

Discipline through Synergy and Reducing Causes of Misbehavior

Authoritative Input

■ C. M. Charles / *The Synergetic Classroom*

This chapter presents C. M. Charles's views on the role that synergy—a mutually energizing phenomenon—can play in making classroom discipline more effective and pleasant for everyone. Charles contends that discipline programs are most effective when they (1) make provisions for meeting student needs, (2) emphasize conditions and activities that students find attractive, (3) eliminate or minimize conditions and activities that students generally dislike, and (4) foster ethics and trust among members of the class. In this chapter, Charles explains how discipline approaches of this type can be organized and implemented in the classroom.

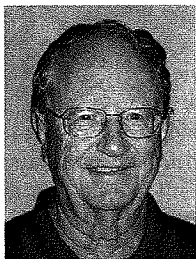
CHAPTER PREVIEW

Fundamental Hypothesis of Synergetic Discipline

Good classroom behavior is best established by teachers and students cooperating to meet individuals' needs in the classroom, minimize the causes of misbehavior, and, when appropriate, energize the class for greater enjoyment and easier learning.

The Nature and Practice of Synergetic Discipline

Synergetic Discipline is the behavior management portion of **Synergetic Teaching**, a way of teaching and working with students that produces quality learning and responsible behavior, while removing much of the job stress teachers normally experience. Synergetic Teaching and Discipline involve developing same-side cooperation between teacher and students, attending to known causes of misbehavior, focusing on student needs, energizing the class, and minimizing mistakes teachers sometimes make in relating with students. One of the strengths of Synergetic Teaching is its ability to increase motivation and enjoyment for everyone. No coercive measures are involved. Teachers gain the willing



About C. M. Charles

C. M. Charles began his career as a public school teacher and later held faculty appointments at the University of New Mexico, Teachers College Columbia University, Pepperdine University, Universidade do Maranhao, Brazil, and San Diego State University, where he is now Professor Emeritus. He directed innovative programs in teacher education at San Diego State and five times received outstanding professor and distinguished teaching awards. He served on various occasions as advisor in teacher education and curriculum to the governments of Peru and Brazil. He has authored twenty-seven books that have attracted wide audiences internationally, with translations into several foreign languages. Those having to do most directly with school discipline are *Teachers' Petit Piaget* (1972), *The Synergetic Classroom: Joyful Teaching and Gentle Discipline* (2000), *Essential Elements of Effective Discipline* (2002), *Classroom Discipline: Today's Best Strategies and Tactics* (2008), and *Building Classroom Discipline* (ninth edition, 2008).

Author's Note: This chapter contains many of my personal views on discipline. I include my views here for two reasons: First, many people have written over the years asking for my personal ideas about discipline and how I would implement them in the classroom. I think they—and you, if you are among them—deserve that consideration. Second, I believe strongly in the value of three of the main elements of Synergetic Discipline that are not given much attention in other discipline programs: (1) limiting the conditions that are known to foster student misbehavior; (2) using synergetic activities to energize the class, when appropriate to do so; and (3) identifying what might be called “teacher misbehavior” that requires attention. Synergetic Discipline is not a commercial program, nor am I affiliated with Synergetic Discipline in any way. If you are interested in Synergetic Discipline, you can find more information about it on my website, www.teacherweb.com/ca/sdsu/charles.

cooperation of students by meeting their needs in a helpful manner, communicating effectively, and treating students with respect. This is done within a sense of community that emphasizes ethical behavior.

Synergy and Synergetic Discipline

Synergy is a phenomenon in which two or more people (or other entities) interact in a manner that builds mutual energy. Among humans, that condition often leads to increased productivity, creativity, satisfaction, and enjoyment. This effect is seen when students get caught up in group spirit and strong sense of purpose, as typically occurs in athletic competitions, science fairs, dramatic productions, and the like. Teachers note that during episodes of synergy, discipline problems are largely nonexistent.

The following is a brief description of how you can implement Synergetic Teaching and Discipline in your classroom; the remainder of this chapter explains these suggestions further:

1. Invite your students sincerely to work with you in maintaining an interesting, inviting program for learning, one that is free from fear and based on personal dignity and consideration for others.

2. Involve your students in discussing the details of your discipline plan and listen to suggestions they might have. Make sure they understand what it involves, what their responsibilities are, and what your responsibilities are.
3. Discuss and demonstrate conditions that elevate class spirit and energy. Ask the class continually to help identify topics and activities they find appealing.
4. Discuss student (and teacher) misbehavior, how it is manifested, why it is detrimental to learning, and the factors that are known to foster it. Ask students to work with you to eliminate or reduce those factors.

