

# Guidelines for Effectively Correcting Misbehavior

(Excerpt from *The Solution Book*, Topic Booklet C)

## Guidelines for Effectively Correcting Misbehavior

For corrective consequences to be effective, several things must be kept in mind:

### Guideline 1

**Corrective consequences must change behavior.** Therefore, student behavior must be monitored to determine whether consequences are reducing the frequency of the misbehavior. If they are not, you are not correcting misbehavior. Corrective consequences can work. Therefore, if the strategy you are using has not modified the behavior, try other strategies until you find one that works.

### Guideline 2

**Corrective consequences should never be used without a concurrent plan for reinforcing success.** Consequences do not teach a student to behave, only to avoid punishment. To teach a student appropriate behaviors, corrective strategies must have a positive dimension to them. For example, Shirley often talks back to the teacher. The teacher has decided she will correct Shirley by having her “owe time” (a procedure explained later in this booklet). Every time Shirley talks back, she loses a minute of her recess.

If this is the teacher’s total plan, it will probably fail. The plan does not have a motivating aspect from Shirley’s point of view. If Shirley is 100 percent successful, she doesn’t owe time, but this means that her best efforts can only result in not being corrected. Something more is necessary to motivate Shirley to succeed.

If the teacher adds a reinforcing contingency, Shirley’s behavior is much more likely to change. In the original plan Shirley owed time from recess if she talked back to the teacher. This plan could be improved simply by adding a motivating dimension to it: for each day that Shirley does not talk back, she will get to help the teacher erase the boards. In addition to showing Shirley she should not talk back, the teacher now shows that she is pleased when Shirley is successful. The reinforcement of her good behavior gives Shirley something to be proud of and contributes to a positive self-image. Remember, a corrective procedure should never be used without a plan for reinforcing success.

### Guideline 3

**Corrective consequences should always be implemented calmly.** The goal of a corrective consequence is to teach the individual who misbehaves that there is a consequence for misbehavior. The student must see that the corrective procedure has nothing to do with the teacher’s personal feelings. If the teacher is emotional while implementing the consequence, the student may think that the teacher is correcting him or her because he is angry or because he does not like the student. Thus, the student ends up believing that the consequence is not a result of his or her misbehavior—the teacher’s just having a bad day.

Another reason that corrective procedures must be implemented calmly is that the student may find the teacher’s anger reinforcing. If the student knows that the teacher will become angry or yell, he or she may decide that it’s worth losing some time from recess in order to upset the teacher.

Correcting a student unemotionally will draw attention away from your behavior and concentrate it on the student’s behavior, where it belongs. Once this is accomplished, the message from the consequence becomes clear; students are responsible for their behavior and must make their own choices with regard to it. If they behave appropriately, there will be positive results, and if they misbehave, there will be negative results.

### Guideline 4

**Corrective consequences should be used discriminately.** Correcting students takes time. The more time spent correcting students, the less time there is left for teaching. So, resolve to correct only a few, carefully chosen behaviors.

### Guideline 5

**Once you have chosen which behaviors you will correct, implement consequences consistently.** If talking back to the teacher is a behavior you decide to correct, correct it every time it occurs. A corrective consequence will only be effective if it is absolutely consistent. The students must see a pattern: If we do X, we are corrected. If instead they see that the teacher is inconsistent in meting out consequences, they may misbehave just to find out what the teacher will do or behave any way they want since the consequences seem arbitrary and unfair.