

# PEACE POWER TOOLS

([www.peacepower.info](http://www.peacepower.info))

## *Respectful Discipline Procedures*

---

### **Summary:**

Youth serving organizations are bound to run into circumstances requiring discipline and special attention needs to be given to the manner in which discipline problems are handled. Reprimands, which are defined as rebukes (gestures or verbal) of behavior, are the most common form of discipline. When used in conjunction with high rates of positive reinforcement, reprimands can serve as effective and respectful discipline that helps build cultures of respect.

### **Resources Needed:**

- None

### **Implementation Steps:**

For proper implementation of respectful discipline procedures, a culture rich in recognition must be established. For suggestions on how to increase recognition, see the *Recognize Contributions and Successes* section of PEACE POWER Tools. Some valuable principles for effective and respectful discipline include the following:

- Track frequency and timing of reprimands, such that a maximum of one reprimand is issued every four or five minutes. At least 4 times as many recognition events should occur during the same time interval.
- Use positive language to deliver planned and reasonable consequences as indicated, with consideration given to:
  - Format of request. Use directives such as "Please do your work." Request the desired behavior rather than discussing what behavior should be stopped.
  - Pause. Wait 3-5 seconds before issuing a 2<sup>nd</sup> request, which gives the youth sufficient time to comply with the 1<sup>st</sup> request.
  - Repetition. Make a request no more than two times; more than this conditions youth to ignore requests.
  - Distance. For greatest impact, the proximity between youth and adult should ideally be approximately 3 ft.
  - Circulate. It is most effective to randomly circulate the room.
  - Eye contact. Make eye contact with the individual being reprimanded.
  - Touching. Where permitted, it's a good idea to give a soft touch on the shoulder, just prior to issuing a reprimand. NOTE: This is not recommended for secondary or volatile individuals. Also many organizations forbid touching by staff and often among students; this is a problem, as positive touching prepares students for socially appropriate behavior and enhances the balance of important neurotransmitters. (See "Systematic Widespread Handshakes, etc." in the Recognition Modules of the website.)
  - Firm, but soft voice. Without yelling at, pleading or cajoling with an individual, issue an unyielding request.
  - Nonemotional request. Emotional reprimands, which involve name calling (i.e. "You are so lazy"), anger or threats are very ineffective. (The more challenging the student, the more important to avoid appearing to be provoked, which can be reinforcing to the child.)
  - Proximal request and reinforcers. When a less motivated individual is in close proximity to a normally compliant individual, issue a request to the compliant individual, wait for his/her compliance, reinforce him/her, and then issue a request to the less motivated individual, and recognize immediately if s/he complies.

# PEACE POWER TOOLS

([www.peacepower.info](http://www.peacepower.info))

- Momentum. Attempt to build a momentum of compliance by issuing fun, more desirable, or easy requests (i.e. pass our worksheets) prior to issuing more difficult or less desirable requests.
- Description and Specificity. Use statements like "Do the even math problems on page 38", instead of "Do the problems I told you to do earlier."
- Positive consequences. Be sure to socially reinforce compliant behavior, as youth are more likely to complete the task and comply the next time a request is made.
- Negative consequences. Have pre-planned negative consequences ready, including checks on the board as warnings, loss of recess, loss of free time, or brief time-outs. For students who are often discipline challenges, such plans should be explicit and clear to everyone. See the "Intensive PEACE POWER" chapter in the PEACE POWER book listed below for further detail.