Establishing Conditions that Elevate Class Spirit and Energy

Synergetic Teaching depends on maintaining student interest and good personal relations. All of us seek out people, places, objects, situations, and activities we like. Similarly, we avoid people, places, objects, situations, and activities that we dislike. The following paragraphs focus on what students typically like and dislike and what you should do accordingly. This information is distilled from contributions made by Steve Biddulph (1997), Cynthia Mee (1997), William Glasser (1998a, 1998b), Jean Piaget (2001), Harry Wong (2001), and a number of experienced teachers and school administrators.

Discuss and Take into Account Student Needs

Briefly discuss with your class the predominant needs we all share. Go through the following list of **basic student needs** and reassure students that you will take these needs fully into account in the class. (Of course, adjust the discussion to your students' developmental level.)

- *Security.* A sense of safety without worry
- *Hope.* The belief that school is worthwhile and success is possible
- *Dignity.* Feeling respected and worthwhile
- *Belonging.* Feeling a part of things, being valued, and having a place in the class
- *Power.* Having some control of and input into events in the class
- *Enjoyment.* Finding pleasure in activities that are stimulating or rewarding
- *Competence.* Becoming able to do many things well, including the expected schoolwork

Point out that both students and teachers become uncomfortable when these needs are not being met at school, and that their discomfort reduces enjoyment, learning, and willingness to try their best. Reassure your students that you will reduce or eliminate topics and activities they clearly do not like or that affect them adversely, and that you will not permit anything in the class to damage their sense of safety and security. The same will be true for their sense of belonging and hope.

Emphasize Class Conditions and Activities Students Are Known to Like

Inform your students that with their help you will strive for the following in the classroom:

- A teacher who is friendly, interesting, helpful, and supportive
- Camaraderie—enjoyable associations among class members
- Students understanding the importance of what they are asked to learn
- Interesting topics to learn about that are intriguing and worthwhile
- Enjoyable instructional activities
- Opportunity for, and likelihood of, success and accomplishment
- Attention that is drawn tactfully to student accomplishments

Also discuss with students some of the things they normally dislike in school, as listed below. Indicate that you will guard against these things. Note, however, that some students do not object to all of these activities or conditions—you might wish to ask their opinions about them. Also ask students about situations in which some of these conditions might be necessary.

- Sitting still for long periods
- Keeping quiet for long periods
- Working by oneself
- Not knowing why something is being taught or learned
- Memorizing facts for tests
- Completing lengthy writing assignments
- Doing repetitive work
- Completing long reading assignments
- Engaging in individual competition in which there is little or no chance of winning
- Having little or no choice in activities, assignments, or assessment

Work to Develop Class Ethics and Trust

Ethics refers to doing what one believes to be the honorable thing in all situations. Ethical student behavior should be a prime goal of education, and ethical *teacher* behavior, needed as a model for students to emulate, is essential for building **trust** in the class. Students see teachers as ethical and trustworthy if they are invariably kind, considerate, helpful, fair, and tactfully honest. Trust is essential in Synergetic Discipline, as it enables teachers and students to count on each other for support and fair treatment.

Emphasize and Use Your Personal Charisma

Charisma is an aspect of personality that attracts others. Students greatly enjoy charismatic teachers and flock to them. Charisma seems to emerge from a blend of talent,

experience, knowledge, and understanding of others, and it is made evident in how people react to each other. We can all increase our level of charisma and display it through personal charm, friendliness, enthusiasm, and helpfulness.

Improve the Quality of Communication in Your Classroom

Except for trust, no element of synergy is more important than communication. The type of communication that contributes most to synergy is verbal give-and-take between teacher and students. It involves listening sensitively, showing genuine interest, and speaking encouragingly rather than arguing, moralizing, or giving unsolicited advice.

Make Use of Coopetition

Coopetition, pronounced "co-opetition," refers to members of groups cooperating together in order to compete against other groups. Coopetition is not given a great deal of direct attention in teaching, but it contributes powerfully to synergy. In school, it is exemplified in team athletic events and other performances and competitions. Coopetition can be incorporated into almost all areas of the curriculum. Generally speaking, students respond to it more enthusiastically than to any other activity.

Resolve Class Problems and Conflicts Amicably and Productively

A class **problem** is a situation or condition that affects the class seriously enough to require attention, whereas a **conflict** is a strong disagreement between students or between teacher and student.

