

# SCHOOL SAFETY FRAMEWORK

# Positive Discipline and Classroom Management



**basic education**  
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REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



**COURSE READER**

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# Introduction

Education policy in South Africa emphasises the importance of creating safe schools that encourage respect for human rights (see *School Safety Framework Book 1*). The National Education Policy Act requires schools and school authorities to create an enabling education system that supports the full personal development of each learner, and contributes to the moral, social, cultural, political and economic development of the nation at large. It emphasises the advancement of democracy, human rights and the peaceful resolution of disputes, and bans corporal punishment. Following its lead, a key goal of the Department's School Safety Policy is to develop and maintain a safe, welcoming, violence-free learning environment.

The positive discipline approach can play a key role in creating safer schools, where children's rights and dignity are respected and they are equipped to achieve their full potential. The positive discipline approach rejects the use of violence as a teaching tool. It focuses instead on guiding children's behaviour; rather than enforcing good behaviour through fear, the educator plays the role of mentor and guide, and the school makes long-term investment in a child's development. In so doing, this approach not only supports children's full development, but also improves the school environment by eliminating fear, teaching children self-discipline and encouraging greater pleasure and engagement in learning.

This Trainer's Manual forms part of the *School Safety Framework* on implementing a positive discipline approach in schools. The training module on positive discipline comprises two inter-related tools:

- **This Course Reader:** provides detailed information on the topics covered in the training module. The Reader is designed to provide trainers with the information needed to deliver the Positive Discipline training for educators. It also can be used as a resource for those participating in the course, educators looking for information to incorporate into their teaching, or those who simply wish to learn more about positive discipline.
- **The Positive Discipline Trainer's Manual:** this equips trainers with tools to implement the training module. It covers the aims and objectives of each session, suggested timings and recommended activities to help transmit the content of the course. The manual also includes tips for talking about positive discipline.

These components provide a comprehensive toolkit designed to equip school governing bodies, school principals and children with the knowledge and tools to recognise and counter bullying within the school community.

# Overview of the Course Reader

This Course Reader covers the primary content of the Positive Discipline training. The reader is divided into seven sections that include the primary messages, background information and definitions, as well as useful resources educators and trainers can use to access additional information.

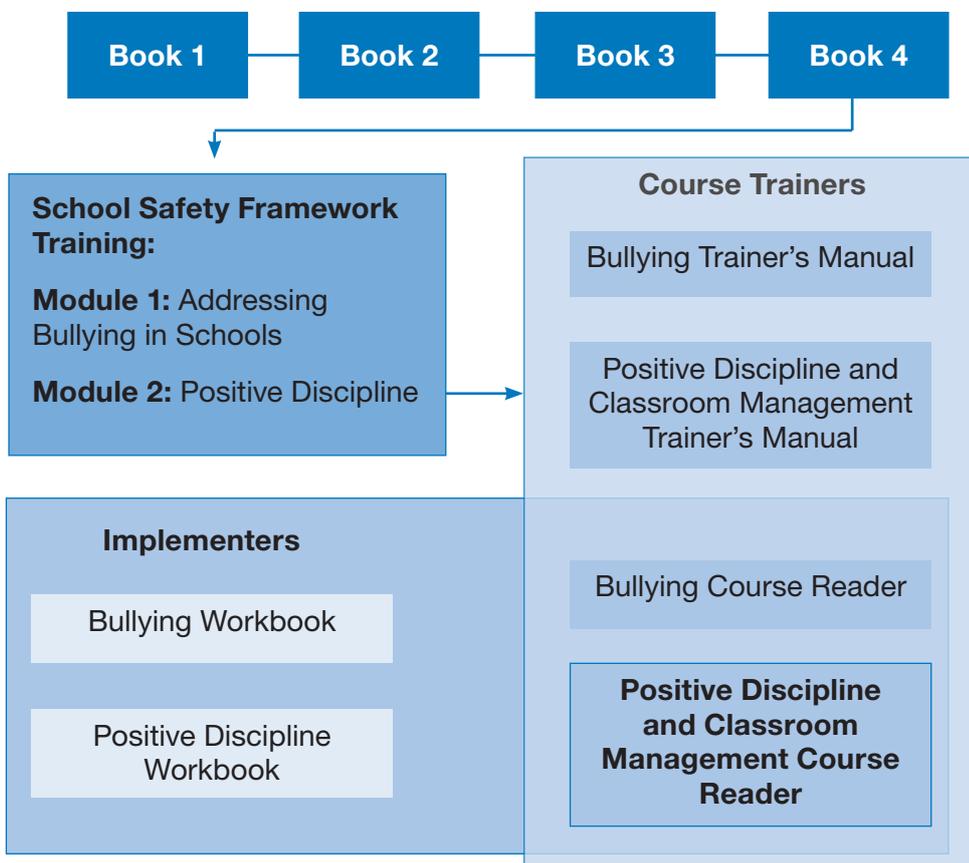
The key objectives of the Course Reader are to:

