

PEARSON NEW INTERNATIONAL EDITION

Building Classroom Discipline

**C. M. Charles
Eleventh Edition**

Pearson New International Edition

Building Classroom Discipline

C. M. Charles
Eleventh Edition

PEARSON®



All too often, he says, today's authorities urge teachers to involve students in decision making before the students are mature enough to do so responsibly. Consequently, teachers waste large amounts of time negotiating and haggling with

students about behavior. Morrish says that for decades, experts have erroneously claimed that plentiful student choice leads to self-esteem, responsibility, and motivation to achieve. As those experts see it, the teacher's role is to encourage good choices and discourage poor ones.

That approach has failed, Morrish contends, for three reasons. First, it does not demand proper behavior from students, but instead allows them, if they don't mind the consequences, to choose to behave discourteously and irresponsibly. Systems based on fear of consequences, he explains, cannot be effective unless students truly find the consequences intolerable, which is virtually never the case today.

Second, many discipline approaches do not adequately teach students how they are to behave in school.

And third, many approaches leave teachers stuck with bargaining and negotiating endlessly, and often fruitlessly, to get students to cooperate.

Morrish contends that if discipline is to be effective, a different approach is required—one in which students are taught what is acceptable and what is unacceptable before they are given latitude to make choices. Otherwise, he says, they are likely to choose whatever appeals to them at the time, and teachers will find it difficult to live with many of those choices.

Although all of us want students to be successful, the discipline approaches we use often allow students to underachieve, behave discourteously, engage in high-risk behaviors, contribute little or nothing of value to the school environment, and use intimidation and violence in dealing with others. Clearly, says Morrish, such discipline is not producing the results we want.

WHAT IS THE "REAL DISCIPLINE" MORRISH ADVOCATES?

Morrish calls his approach **Real Discipline**. He explains that it is not a new theory, but an organized set of techniques that great teachers and parents have used for generations in teaching children to be respectful, responsible, and cooperative. It emphasizes careful teacher guidance to ensure that children learn how to conduct themselves in an acceptable manner.

Morrish feels teachers have been sidetracked into focusing on what he calls "behavior management" rather than real discipline. Both management and discipline are needed, he says, but they are not one and the same. **Behavior management** is about making the learning environment functional, keeping students on task, and minimizing disruptions. It attempts to deal with whatever behavior students bring to school. Although important in teaching, behavior management is not very effective in helping students learn to behave responsibly.

Real Discipline, on the other hand, explicitly teaches students how to behave properly. It requires them to show courtesy and consideration. It helps them develop needed social skills and trains them to work within a structure of rules and limits. It does these things while protecting students from self-defeating mistakes they are otherwise likely to make. As Morrish (1997, p. 33) puts it:

Real Discipline is a lot more than simply giving choices to children and then dealing with the aftermath. We have to teach them right and wrong. We have to

teach them to respect legitimate authority. We have to teach them the lessons that have been learned by others and by ourselves. Then, and only then, will we enjoy watching them develop into adults.

Morrish says these provisions are necessary because children, in their early years, are by no means wise and tolerant. They are frequently the opposite—impulsive and self-centered. If they are to develop into contributing members of society, they must learn to cooperate, behave responsibly, and show consideration for others.

Some young students are fortunate to have good caregivers and role models who teach them these things. But many children today are overly indulged and rarely called to account for their behavior. They remain self-centered and grow up concerned only with their own interests. They want things their way, they cooperate in school only when they feel like it, and they show little consideration for teachers and fellow students. For many, lack of effort, abusive language, and bullying are rules of the day.

Morrish says this condition has come about, at least in part, because the society in which we live stresses individual rights and freedom, but has lost sight of the personal responsibility that must accompany rights and freedom. Without responsibility, rights and freedom mean little. Personal responsibility is too important to leave to chance. Life requires us to live within certain constraints that limit individual freedom. We accept those constraints in exchange for life that is safer, more secure, and more orderly.