How to Address Problems

Suppose students in a high school geometry class are troubled by a heavy load of homework. Or suppose a middle school teacher is greatly embarrassed when the principal visits and finds the room very untidy. When such situations hinder teaching or learning, for any reason, they should be addressed immediately. The teacher, sensing the problem, might say, "Class, something is going on that I think we need to talk about." The problem is then clarified, possible solutions are sought, and a solution is selected and tried.

How to Address Conflicts

Conflicts are interpersonal situations characterized by strong disagreements, which may or may not include misbehavior. If the individuals involved do not know how to find a peaceful solution, they tend to fight each other verbally, or sometimes physically. Conflict threatens personal dignity, which is strongly defended. Examples of conflict situations

include disputes over who won a contest, who is entitled to play with a toy, whether work was turned in on time, and whether work has met the standards expected. Conflict is best resolved through a win-win approach in which both sides feel most of their concerns are being properly addressed. To resolve conflicts in your class, do the following:

- Make sure all individuals involved have the opportunity to express their concerns.
- Insist that all comments, observations, and suggestions are presented in a courteous manner.
- Encourage both sides to be open and honest, but tactful.
- Encourage each person to try to see things from the other's point of view.
- Keep attention focused on areas of agreement between the disputants.
- Help disputants formulate solutions as joint agreements.
- Do not allow students to argue back and forth, defend themselves, or debate.

Addressing the Causes of Student Misbehavior

The single best way to limit misbehavior is to do what you can to prevent it from occurring. This is done by attending, proactively, to the known **causes of misbehavior**, meaning conditions that tend to foster inappropriate behavior. Generally speaking, we can identify twenty-five causes of (or conditions that promote) student behavior. Those causes lead to thirteen types of student behavior usually identified as misbehavior, inappropriate behavior, or irresponsible behavior. The thirteen types of student misbehavior are *inattention, apathy, needless talk, moving about the room without permission, annoying others, disruption, lying, stealing, cheating, sexual harassment, bullying and fighting, malicious mischief, and defiance of authority*. In the paragraphs that follow, many causes of such misbehavior are reviewed. Teachers can control most of the causes, which are grouped here in accordance with where they seem to reside or originate.

Causes of Misbehavior that Reside in Individual Students

Nine causes of misbehavior reside within individual students: unmet needs, thwarted desires, expediency, urge to transgress, temptation, inappropriate habits, poor behavior choices, avoidance, and egocentric personality.

Unmet Needs

In the classroom, students continually try to meet needs related to security, belonging, hope, dignity, power, enjoyment, and competence. When any of these needs is not being satisfied, students become unsettled, distracted, and more inclined to misbehave.

Teacher Action. By observing students and talking with them, you can identify most student needs and help students meet them in an acceptable manner.

Thwarted desires

When students fail to get something they want badly, they may complain, become destructive, sulk, pout, or act out.

Teacher Action. Tell students you can see they are troubled or distracted. Ask if there is anything you can do to help. Be sympathetic, but don't dwell on the problem. Try to get them interested in something else.

Expediency

Students always look for ways to make their lives easier and more enjoyable. They take shortcuts, conveniently forget what they are supposed to do, look for ways to get out of work, and intentionally break rules.

Teacher Action. Expedient behavior is seldom a problem in classes that are interesting and enjoyable, but it appears often in classes that are dull and boring. Hold discussions about expediency and its troublesome effects. Ask students why they sometimes take the easy way, such as reading book summaries or reviews rather than the assigned book, rushing through a writing assignment, or copying others' ideas. If they are comfortable enough to answer honestly, they will probably say they do so because they don't like the work, don't see the point in it, or don't want to spend time on it. Ask them what would encourage them to give their best effort. Listen to their suggestions and make use of them if you can.

Urge to Transgress

All of us feel the urge to transgress rules and regulations and we often do so, knowing there is a chance we will get caught or even harm ourselves or others. Students succumb to this urge frequently, especially when class activities are not appealing, and they cheat, take shortcuts, tell lies, break class rules, and annoy others, seemingly for no beneficial purpose at all.

Teacher Action. Discuss this urge, its effects, and how it can be controlled sensibly. Discuss the reasons for rules, including how they equalize opportunity, reduce potential harm, and help us live together harmoniously. If students are old enough, ask if they understand what ethics, ethical conduct, and personal character mean. Ask why they think ethical people are so widely admired.

Temptation

Students regularly encounter objects, situations, behaviors, and people they find powerfully attractive. This phenomenon is evident in association with music and lyrics, desirable objects, ways of speaking, styles of clothing, lifestyle, and cheating on tests and assignments. Although pursuit of these temptations can result in mild or severe misbehavior, students nevertheless find them so attractive they will occasionally do, adopt, mimic, acquire, or associate with them, even though forbidden to do so.