- Explain and explore the difference between punishment and discipline
- Explain the difference between negative disciplinary approaches like corporal punishment and positive discipline, and the key aspects of the positive discipline approach
- Explore the consequences of negative discipline and the underlying principles and value of the positive discipline approach
- Explore the reasons for misbehaviour and how to respond and discipline positively rather than negatively.
- Provide guidance on implementing a whole-school positive discipline approach
- Provide guidance, tips and resources for educators to implement the positive discipline approach in the classroom.

The Reader includes a Glossary that explains the meaning of key terms. These terms are coloured in blue in the text for easy reference.

The Course Reader is designed to be read, inform and work alongside the other components of the *School Safety Framework*.

## School Safety Framework



**Food for thought:**

When you think of a “disciplined person,” what do you think of? Chances are, you think of someone like an Olympic athlete, someone who has given up a bad habit, such as smoking, or someone who remains calm in the midst of chaos. This is the goal of discipline.

## The difference between punishment and discipline

People often see ‘discipline’ as the same thing as ‘punishment’. They are not. Discipline actually refers to the practice of teaching or training a person to obey rules or a code of behaviour in the short- and long-term.<sup>1</sup> While punishment is meant to control children’s behaviour, discipline is meant to develop their behaviour. It is meant to teach children self-control and confidence by focusing on what they are capable of learning. The ultimate goal of discipline is for children to understand their own behaviour, take initiative, be responsible for their choices, and respect themselves and others. Discipline should:

- Focus in correcting and educating
- Promote responsibility and self-discipline
- Never undermine or compromise the dignity of the learner or educator

The key differences between a discipline-focused and punishment-focused approach can be summarised as follows:

Discipline	Punishment
Gives children positive alternatives	Tells them what not to do without explaining why
A regular, continuous, consistent and determined process. It should be instruction-oriented	Happens only when a child is caught making mistake or having a problem. It is a premeditated action that aims at making children ashamed or humiliated
Acknowledges and rewards effort and good behaviour	Only reacts harshly to misbehaviour
Takes the child’s view into account; children follow rules because they are discussed and agreed upon	Never or rarely listen to children; children follow rules because they are threatened or bribed
Consistent, firm guidance	Controlling, shaming, ridiculing
Positive, respects the child	Negative and disrespectful of the child
Physically and verbally non-violent	Physically and verbally violent and aggressive
Logical consequences that are directly related to and in proportion to the misbehaviour	Consequences that are unrelated
Teaches children to understand the reason for rules and discipline so that they internalise them and follows them subconsciously	Teaches the child to passively follow the rules for fear of being punished; there is no real understanding of why one behaviour is permitted and another is not
Understands children’s capacity, needs and developmental stages	Inappropriate to the child’s developmental stage of life; does not take into account children’s capacity and needs.
Teaches children self-discipline	Requires adults to enforce discipline. Teaches children to behave well only when they risk getting caught doing otherwise
Emphasises listening and <b>modelling</b>	Involves constantly reprimanding children for minor infractions causing them to tune us out (ignore us; not listen to us)
Accepts mistakes as normal and uses them as learning opportunities	Mistakes viewed as unacceptable. Forces the child to be obedient because adults say so, rather than through understanding the right and wrong of the situation.
Focuses on the behaviour of the child rather than the child’s personality	Criticise the child’s personality rather than comment their behaviour

