

VERBAL ROUTINES

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Students may need guidance to understand why or how their misbehavior has hurt others, and to find more constructive ways to solve problems.

Teachers need to develop a repertoire of discipline techniques that they can use to solve classroom problems.

Listed below are three models that can be readily used by teachers. They are called routines because the teacher consistently uses similar wording when students do something they should not have done. The first routine deals with problems caused by student misbehavior. The second deals with situations in which students are not doing their work. The third deals with students who are not where they ought to be or are not doing what they should be doing.

When a Student Misbehaves

Using an adaptation of Glasser's idea of individual accountability,* here is what to do when a student acts in an inappropriate way. The routine consists of the following questions:

1. "What did you do?"
2. "Who is this helping or hurting?"
3. "What are you going to do so that this does not happen again?"
4. "When are you going to start?"

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The first question, "*What did you do?*" puts the responsibility on the student for his or her behavior. If you ask students *why* they were doing a certain thing, this allows them to make excuses—and many are creative at doing that! Often you will need to repeat the question, because most students (and even adults) are not used to describing their own behavior, especially their misbehav-

ior. People are usually quite good at describing others' actions but need help and practice in describing their own.

The second question to be asked is this: "Who are you helping or hurting?" Students may need guidance to understand why or how their misbehavior has hurt others and why it is not helpful, and to find more constructive ways to solve problems. They need to be reminded that hurting others is not acceptable behavior. This includes making the teacher take time to deal with the problem.

The third question, "What are you going to do so that this does not happen again?" places the responsibility on the student to come up with a plan. Students may need assistance at this point, but even young children will have some ideas. This process may take time, because students often do not want to take responsibility for their actions. Allow them to sit until they come up with at least one idea. Meanwhile, carry on your usual routine. Of course, they will need to negotiate their plan with the teacher, but once decided upon, the plan can be oral or written.

The last question is simple: "When are you going to start?" This question also implies responsibility and emphasizes the immediacy of the plan. The most acceptable answer is "right now." Sometimes it is a good idea to role-play the situation to let the student see the plan in action.

Using this type of routine cuts out a lot of verbal pollution and teaches students to take responsibility for their actions. Using this series of questions every time misbehavior occurs will help students act more responsibly and begin generating their own solutions. Some actions may be averted because students have thought through the consequences.

When a Student Is Not Doing What He or She Is Supposed to Do

Another verbal routine can reduce verbal pollution in the classroom. It addresses the problem of students' not doing what they are supposed to do. Again, using an idea adapted from Glasser, you ask questions to get students to take responsibility for their actions.

The questions are as follows:

1. "Do you know what to do?"

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If you ask students why they were doing a certain thing, this allows them to make excuses—and many are creative at doing that!

2. "Do you know how to do it?"

3. "Is anything keeping you from doing the work?"

The first question, "Do you know what to do?" clears up an important point. If a student does not know what he or she is supposed to do, the solution is simple: explain the task or assignment.

If the student does know what he is supposed to do, the next question should be: "Do you know how to do it?" Sometimes diagnostic questioning will be needed to find the answer. Asking the student what to do first, second, and third helps you determine whether he knows how to do

the task. Reteaching may be needed.

If the student knows what to do and how to do it, the logical next question would be: "Is anything keeping you from doing the work?" Perhaps the student can't see the chalkboard, has left his glasses at home, or doesn't have a pencil. These conditions need to be remedied.

The culmination of this line of questioning is the conclusion that the student has chosen not to do the task or assignment. You may need to emphasize that this decision is not acceptable. Using the above verbal routine tells where the responsibility lies—with the teacher to make the assignment clear or with the student who has chosen not to work. Most students will get busy once they realize that the teacher wants them to work and it is their responsibility to do so. In extreme cases, you may need to enlist the help of parents with this routine.

Other Verbal Routines

Other simple verbal routines can help students take responsibility for their behavior. For example, if a student is not where he or she is supposed to be, the simple question, "Where are you supposed to be?" will often suffice. This does not permit excuses or seek to lay blame. A related question is "What are you supposed to

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be doing?" if students are not working when they should be.

Teachers should use these routines privately with students. However, when introducing the process, the whole routine ought to be discussed and role-played before using.

Summary

Here is a summary of the routines:

Misbehavior

1. "What did you do?"
2. "Who are you hurting?"
3. "What are you going to do so that this does not happen again?"
4. "When are you going to start?"

Not Working or Following Instructions

1. "Do you know what to do?" or "What are you supposed to be doing?"
2. "Do you know how to do it?"
3. "Is anything keeping you from doing the work?"
4. (if necessary) "What are you going to do next?"

In the Wrong Place

1. "Where are you supposed to be?"

These routines teach students to think about their own actions and behaviors even before being asked.

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Conclusion

These verbal routines have several advantages. They are simple, yet powerful. They put the responsibility for behavior on the student. They discourage students from making excuses, but also remind teachers to give clear assignments, make directions understandable, and remove environmental hindrances. These routines also teach students to think about their own actions and behaviors even before being asked—particularly if these procedures truly become routine in the classroom. Students thus learn to take responsibility

for themselves—something for which other students, teachers, and parents will thank you. Verbal routines are worth trying in your classroom. ✍

**William Glasser, M.D., Schools Without Failure (New York: Harper and Row, 1969).*