Teacher Action. With your students, discuss and analyze temptation, seeking to understand why certain objects, styles, and opportunities are so seductive. Help students foresee the undesirable consequences of following disapproved styles and manners. Help them clarify the lines that separate the approved from the disapproved and reinforce their resolve to resist factors that are likely to harm them.

Inappropriate Habits

Inappropriate habits are ingrained ways of behaving that violate established standards and expectations. Jason uses profanity at school. Maria is discourteous and calls others names. Larry shirks his assignments. Some of these habits are learned in school, but most become established in the home or community.

Teacher Action. Bring inappropriate habits to students' attention without pointing a finger at anyone. Discuss their harmful effects and, if necessary, have students practice desirable alternatives to habits such as name-calling, teasing, verbal put-downs, cheating, lying, and disregard for others.

Poor Behavior Choices

The behaviors students use in attempting to meet their needs are sometimes acceptable, sometimes not. Levels of acceptability may not be clear to students. Alicia, trying to get attention, annoys others so much they avoid her. Alan, seeking an increased sense of power, refuses to do what his teacher requests.

Teacher Action. Alicia and Alan need to understand that their behavior choices are detrimental to themselves or others. To help students such as Alicia and Alan, ask the class: "What are some of the things you have seen students do to [get attention, be acknowledged, get better grades than they deserve, get out of work, become members of groups, etc.]? Does their behavior usually get them what they want? What could those students do that would probably bring better results?"

Avoidance

No one likes to face failure, intimidation, ridicule, or other unpleasant situations and treatment. One way to escape them is to avoid situations where they might occur, but in school we can't always do that. Consider Norona, who refuses to participate in a group assignment. Her refusal seems to show disrespect for the teacher, but in reality, she is intimidated by her peers and doesn't want them to think she is inept.

Teacher Action. To help students such as Norona behave advantageously in circumstances they dislike, show them how to face unpleasant situations and work through them. Rather than singling out Norona, ask the following in a group discussion: "Are there things you try to avoid in school, such as people, events, or activities you find frightening or embarrassing? Which of those things could best be dealt with through avoidance (e.g., a clique that is maligning other students)? Which of those things cannot be dealt with through avoidance (e.g., giving an oral report in front of the class)? What is the worst

thing that can happen in class if we make a mistake? Can mistakes help us learn? What could a person do to reduce fear of mistakes or unpleasant situations?" Consider exploring these ideas in pairs, then small groups, then the class as a whole.

Egocentric Personality

Students with egocentric personalities focus primarily on themselves, believe they are superior to others, and think they do little wrong. Most classes contain one or more such students.

Teacher Action. To help these students behave more appropriately, ask questions such as the following in class discussions: "Are the needs and interests of all students important, or do only certain students deserve attention? Is one person often entirely right and everyone else entirely wrong? Is everyone entitled to an equal opportunity in the class? How should you and I react to a person who always wants to dominate, be first, be right, and quarrel with those who don't agree?" Make sure the proffered suggestions are positive in nature, not negative.

Causes of Misbehavior that Reside in Class Peers and Groups

Two significant causes of misbehavior reside in class peers and groups—provocation and group behavior. Here are suggestions for dealing with them.

Provocation

A great amount of school misbehavior results from students' provoking each other through petty annoyance, put-downs, sarcastic remarks, and aggression or bullying. Heather is trying to study, but Art's incessant chatter frustrates her to the bursting point. Marty calls Jerry a name and Jerry responds hotly. Randall is trying to pay attention but Larry keeps poking him in the back with a pencil.

Teacher Action. Provocation often produces strong emotions that reduce self-control and increase combativeness. Discuss this phenomenon with your class. Ask: "Can you name some things people say or do that upset you so much you want to retaliate? How do you feel when this happens? If you retaliate, is it likely to improve the situation or make it worse? What might you do that would resolve the incident peacefully? Is provoking others or bullying them consistent with the class character we are trying to build? Would you act that way if the teacher were standing beside you?"

Group Behavior

Students often succumb to peer pressure or get caught up in group emotion, and as a result may misbehave in ways they would not if they were by themselves. It is difficult for students to disregard peer pressure, easy for them to get swept up in group energy and emotion, and easy for them to justify their misbehavior as only what others were doing. Because Kerry and Lee want to look cool to their peers, Kerry defaces school property, and

Lee bullies a weaker member of the class, even though Kerry and Lee would not do those things if by themselves.