Source: Durrant., 2010; Plan Vietnam 2009

# The difference between negative and positive discipline



The National Education Policy Act and the South African School's Act prohibits:

- Physical punishment
- Cruel or demeaning treatment
- Psychological abuse
- Solitary confinement
- Lock-outs

Negative discipline focuses on punishment. Negative discipline uses measures aimed at hurting children physical or emotionally as a way of stopping misbehaviour, punishing them and preventing bad behaviour in the future. It includes corporal or physical punishment, as well as emotional punishment, which aims to embarrass or shame children.

## Examples of Negative discipline

Corporal or physical punishment includes:

- Hitting, smacking, slapping and spanking with a hand, whip, stick, shoe, wooden spoon or other implement
- Kicking, shaking, throwing, pinching, scratching, biting, burning, pulling a child's hair or boxing their ears
- Forcing children to stay in uncomfortable positions, forcing children to swallow spices, or washing their mouths with soap

While corporal punishment is meant to cause physical pain, emotional punishment is meant to humiliate and cause psychological pain. It includes:

- Sarcasm or making fun of children
- Threats
- Name-calling
- Yelling and commanding
- Humiliating actions such as forcing children to stay in undignified positions or wear a sign for everyone to see and comment on

Positive discipline focuses on discipline rather than punishment. It aims to teach children to understand and follow social rules, both within the classroom and outside it, without using physical or emotional violence. It emphasises teaching children to do things right rather than punishing them for doing wrong. It aims to encourage self-discipline and mutual respect within a non-violent and caring environment.

The positive discipline approach is rooted in a respect for human rights. It takes as its starting point that children have the right to a safe school environment, free from violence. It aims to build a culture of human rights where everyone, learners and educators alike, are protected from harm and are treated with dignity and respect.

Positive discipline aims to work with children and not against them. The emphasis is on building on learners' strengths rather than criticising their weaknesses and uses **positive reinforcement** to promote good behaviour. It involves giving children clear guidelines for what behaviour is acceptable and then supporting them as they learn to abide by these guidelines. The approach actively promotes child participation and problem solving, while at the same time encouraging adults to become positive role models for the youngsters in their care.

Key concepts include:

- **Mutual respect.** Adults illustrate good behaviour by treating adults and children with respect and kindness, while encouraging children to respect the rights of others.
- **Identifying the reasons and beliefs behind the behaviour.** Children usually have reasons for behaving in a particular way. The approach aims to understand and address these underlying beliefs and motivations, rather than just changing behaviour.
- **Effective communication and problem solving.** Educators ask questions, listen to learners and lay out consequences. Educators work with learners to find solutions to problems and provide learners with opportunities to develop problem-solving skills.
- **Discipline that teaches.** Educators are firm, but respectful. The emphasis is on teaching children to behave better rather than punishing poor conduct.
- **Encouragement rather than praise.** Encouragement notices effort and improvement, not just success, and builds long-term self-esteem and empowerment.

When necessary, positive discipline includes non-violent consequences for poor behaviour. It uses consequences that replace the experience of humiliation with the following:

- Considering the effects of one's behaviour
- Identifying alternative and preferred behaviours
- Demonstrating understanding of why a preferred behaviour is important
- Making amends for harm done to others or the environment

This approach may require learners to engage in writing essays, making apologies or performing chores in the classroom—any activities that make them stop, think and demonstrate their intention to act differently in the future. Positive discipline does not reward children for poor behaviour. It provides children with an opportunity to grow as individuals by understanding their mistakes and appreciating how appropriate behaviour can bring them positive experiences and opportunities.

