you select, outline an *Assertive Discipline* plan that includes the following:
  - four rules
  - positive recognition and corrective actions associated with the rules
  - the people you will inform about your system, and how you will inform them

## YOU ARE THE TEACHER

### Fifth Grade

Your new fifth-grade class consists of students from a small, stable community. Because the transiency rate is low, many of your students have been together since first grade, and during those years they have developed certain patterns of interacting and assuming various roles such as clowns and instigators. Unfortunately, their behavior often interferes with teaching and learning. During the first week of school you notice that four or five students enjoy making smart-aleck remarks about most things you want them to do. When such remarks are made, the other students laugh and sometimes join in. Even when you attempt to hold class discussions about serious issues, many of the students make light of the topics and refuse to enter genuinely into an exploration of the issues. Instead of the productive discussion you have hoped for, you find that class behavior often degenerates into flippancy and horseplay.

### A Typical Occurrence

You have begun a history lesson that contains a reference to Julius Caesar. You ask if anyone has ever heard of Julius Caesar. Ben shouts out, "Yeah, they named a salad after him!" The class laughs and calls out encouraging remarks such as "Good one, Ben!" You wait for some sem-

blance of order and then say, "Let us go on." "Lettuce, continue!" cries Jeremy from the back of the room. The class bursts into laughter and chatter. You ask for their cooperation and no more students calling out or making remarks, but you know several are continuing to smirk and whisper, with a good deal of barely suppressed giggling. You try to ignore it, but because of the disruptions you are not able to complete the lesson on time or to get the results you hoped for.

### Conceptualizing a Strategy

If you followed the suggestions of Lee and Marlene Canter, what would you conclude or do with regard to the following?

1. Preventing the problem from occurring in the first place.
2. Putting a clear end to the misbehavior now.
3. Involving other or all students in addressing the situation.
4. Maintaining student dignity and good personal relations.
5. Using follow-up procedures that would prevent the recurrence of the misbehavior.
6. Using the situation to help the students develop a sense of greater responsibility and self-control.

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