Teacher Action. Try the following techniques to discuss this phenomenon with your class:

- Tell the class about some event in which a friend of yours, let's say Sarah, behaved badly just because others were doing so. Indicate that Sarah is now very embarrassed about her behavior and wishes no one knew about it.
- Ask your students if they know any stories like Sarah's they can share, without mentioning names the class might recognize. (Tell them they must not mention family matters or members—doing so is a sure way to get parents upset at you.) If they share stories, guide the class in analyzing one or two of them. If they don't contribute a story, have a fictional one ready for their consideration. After hearing or recounting the story, ask questions such as the following:

Is the behavior something the person will be proud of later?

Why do you suppose the person behaved that way? (e.g., for fun, comradeship, to test limits, to be seen as clever or "cool")

What do you think the long-term results will be for the person? (e.g., an unpleasant story to remember, regret, guilt, getting caught, being found out, worry, disappointing one's family, possible punishment, living with knowing you did the wrong thing)

How do you think the possible benefits compare with the probable harmful effects?

Once you do something you are ashamed of, is there any way to make amends?

How can you stay away from, or keep out of, group activities that are unlawful, unethical, or against the rules?

Causes of Misbehavior that Reside in Instructional Environments

Four causes of misbehavior reside in instructional environments and all can be corrected easily—physical discomfort, tedium, meaninglessness, and lack of stimulation.

Physical Discomfort

Students often become restless when made uncomfortable by inappropriate temperature, poor lighting, or unsuitable seating or workspaces.

Teacher Action. Attend to comfort factors in advance and ask students about them. Make corrections as necessary.

Tedium

Students are likely to begin to fidgeting after a while when an instructional activity requires them to pay close attention for a long time, especially if the topic is not appealing.

Teacher Action. Break the work into shorter segments or add something that increases the interest level.

Meaninglessness

Students grow restless when required to work at topics they do not comprehend or for which they see no purpose.

Teacher Action. Make sure the topic is meaningful to students—that they understand it and see its relevance and importance in their lives.

Lack of Stimulation

Students take no interest in the lesson when the topic and learning environment provide little that is attractive or otherwise stimulating.

Teacher Action. Select topics and activities in which students have natural interest. When that is not possible, introduce elements students are known to enjoy, such as novelty, mystery, movement, competition, group work, and role-playing.

Causes of Misbehavior that Reside in Teachers and Other School Personnel

We must honestly recognize that teachers sometimes misbehave in the classroom. Other personnel at school do so as well, including administrators, librarians, clerical staff, health personnel, cafeteria personnel, custodial personnel, and family members working in the school. The following ten factors within school personnel sometimes promote student misbehavior:

Poor Habits

Personnel in the schools have sometimes unknowingly acquired counterproductive ways of speaking to or dealing with students. They may have become set in these ways.

Teacher Action. Watch closely to see how students react to you and other school personnel. Do they seem friendly? Wary? Eager to cooperate? Reticent? If they are reticent, fearful, uncooperative, or unfriendly, analyze the situations you observe and see if you can determine the problem. Correct your own behavior, should that be necessary, but be careful about approaching colleagues with criticism.

Unfamiliarity with Better Techniques

Some educators have not had occasion to learn some of the newer, more effective ways of teaching and relating with today's students.

Teacher Action. If you feel you might be less than well-informed, ask students about things school people do that they really like. Notice what popular teachers at your school

do, and don't be reluctant to request ideas from them. Your school may keep a library of professional books and journals. You can also access dozens of sites through the Internet that present outstanding ideas and suggestions.

Presenting Poor Models of Behavior

At times all of us are inconsistent, irresponsible, and short on self-control, and we sometimes treat students with discourtesy or disregard. We can't expect to be perfect, but we must realize that when we treat students poorly—which is to say, in ways we would not want to be treated—we not only damage relationships but also encourage students to imitate our poor behavior.

Teacher Action. Always be the best model you can for your students, who watch you very closely and often pattern their behavior after yours (especially when you misbehave). If you do anything inappropriate, call attention to it, explain why it was wrong, and apologize if necessary.

Showing Little Interest in or Appreciation for Students

We sometimes fail to show interest in students or appreciation for them as individuals, despite knowing they want our attention. If we disregard them repeatedly, students become hesitant or may disruptively seek our attention.

Teacher Action. Give each student as much personal attention as possible. Greet them personally, exchange a friendly word, show you are aware of their difficulties, try to help them feel at ease, and acknowledge their progress.

Succumbing to Personal Frustration

Some educators are beaten down from continually having to deal with misbehavior or inconsiderate parents. The stress may make it difficult for them to work with students in a kind, helpful manner.