Positive discipline *is not*:

- **Permissiveness**

- Letting learners do whatever they want
- About having no rules, limits or expectations
- About short-term reactions
- Alternative punishments to slapping, hitting and shaming

Positive discipline *is*:

- Long-term solutions that develop learners' own self-discipline
- Clear and consistent communication
- Consistent reinforcement of your expectations, rules and limits
- Based on getting to know learners and being fair
- Building a mutually respectful relationship with learners
- Teaching learners life-long skills and fostering their love of learning
- Teaching courtesy, non-violence, empathy, self-respect and respect for others and their rights
- Increasing learners' competence and confidence to handle academic challenges and difficult social situations

Source: Joan Durrant, 2010. *Positive Discipline in Everyday Teaching: A guide for educators*. Save the Children, Sweden.



### Useful websites

- **Resources Aimed at the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (RAPCAN):** Information and resources to assist educators, parents and others to use positive approaches to discipline ([www.rapcan.org.za/resources/resources.asp?ResourceFilter=Corporal%20Punishment%20and%20Positive%20Discipline&filter=8](http://www.rapcan.org.za/resources/resources.asp?ResourceFilter=Corporal%20Punishment%20and%20Positive%20Discipline&filter=8))
- **The Department of Basic Education's Thusong education portal:** Provides free educational resources, policy information and interactive services concerning all aspects of the South African Schooling Sector ([www.thusong.doe.gov.za](http://www.thusong.doe.gov.za))

### Other resources:

- LEADSA, 2010. *Building a Culture of Responsibility and Humanity in Our Schools: A guide for educators*. Department of Basic Education. Available at [www.education.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=7sgDgKbLtJA%3D&tabid=93&mid=1722](http://www.education.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=7sgDgKbLtJA%3D&tabid=93&mid=1722)
- Joan Durrant, 2010. *Positive Discipline in Everyday Teaching: A guide for educators*. Save the Children, Sweden. Available at: <http://seap.savethechildren.se/Global/scs/SEAP/publication/publication%20pdf/Education/Positive%20Discipline%20Everyday%20Teaching%20FINAL.pdf>
- Dipak Naker and Deborah Sekitoleko, 2009. *Creating a Good School without Corporal Punishment*. Raising Voices: Kamwokya, Uganda. Available at [www.raisingvoices.org/files/goodschool\\_learn\\_positivediscipline.pdf](http://www.raisingvoices.org/files/goodschool_learn_positivediscipline.pdf)
- UNESCO, 2006. *Positive Discipline in the Inclusive, Learning-Friendly Classroom: A guide for educators and educator educators*. UNESCO, Bangkok. Available at [www2.unescobkk.org/elib/publications/086/Pos\\_Dis-final.pdf](http://www2.unescobkk.org/elib/publications/086/Pos_Dis-final.pdf)



- The **Bill of Rights** can be downloaded from the South African Government's web portal, at [www.info.gov.za/documents/constitution/1996/96cons2.htm#7](http://www.info.gov.za/documents/constitution/1996/96cons2.htm#7)
- The **Abolition of Corporal Punishment Act** can be downloaded at [www.info.gov.za/view/DownloadFileAction?id=70779](http://www.info.gov.za/view/DownloadFileAction?id=70779)

## Why should schools implement positive discipline?

There are several reasons why it is important to adopt a positive discipline approach.

The first is that post-apartheid South Africa is founded on dignity and respect for human rights. The Constitution's Bill of Rights states that everyone living in South Africa, whether an adult or child, has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected and the, right to a basic education and the right to freedom and security. Corporal punishment and other negative discipline methods are in opposition to these basic principles, and Abolition of Corporal Punishment Act makes corporal punishment illegal in South African schools.