Morrish does believe students should be allowed to make choices and helped to make good ones, but only when they are sufficiently mature to do so intelligently. Students do not innately know how to do so, nor can they do so early in their lives. They first have to develop respect for, and a degree of compliance with, authority.

WHICH MAXIMS HELP US UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF REAL DISCIPLINE?

As noted, Morrish also published a small book called *FlipTips* (2003), which contains comments and maxims from his various publications and presentations. They reflect the mindset that Morrish would like teachers to acquire. Here are a few of the tips that illustrate Morrish's ideas on discipline. How would you explain, in your own words, what each of them means or suggests?

- Discipline is a process, not an event.
- Discipline is about giving students the structure they need for proper behavior, not the consequences they seem to deserve for misbehavior.
- Discipline comes from the word *disciple*. It's about teaching and learning, not scolding and punishing.
- Discipline isn't what you do when students misbehave. It's what you do so they won't.
- Discipline isn't about letting students make their own choices. It's about preparing them properly for the choices they will be making later.

- Don't let students make choices that are not theirs to make.
- Train students to comply with your directions. Compliance precedes cooperation. If you bargain for compliance now, you'll have to beg for it later.
- Always work from more structure to less structure, not the other way around.
- To prevent major behavior problems, deal with all minor behavior problems when they occur.
- Students learn far more from being shown how to behave appropriately than from being punished.
- The best time to teach a behavior is when it isn't needed, so it will be there when it is needed. Today's practice is tomorrow's performance.
- If you teach students to be part of the solution, they're less likely to be part of the problem.
- When dealing with adolescents, act more like a coach and less like a boss.
- A single minute spent practicing courtesy has more impact than a 1-hour lecture on the importance of it.
- To stop fights, stop put-downs. Verbal hits usually precede physical hits.
- Discipline should end with the correct behavior, not with a punishment.
- Rapport is the magical ingredient that changes a student's reluctance to be controlled into a willingness to be guided.

WHAT ARE THE THREE PROGRESSIVE PHASES THROUGH WHICH WE SHOULD GUIDE STUDENTS?

Morrish explains that rather than approaching discipline from the perspective of choice, Real Discipline asks teachers to guide students through three progressive phases he calls *training for compliance*, *teaching students how to behave*, and *managing student choice*. Each of these **three phases** is aimed at a particular goal and involves the use of certain strategies, as explained in the following paragraphs.

Phase 1: Training for Compliance

Note: In a September 2012 memo to the author of this text, Mr. Morrish said some people react a bit negatively to the word "compliance." He wants teachers to think of compliance as meaning "following directions," which students must do if teaching is to be effective. When explaining this point to teachers, Morrish uses driver training as an illustration, where it is clear that the driving instructor will be giving directions that the learner must follow. In the same way, teachers teach routine behaviors that students are to follow. Doing so consistently results in a classroom that runs smoothly.

Morrish strongly urges teachers to train their students to comply with rules, limits, and authority. *Rules* are descriptions of how students are to behave. An example might be "Show courtesy and respect for others at all times." *Limits* specify behavior that will *not* be allowed. An example would be, "No name-calling in this room." *Authority* refers to power that has been assigned to certain individuals. By custom and law, teachers are given legitimate authority to control and direct students in school, and they should use that power to set and maintain standards of conduct.

Teachers' first task is to train their students to accept authority and comply with it automatically. Compliance should be taught as a *nonthinking activity*. Non-thinking activities are habits you don't have to reflect on or make choices about, such as stopping at red lights or saying "thank you" when a person does something nice for you.

Begin by telling your students straightforwardly that one of your most important jobs is to help each and every one of them be successful in school and life. Success comes from behaving in approved ways, with limits set on what people are allowed to do. He says he finds it astonishing that compliance receives virtually no attention in most approaches to discipline, even though compliance helps students learn to conduct themselves properly and at the same time provides the basis for later decision making.