Teacher Action. Educators often experience intense frustration from trying unsuccessfully to force students to comply with their expectations. Force does not work. Replace it with encouragement and enticement and you will see your students become cooperative, willing to learn, and considerate. Go out of your way to communicate with parents and show appreciation for their child.

Succumbing to Provocation

Students may do and say things intentionally to get under your skin, hoping to see you become upset and befuddled and perhaps lose self-control.

Teacher Action. Do not allow students to provoke you. When they try to do so, disregard their comments and actions and proceed as if nothing has happened. If you feel it necessary to respond, say, "Something is causing violations of our agreement about being

considerate of others. I don't understand why. Is there something we can do to fix the problem?"

Providing Ineffective Guidance and Feedback

In the absence of guidance and feedback, students sometimes do not understand what is expected of them, how much progress they have made, or how they can improve.

Teacher Action. Make sure students understand clearly what they are supposed to do and how they should do it. During and after assigned activities, tell students what they have done well or poorly and indicate how they can improve. Ask them for their opinions about the activity and their efforts.

Using Ineffective Personal Communication

Some educators are not adept at communicating with students on a personal level. This may cause students to become uneasy and reticent.

Teacher Action. Speak regularly with students in a friendly way. Students want you to know their names and exchange pleasantries with them. They sometimes want to know your views on various matters, and want to tell you theirs. This provides them a measure of personal validation. Avoid comments that hurt feelings or dampen enthusiasm. Say things that increase optimism and bolster confidence. Build students up when you can, but do so honestly.

Failure to Plan Proactively

Many educators do not plan ahead adequately to foresee potential problems. Then, when unexpected events occur, they are unable to respond effectively.

Teacher Action. Think carefully about problems that might arise in class or about possible student reactions to topics, lessons, your requests, or unexpected events. By anticipating potential difficulties, you can avoid most problems and can prepare yourself to deal with whatever might eventuate. Think through what you will do when people are injured or become suddenly ill, grow defiant, or get into fights. Decide what you will do and say if an unauthorized visitor approaches you, if a parent berates you, if the class moans when you make an assignment, and so forth. Determine how you can respond decisively to such eventualities, yet maintain positive relationships.

Using Coercion, Threat, and Punishment

Students don't like to be forced to do anything and they don't like to be threatened. If you treat them abrasively, they keep a watchful eye on you, fearful of being scolded, embarrassed, or demeaned, and will very likely develop negative attitudes toward you and school.

Teacher Action. Give up coercion and threat and replace them with considerate helpfulness, personal attention, and good communication.

Recognizing and Correcting Teacher Misbehavior

Despite our dedication and concern for students, teachers sometimes do or say things that provoke antagonism, inhibit student progress, and leave the class dispirited. Five types of **teacher misbehavior** should be acknowledged: *inducing fearfulness, denigrating students, being demanding and abrasive, presenting poor models of behavior, and not making classes interesting and worthwhile.* When we misbehave in these ways, it is usually because we are fearful of losing control of our classes or because we simply do not know how to use positive tactics that work well. Do what you can to make sure you are not guilty of such misbehavior. Think back at the end of each day and judge yourself against the misbehaviors listed above: If you need to improve, work on one of the behaviors each day until you get it right. Tell your students what you are doing and ask for their feedback.

Establishing a Discipline Plan with Your Class

On the first day of class begin discussing with your students how the class is to function and how members can conduct themselves to achieve greatest personal and class benefit. Tell your students that everyone, including you, is expected to show consideration for others in the class and not do or say anything that will hurt others' feelings or interfere with their work. You should have already thought through a desirable discipline approach carefully, but rather than presenting your plan as a *fait accompli* on the first day, lead students into it gradually by asking a series of questions, adjusted to their maturity level. When done as suggested here, the process requires six short sessions that, ideally, should begin the first day of class and be completed in six consecutive days. Expect to use about 10 minutes per session for young children, and about 15 minutes for older students. Consider having your students sit in a closed circle and explain that a circular seating arrangement will be used when the class needs to have class meetings to discuss matters that concern everyone.

Session 1

Begin to establish rapport with your students. Smile. Look into their faces. Tell them you are pleased to see them and are looking forward to working with them. Tell them you want to discuss with them some ideas for making the class enjoyable and useful, but first you want to begin getting acquainted with them. Call their names and ask if you have pronounced them correctly. Tell students just a little bit about yourself, including your special interests and why you became a teacher. Then tell the students you'd like to learn more about them. Using the class roster, call on a few individual students. As appropriate to their age, ask a question or two about siblings, pets, hobbies, and special interests. Call on as many as time allows and end the session by saying you will get to know all of them very soon.