The second is that implementing a positive discipline approach can help schools to play an instrumental role in creating a more just and **humane** society. Children look to adults to provide models of behaviour; where children see adults using physical or psychological violence they learn that violence is acceptable and are more likely to use violence against others. Schools have an important role to play in guiding, correcting and socialising children toward appropriate behaviours. Using positive rather than negative approaches to discipline teaches children to respect others' human rights and provides them with positive models of behaviour. Positive discipline promotes children's self-control, teaches responsibility and helps them make thoughtful choices.

The National Curriculum Statement makes the link between education and creating the kind of society that respects and protects the rights of all people. It also emphasises the importance of human rights principles in teaching in South Africa. The Curriculum Statement Overview document states that:

“...the promotion of values is important not only for the sake of personal development, but also to ensure that a national South African identity is built on values different from those that underpinned apartheid education. The kind of learner envisaged is one who will be **imbued** with the values and act in the interests of society based on respect for democracy, equality, human dignity, life and social justice. The curriculum aims to develop the full potential of each learner as a citizen of a democratic South Africa. It seeks to create a lifelong learner who is confident and independent, literate, numerate and multi-skilled, compassionate, with a respect for the environment and the ability to participate in society as a critical and active citizen.”

Learning area statements in the National Curriculum Statements reflect the principles and practices of social justice, and respect for human rights, as defined in the Constitution's Bill of Rights.

The National Curriculum Statement does not confine human rights and responsibilities to one Learning Area. It expects respect for human rights to form part of all teaching. This means that every educator in South Africa is expected to teach for and about human rights and human responsibility. It also means that educators need to lead by example, and provide children with positive models of behaviour by always respecting the dignity and rights of other adults and children.

The third reason is that positive discipline approaches also make teaching easier in the long term. By teaching self-control, helping children to understand what is expected of them and providing them with the necessary skills, positive discipline techniques enable children to moderate their own behaviour. This means that educators need to spend less time and effort correcting children's misbehaviour.



- The **Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9 (Schools)** can be downloaded at [www.info.gov.za/view/DownloadFileAction?id=70257](http://www.info.gov.za/view/DownloadFileAction?id=70257)

## Rights and discipline

Human rights at school are often regarded as the reason that children misbehave or that educators are unable to exercise 'control' over the learning environment. This view completely misses what human rights are all about. For there to be a true culture of rights at school, responsibilities are very important. A rights-based culture at school is based on respect, responsibility, self-discipline and dignity. This requires respect for others, hard work, the pursuit of excellence, and participation and commitment to the well being of others, both inside and outside the school community.

For more on human rights in education see LEADSA, 2010. *Building a Culture of Responsibility and Humanity in Our Schools: A guide for educators*. Department of Basic Education. Available at [www.education.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=7sgDgKbLtJA%3D&tabid=93&mid=1722](http://www.education.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=7sgDgKbLtJA%3D&tabid=93&mid=1722)

## A whole-school approach to positive discipline

Implementing a rights-based, positive discipline approach requires a complete shift in perspective. The emphasis needs to move from controlling children's behaviour to a more developmental approach that equips children with the knowledge and skills to better moderate their own behaviour. This requires building a climate of trust and helping school actors to understand each other better.

Making this change is not easy. Corporal punishment has become such an accepted part of child rearing and teaching that introducing positive discipline will sometimes require a complete re-orientation of how schools approach teaching. In many cases educators will also need to unlearn one set of behaviours and replace them with another, new set of skills.

Making the shift successfully requires a coordinated approach that involves all of the actors in the school community. Principals, educators, administrative staff and other school authorities need to work together to implement a positive discipline approach. Schools also need to involve caregivers. Positive discipline is unlikely to succeed if children face one set of expectations and rules at school and a completely different set at home. Schools need to work with caregivers to ensure consistency between home and school, and equip them with the information and tools to practice positive discipline at home. Schools can begin this process by meeting parents at the beginning of each year to discuss positive discipline and how it can be put into practice.

