

# Arguing: An Individual Argues with Classmates

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(*The Solution Book*, Solution Sheets, Section 23)

See also

Arguing: A General Class Problem 24

Description of the Problem	Cause
Marshall is constantly getting into arguments with other students in the class. Some of the students ignore him when he argues, but many of the students argue with him. Marshall argues about being first in line. He argues about who gets to take the ball out to recess. He argues about the corrections that have been made on his papers. He even becomes confrontational if someone puts a hand on his desk as he or she walks by. Up to this point, the teacher has dealt with Marshall's problem by scolding him whenever he begins to argue.	Marshall may be reinforced for his behavior by the reminders and the scolding he receives from the teacher. If the teacher stops every argument and lectures him, he may have decided that arguing gives him some worthwhile attention from the teacher. A second factor may be the additional attention Marshall gets from his peers. The student may have learned that he can elicit a consistent and predictable response from other students in the class. Predictability is reassuring to an insecure child. While the child may be uncomfortable with his peer relationships, he may be quite comfortable with arguing. The student who argues constantly may not know how to interact positively. Arguing may be the only way that he knows to get attention.

## The Goal

The student will learn to disagree in appropriate ways and will increase the number of positive interactions he or she has with peers.

## The Plan

**Step 1** Identify exactly what constitutes an argument. This is more difficult than it sounds. Is the student arguing if the student tells another student that he or she should be first in line? Is the student arguing if the student speaks in an angry voice? What if the student has a legitimate disagreement with another student? How can the student voice his or her opinion so as not to be considered arguing?

It might be easier to define arguing as any negative interaction between the student and any other student or between the student and the teacher. A negative interaction must be carefully defined for the student. It will be important to provide the student with clear feedback when he or she is being successful and when he or she is not. Before implementing the other steps in the plan, watch the student interact with the other students. For each interaction, decide if it is positive or negative. For now, don't do anything else. Just watch the student and practice classifying his or her interactions with other students. When you feel confident in deciding whether an interaction is positive or negative, proceed with the other steps in the plan.

Turn the page.

## The Plan (continued)

- Step 2** Have the student use the “Interactions” chart in the Materials section of the program. Note that this chart has two halves—one for positive interactions and one for negative interactions. The student should be given a copy of the chart to keep at his or her desk. Anytime you see the student interacting positively with another student, have him or her mark the top half of the chart. Anytime you see the student interacting negatively with another student, have him or her mark the bottom half of the chart. If you think the student will not mark the chart accurately, you may wish to mark the chart for the student.
- Step 3** Design a reinforcer for decreasing the student's negative interactions and increasing his or her positive interactions. If the student earns more positive marks than negative marks on the first day, he or she should earn some reinforcement. A good reinforcer might be earning free time. On each subsequent day, earning free time should be based on his or her having decreased the number of negative interactions. When the student's negative interactions have been reduced to zero, the reinforcer will provide the necessary inducement for maintaining zero negative interactions.
- Step 4** Discuss the problem, the chart, and the reinforcer with the student. The talk might go something like the following:
- “Marshall, I’ve been worried about the amount of arguing you do with the other students in the class. I’m concerned about this because I would like to see you get along better and have more fun with your classmates. What I’d like us to do is work on your being more positive and less negative with others in the class. I want you to keep a chart. This chart has two parts. The top of the chart is for keeping track of positive interactions. You are engaging in positive interactions when you are getting along with, cooperating, or helping another student. The bottom of the chart is for keeping track of negative interactions. You are engaging in negative interactions whenever you argue with, yell at, or hassle another student.
- “Sometimes you may disagree with another student. That’s all right as long as you handle it without getting mad and arguing. If you can handle a disagreement by discussing the problem calmly with the other student, you will earn a mark on the positive part of the chart. However, if you get angry and start to yell or get upset in any way, you will earn a mark on the negative part of the chart. At the end of the day, if you have more marks on the positive part than on the negative part of the chart, you will earn five minutes of free time. Each day, you will earn free time if you have fewer negative marks on the chart than you did the day before. Do you have any questions?”
- Step 5** Be consistent about giving the student feedback. The effectiveness of this plan depends on your ability to notice and give feedback to the student when he or she is being successful. You may wish to involve the other students in helping you notice the student's successes. Ask the other students to tell you anytime they have had a pleasant interaction with Marshall. Whenever a student reports a positive interaction, have Marshall mark the positive section of his chart.
- Do not have students report negative interactions with Marshall, only positive interactions. If a student reports a negative interaction, simply say, “That’s too bad. I hope next time you two will be able to get along.” Do not have Marshall mark the negative part of his chart unless you actually see or hear the interaction.