Session 2

Tell the students you are dedicated to helping them learn and have an enjoyable time in school. To make sure that happens, you would like to hear their ideas about some matters that might make the school year more enjoyable. Ask the following and take notes on a chart (e.g., on an easel or overhead display):

- Ask what some of the things are that they like best about school. List their comments on the left side of the chart. They will probably mention playing, being with friends, sports, art, and music. Some may mention plays, concerts, and athletics.
- Ask what they like, specifically, about each of the things you've written on the chart. Write these notes on the right side of the chart.
- Ask if they think any of the things they've mentioned might be possible in this class. Circle the things they indicate.

Thank them for their contributions and tell them you will do what you can, with their help, to make the class as they would prefer it to be, although there are many things the school requires that are outside your control.

Session 3

Give feedback concerning the suggestions students made in Session 2. Before the meeting, revise the chart to indicate the suggestions you consider appropriate for the class. Ask students if they have further thoughts or suggestions. Turn to a fresh page or new transparency and elicit comments about the kind of teacher they prefer.

- Ask if they have had a teacher they really enjoyed or respected (ask them not to mention names). Have the students indicate what that teacher did that made such a good impression. They will say things such as nice, interesting, helpful, fair, and good sense of humor. They may also mention favorite activities and special teacher talents. Write the traits they mention on the left side of the chart.
- Review the traits with the class. Ask for examples, such as what is meant by "helpful" or "really fun." Make these notes on the right side of the chart.
- Tell students that all teachers and all students are different, but that as much as you can, you will try to be the kind of teacher they prefer. Tell them you will think more about their comments and will give them feedback at the next session. Thank them for their helpfulness.

Session 4

Show students a clean chart of the preferred traits they have identified in teachers. Ask if they have additional comments. Tell them you have been thinking about how you can be the kind of teacher they want. If you know you can't do so in every respect, tell them so, and why. Next, draw students out about how they feel they should behave in the class.

- Ask students to think of a classmate who has behaved in class in ways they admired or appreciated (ask them not to mention names). Have them tell what the student was like or what he or she did. List the descriptions on the left side of a clean chart.
- When several behaviors have been listed, go back and ask students *why* they appreciated those behaviors. Make notes accordingly.
- Now ask students how they like for other members of a class to treat them. Make notes. Go back and once more ask *why*.
- Next, ask what kind of behavior they most appreciate from other students when they are working together on assignments. Ask *why* and make notes.
- Finally, ask students if they understand the meaning of *personal responsibility* and what it involves. Discuss that concept briefly. Ask them if they think it would be possible to have, in this classroom, the kinds of responsible behavior they have discussed. Thank them for their input and tell them you will review their suggestions at the next session.

Session 5

Provide a review of behaviors the students have indicated they like and appreciate. Ask if they have further comments.

- Now ask what they *dislike* fellow students doing in class. Ask if they have any ideas *why* students behave in ways others do not like. (If they do not, mention a few of the major causes of misbehavior.)
- Then ask if they have ideas about what we, as a class, can do to keep those unwanted behaviors from occurring—that is, how we can prevent them.
- Ask students if they feel they have control over how they, themselves, behave in the class. Follow with, “What makes you decide whether to behave responsibly or irresponsibly?” Ask them if they feel they can almost always behave responsibly in class, for their own sake and for the good of the class.

Thank the students for their input and tell them you will provide feedback later.

Session 6

Ask students to respond to a summary you have made of their suggestions. Show them a display that lists their contributions concerning (1) things students like best in school, (2) traits appreciated in teachers, (3) behaviors appreciated in classmates, and (4) behaviors disliked in classmates. Once you have done that, show them an outline of the discipline plan you wish to implement in the classroom. Indicate where their suggestions fit into the plan. It is suggested that your plan make specific mention of:

- Desirable and responsible teacher behavior
- Desirable and responsible student behavior
- Things that will be done to remove or limit “causes” of misbehavior
- What you will do to help students behave responsibly when they have made behavior mistakes (have behaved irresponsibly)

Ask the class what they think of the plan and if they can commit themselves to living with its stipulations. Thank them for their cooperation. By the next day, have the discipline plan outlined and printed. Give a copy to each student and ask them to share the plans with parents or guardians. Also prepare a chart of the plan and post it in the classroom.

