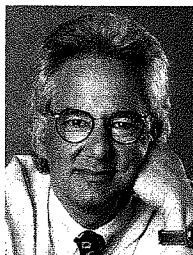


- Show faith in students; offer them help in overcoming obstacles.
- Encourage students to help each other.
- Show pride in students' work; display it and share it with others.
- Be optimistic and enthusiastic—a positive outlook is contagious.
- Use encouraging remarks, such as, "You have improved." "Can I help you?" "What did you learn from that mistake?"

Because Dreikurs contributed so much to discipline, it might seem strange that teachers did not adopt his approach wholeheartedly. Teachers like his ideas, but have found his system a bit daunting, too unwieldy to be implemented easily. They had trouble seeing the interconnections among democracy, prime motive, mistaken goals, social interest, and logical consequences. But most of all, they found it lacking in the ingredient they most wanted, namely, what do you do to put an immediate stop to student disruptions, aggression, and defiance?

Lee and Marlene Canter: Discipline through Assertive Tactics



In 1976, Lee Canter founded Canter & Associates. Their first product was a book titled *Assertive Discipline: A Take-Charge Approach for Today's Educator* (1976). In subsequent years, Canter & Associates provided a large quantity of materials and programs involving Assertive Discipline for educators and parents. They brought *Assertive Discipline* to millions of teachers and administrators worldwide. In 1998, Canter & Associates merged with Sylvan Learning Systems, which in 2003 made the decision to focus exclusively on postsecondary education. The company changed

its name to Laureate Education, Incorporated, and no longer produces materials or provides workshops on Assertive Discipline.

The Canters' Principal Teachings

By 1978, Assertive Discipline was the most popular of all discipline systems, and it remained so for almost 20 years. The Canters described Assertive Discipline as an approach to help teachers take charge in the classroom by interacting with students in a calm, insistent, and consistent manner. They continually emphasized that **student rights** included learning in a calm, orderly classroom, and that **teacher rights** included teaching without interruptions. They expected school administrators and students' parents to support the system they advocated.

The Canters maintained that students choose to behave as they do—that nothing makes them do so against their will. Accordingly, their system attempted to establish an environment in which students would choose to behave in an acceptable manner. To make this possible, they attempted to ensure that students' and teachers' needs were

met and that behavior was managed assertively but humanely. Further, they advocated the use of clear rules of classroom behavior. When students complied with those rules, the teacher applied positive consequences, such as recognition and praise. When students broke the rules, teachers applied negative consequences in accordance with a carefully structured hierarchy, which would ultimately involve consequences so distasteful that students would choose to comply with class rules. In later years, as more humane measures became popular, the Canters added suggestions for teaching students how to behave properly. They emphasized regularly giving students positive attention, talking helpfully with students who misbehaved, and establishing a sense of mutual trust and respect.

A primary reason for Assertive Discipline's early popularity was the Canters' insistence on the following: 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 take-charge teachers who allow nothing to violate students' best interests. These notions were extremely attractive during a time when students were generally beginning to behave atrociously, and teachers had no method, and no support, to make them do otherwise.

Central to Assertive Discipline was the concept of three contrasting types of teachers. **Hostile teachers** behave in a manner that makes it appear they view students as adversaries. They seem to feel that to maintain order and teach properly, they must keep the upper hand, which they attempt to do 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 make students 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 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 to build trust with the class. 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.

The operation of Assertive Discipline is understood through its details. The Canthers urged teachers to make 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.

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 encouragement, expressing appreciation, and positive notes and phone calls to parents.

Corrective actions are applied when students interfere with other students' right to learn. Corrective actions are never harmful physically or psychologically, although they will usually be slightly unpleasant for students. The Canthers stress that it is not severity that makes corrective actions effective, but rather consistency in application. 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 Canthers 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.

When misbehavior occurs, it should be dealt with calmly and quickly. The Canthers advised making 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 Canthers (1993, 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 student disrupts.* Consequence: "Bobby, our rule is no shouting out. You have chosen 5 minutes time-out at the back table."
- *Fourth time the 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 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*, in which the student is 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 stressed that in order to make a discipline plan work effectively, teachers must teach the plan to their students. It is not enough only to read it aloud or display it on a poster. The Canters provided a number of sample lessons showing how the plan could be taught at different grade levels. The plans followed 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.

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 participate in 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.
- Find the first opportunity after a student receives a consequence 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 hurriedly 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.

The Canters concluded that these techniques 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 who the Canters (1993, p. 6) 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." These students are not pleasant to work with, but they are most in need of attention and adult guidance. The Canters suggest making special efforts to (1) reach out to difficult students by trying to establish trust, (2) meet the special needs of difficult students that are not being met in school, and (3) take pains to find ways of communicating more with difficult students.

As time passed, other discipline systems appeared that called for humane cooperation and increased student responsibility in the classroom. Assertive Discipline gave way to the newer approaches to discipline and by the end of the twentieth century, it had largely disappeared from the educational picture, although remnants still form parts of many of the newer discipline systems.

Review of the Canters' Contributions to Discipline

The Canters 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 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 continually modified their popular approach to ensure that it remained effective as social realities change. Earlier, they focused mainly on teachers' being strong leaders in the classroom, but later moved to greater emphasis on building trusting, helpful relationships with students, providing positive recognition and support, and taking a proactive approach to dealing with problems of behavior.