Further explain to your students that in order to find success, they must learn to behave courteously, show self-control, and do what is expected of them to the best of their ability. Point out that as a professional teacher, you have been trained to help students accomplish those things, and that you have a clear plan for doing so that will bring success for everyone in the class. Indicate that you will begin by training your students to pay attention, follow directions, and speak and act respectfully to others. Those things will be practiced until they occur automatically, without anyone having to think about them.

As you proceed, use direct instruction and close supervision to teach students exactly how you want them to behave. For example, if you want students to raise their hands before speaking, tell them what you expect and show them how to do it. Then have them practice it until it becomes habitual. When students make mistakes, show them again how to do the act properly and, again, practice it. Morrish says to start small, and you will see a general attitude of compliance grow out of many small acts of compliance.

Because compliance is so important, you should address all instances of misbehavior. Do not overlook small misbehaviors, as suggested in many discipline programs. If you do, you will soon be overwhelmed with explaining, negotiating, and tending to consequences. This overload will cause you to "pick your battles" and not "sweat the small stuff." Thus, you might allow students to put their heads on their desks during opening routines, talk during announcements, throw their jackets in the corner instead of hanging them up, and wander around the room instead of getting ready to work.

Such minor misbehavior might seem unimportant, but it should never be overlooked. Poor habits easily expand into poor behavior overall. If you walk by students who are doing something wrong and you say nothing, they interpret that as meaning you don't care, and the next thing you know they are engaged in disruptive behavior.

Don't get the idea you can't manage such behavior, but do understand that you can't manage it by scolding and doling out consequences. Morrish repeats again and again that the most effective approach is to tell students what you want them to do and then insist they do it properly. When they do something wrong, have them do it right. That is how you establish good practices and habits in your classes. Students get the picture quickly.

What Role Do Rules Play in Training for Compliance?

Just as we need rules for structure and predictability in everyday living, so do we need rules for classroom behavior. Teachers should make the rules. There is no need to ask students if they agree with them. Students are supposed to learn rules, not determine them. Teach students why we have rules and why they are made by people in positions of authority. Explain your rules to students and take their opinions into account, but don't pretend they are helping decide what the class rules are to be.

Once you've established rules, you must commit to ensuring they are obeyed. Even after you've stated your rules, you really don't have them unless you can enforce them. Your enforcement should be consistent, even for misbehavior that seems incidental, such as carelessly dropping rubbish on the floor or talking during quiet study time. As noted earlier, small infractions have a way of growing into large infractions.

Morrish says **insistence** is the best strategy for enforcing rules. Punishment is rarely if ever needed. You must be absolutely determined that students will do what you want them to, and you must be willing to persist until they do. You should develop the mindset that once you give an instruction, there is no question about students doing what you say.

Morrish does not suggest you give up punishment altogether, even though he points out that punishment does not encourage cooperation or responsibility and that it sometimes produces unwanted side effects. However, he maintains that punishment can do two things well. First, it can teach that "no means no," a message that students need to learn quickly. Second, punishment can bring misbehavior to a stop when other tactics can't.



Students usually enter Mrs. James's class casually, talking and joking among themselves. Mrs. James doesn't mind because she likes to use the first few minutes of class time to review her lesson plans and chat with individual students whose assignments have not been completed correctly.

What do you think Ron Morrish would say about her approach?

What do you think he would have her do differently, if anything?

What Role Do Limits Play in Training for Compliance?

Morrish uses the term *rule* to refer to what students should do (e.g., "Raise your hand before speaking"). He uses the term *limit* to refer to what students should not do (e.g., "Absolutely no bullying allowed"). Rules and limits are set and enforced by teachers, in accordance with established standards. Teachers do not negotiate them with students. Morrish says the first secret of good discipline is: *Never give students a choice when it comes to limits.*

You set limits in many ways, formally and informally. For example, you may work with students so they know that when they arrive in the classroom, they are to hang up their jackets and get ready for work immediately (these are rules). They also know they are not allowed to scuffle or swear (these are limits). You present