Intervening When Students Misbehave

Synergetic Discipline emphasizes prevention of misbehavior, but it can also deal effectively with misbehavior when it occurs. For your consideration, four types of interventions are presented here, sequenced from mildest to strongest. You might wish to consider them, modifying them in your mind to suit a particular age of students.

First Intervention

Subtly remind students of expected behavior. Do this with physical proximity, eye signals, or facial expressions. If these reminders don't work, point to the chart that shows responsible behavior and say, "Class, let's please remember what it means to behave responsibly."

Second Intervention

If it seems advisable, identify what you believe is causing the misbehavior. The cause may be apparent, as when students seem to find the lesson boring and therefore disengage from it, or it may be obscure, as when Jason and Nathan continue an emotional dispute that originated outside the classroom. Even if you think you know the cause, check with students to obtain their view. For example, ask, "Is this too boring for you?" or "Boys, is there a problem I can help you with?" or "Something is causing us to be inconsiderate of others. What do you suppose is causing that? Can we fix it? What can we do that would show greater responsibility?" Then address the cause if you can. You can usually remove it easily if it resides in activities, classroom, or teacher behavior. You can minimize its effects when it involves student needs, simply by trying to provide what students are seeking. It is more difficult to limit causes that have to do with egocentric personalities. You can say privately, "Jason, something is causing you to call out and disrupt the lesson. That makes it difficult for me to teach and for other students to learn. Can you help me understand what is causing you to do that so we might make things better for you?"

Third Intervention

Ask the misbehaving student to suggest how he or she might behave in a more responsible manner. If there is any hesitation on the student's part, make a direct suggestion, such as, "Let's keep our hands to ourself. Will you do that for me, please?" or "Let's start again and find a more responsible way of acting. May I show you once more what is expected of you? Thank you."

Fourth Intervention

If the misbehavior involves, or leads to, a confrontational dispute, help those involved identify the cause of the disagreement and work together to find a solution. *If the confrontation is between students*, as when Jason and Nathan are speaking angrily to each other, consider the following: Ask, "Boys, this is disturbing the class. Can you work the problem out between yourselves, or do you need my help?" If they say they can work it out, ask them if they can keep their dispute from affecting the class. If the boys can't resolve the matter, get together with them at a suitable time and in a nonthreatening manner to help them. Consider the following:

- Ask each to tell you calmly what is troubling them. (Explain that you need to hear each person clearly, so they should not interrupt or argue while the other is talking.)
- Ask Jason what he would like for Nathan to do differently. Nathan listens carefully.
- Ask Nathan what he would like for Jason to do differently. Jason listens carefully.
- Ask each of the boys if he feels he could do part, or most, of what the other wants.
- If they agree on a possible solution, thank them and leave it at that. If they cannot reach a solution, ask them if they'd mind having the class discuss the matter to learn more about resolving disputes considerately.
- If they agree to that, bring up the matter at the next class meeting. If they decline permission, say, "Boys, it is not good for any of us in the class when bad feelings exist. How can we resolve this matter so both of you feel all right? What ideas do you have?" If they reach a settlement, thank them. If they can't, say, "I'm disappointed we can't settle this matter so both of you feel all right. But since we can't, I need to ask you to control yourselves, for the sake of the class." It is unlikely that the conflict negotiations will ever reach this point; the boys will agree to a solution earlier in the process.

If the conflict is between you and a student, consider the following: When you are helping a misbehaving student, your efforts will seldom lead to conflict provided you treat the student with consideration. If conflict occurs, you need to deal with it in a way that brings resolution while preserving positive feelings. Suppose Melissa has once again failed to do her homework. You ask her kindly if there is a problem that is preventing her from complying with the class expectation. Your question strikes a nerve and Melissa retorts, "There wouldn't be a problem if you didn't assign this stupid stuff!" What do you do? Consider saying, "Melissa, can you help me understand why you feel the homework is stupid? I'd like your opinion because I want it to be helpful to your progress. What can you suggest that would help make it better?" Melissa may apologize, say nothing, come back with another snide remark, or give you a suggestion. If she says nothing or remains uncooperative, consider saying, "Now is not a good time for us to discuss the matter. Perhaps we can do so later, just the two of us. Could you meet with me for a minute or two at [name a time and place]?" When you meet, tell her you are willing to listen if she has something she needs to talk about. If she declines, assure her you are interested in her views and are always ready to help. If Melissa apologizes or explains her feelings or talks about some other problem in her life that is probably her real cause of concern, consider saying, "Thank you, Melissa, for informing me. If I can make some changes in the homework or otherwise help with your situation, I'd like to do so. I'll listen to any suggestions you might have."