## **Variations:**

- Two respectful discipline strategies that have general utility are *guided self-correction* and *crisis teaching*. Both strategies are from Father Flanagan's Boys and Girls Town, which is an organization that has special expertise in managing difficult behaviors among youth that have a limited understanding of certain life skills. The Boys Town Press books listed below are excellent resources for additional detail and examples of these empirically-supported techniques.
- **Guided self-correction** is a well-tested discipline procedure where an adult uses a series of questions to help guide a young person through the process of learning from their mistakes. One important aspect of guided self-correction is that it clarifies that the adult and child must share the responsibility of behavior management. It is suggested that those who will use these techniques have the opportunity to practice them in role-plays. Also, posting the steps outlined above on the wall can help the adults involved become familiar with them, further building their repertoires.
  1. Once a history of recognition has been built and a situation requiring discipline occurs, an adult makes an initial request, such as: "Tell me what happened here".
  2. The young person answers the question, with the adult offering help when needed.
  3. The adult asks subsequent questions targeting why the problem unfolded as it did. These questions are to help the young person explore choices made, identify consequences, as well as options that are currently available to them. It may be necessary to help the young person answer these questions depending upon the strength of their problem-solving repertoires.
- **Crisis teaching** is a simple four-step process that adults can use to help defuse situations where young people are losing emotional control.
  1. First, the adult addresses the behavior and gives the young person specific instructions, such as "Tom, I need you to sit down".
  2. Second, it is important that the teacher to monitor their own self-control so that situation does not escalate. If the adult finds himself or herself losing control, it is best to take a few minutes to calm down or have someone else step in.
  3. Third, the adult calmly and empathetically describes the young person's behavior and asks for change to help ensure youth self-control. Here, the adult recognizes and praises positive behavior. Safety is very important, so depending upon organization policies, it could become necessary to physically intervene or have other staff get involved.
  4. Finally, once emotions have moderated, the adult engages the child in follow-up teaching and then establishes consequences. The adult gives direct instruction as to what the problem behavior is or why it is a problem. It is also appropriate to conduct the guided self-correction procedure here.

# PEACE POWER TOOLS

([www.peacepower.info](http://www.peacepower.info))

- Another respectful discipline strategy is the precision request. Research suggests that precision requests can be very effective at prompting appropriate behaviors or inhibiting inappropriate behaviors among youth. In conjunction with respectful reprimand procedures, the following are necessary for precision requests:
  1. When 2<sup>nd</sup> request is made, use the keyword "need" ("Josie, I need you to ...")
  2. If youth complies with the 2<sup>nd</sup> request, offer a social reinforcer, such as praise.
  3. If youth does not comply with the 2<sup>nd</sup> request, use a mild preplanned negative consequence (i.e. loss of privilege, checks on board). Time outs for very disruptive behavior (i.e. arguing or tantrums) can be used with precision requests, but are not effective consequences for academic motivation problems, as they allow escape from the request.
  4. Repeat the request cycle until youth complies with the request.

## ***Rational and Evidence Base:***

There is considerable evidence that the primary determinant of outcomes in a young person's life is the response of others in their environment. This is certainly the case for youth with behavior problems. Youth with behavior problems often receive ineffective and harmful discipline from adults, when research shows that it is much more effective with such youth to teach prosocial behaviors with respect and within cultures of recognition. With an emphasis on building respect, evidence shows that young people can learn the skills needed to be successful and make contributions to the world around them. Respectful discipline procedures hold significant promise for reducing coercive, threatening, and violent actions in organizational and community settings. Reprimands, when used respectfully, can help reduce disruptive classroom behaviors and can lead to improvements in academic motivation among students. In fact, there is some evidence that both the reprimanded student and peers seated nearby will experience increased academic motivation when discipline is handled respectfully. Disrespect by adults, by contrast, models disrespect for the student, and can lead to rapid escalation.

- Connolly, T., Dowd, T., Criste, A., Nelson, C., & Tobias, L. (1995). *The well managed classroom*. Boys Town, NE: Boys Town Press.
- Davis, J. L., Nelson, C. S., & Gauger, E. S. (2000). *Safe and effective secondary schools: The Boys Town Model*. Boys town, NE: Boys Town Press.
- Jenson, W. R., & Reavis, H. K. (1996). Reprimands and precision requests. In H. K. Reavis, M. T. Sweeten, W. R. Jenson, D. P. Morgan, D. J. Andrews, & S. Fister (eds.), *Best practices: Behavioral and educational strategies for teachers* (pp. 49-55). Longmont, CO: Sopris West.
- Mattaini, M. A. (2001). *Peace power for adolescents: Strategies for a culture of nonviolence*. Washington, DC: NASW Press.
- Van Houten, R., & Doley, D. M. (1983). Are social reprimands effective? In S. Axelrod & J. Apsche (Eds.), *The effects of punishment on human behavior* (pp. 45-70). New York: Academic Press.
- Van Houten, R., Nau, P., MacKenzie-Keating, D., Sameoto, D., & Calavecchia, B. (1982). An analysis of some variables influencing the effectiveness of reprimands. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 15*, 65-83.
- Wood, M. M., & Long, N. J. (1991). *Life space intervention: Talking with children in crisis*. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

Julia Wesley & Mark Mattaini