Key roles and responsibilities for the different school actors include:

- **The School Governing Body (SGB):** The SGB has a key role to play in developing and updating a school code of conduct to support positive discipline in schools. It has an important **oversight** role, particularly in ensuring that the disciplinary practices of the school take place within the framework of the South African Constitution and the South African Schools Act. It can also play a key role in drawing parents into the positive discipline process.
- **The principal and school management team:** The school management team needs to provide leadership on positive discipline. They need to establish and drive the concept and ensure that policies are implemented and ensure that learners are dealt with fairly and consistently. They need to ensure that staff



### Discipline in the South African Schools Act

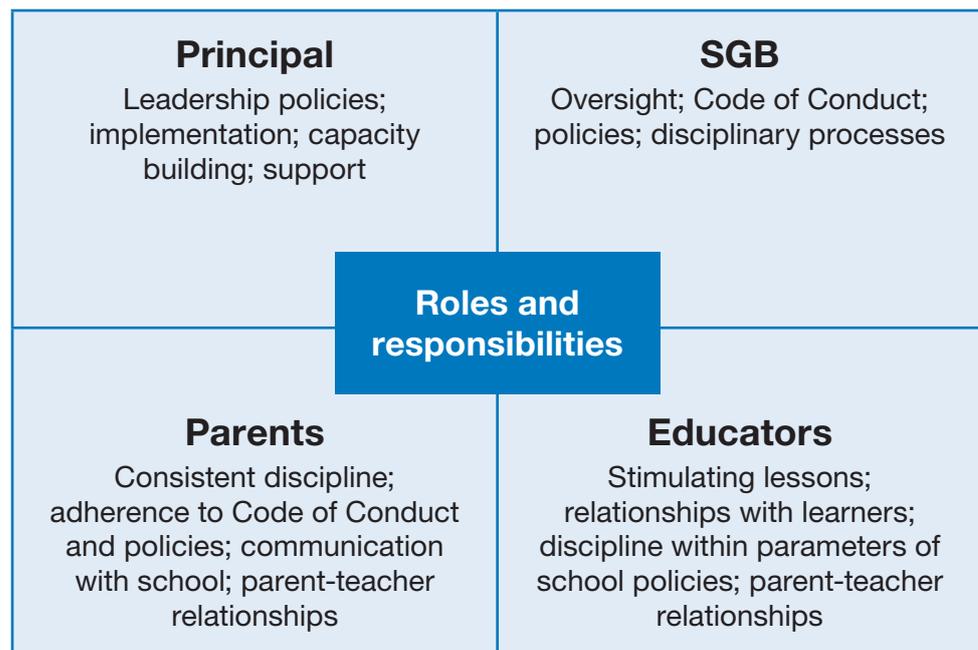
According to the South African Schools Act, the Code of Conduct must focus on positive discipline; it must not be punitive and punishment-oriented but should facilitate constructive learning. Under the Act, discipline is envisaged not as a negative process but as a learning process that support the underlying values and attitudes of peace, tolerance, respect, dignity and human rights.

The South African Schools Act can be downloaded from the portal at [www.education.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=808cFmkP8U4%3d&tabid=185&mid=1047](http://www.education.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=808cFmkP8U4%3d&tabid=185&mid=1047)

gets the support they need to adopt the positive discipline approach. They also need to support and oversee the involvement of parents in the process.

- **Educators:** Educators need to create a learner-centred classroom that stimulates learners and encourages participation and discussion in a focussed and orderly way. They need to prepare well so that lessons can run smoothly and discipline can be applied more easily. Educators need to ensure that discipline is always in line with the school’s code of conduct for learners and that children are treated fairly and consistently. They also need to work with parents to keep them up-to-date with what is happening with their children, and help them to practice positive discipline.
- **Parents:** Parents also need to help the school in ensuring consistency between the home and school, and create a safe atmosphere for children in which they grow and develop positively. Parents need to know the school’s code of conduct and encourage children to uphold it. They need to assist in creating respect for school rules, by ensuring that children attend school regularly and get to school on time. Where children will be absent or late, parents need to inform the school and provide reasons. Parents also need to get to know their child’s educator. A good parent-educator relationship ensures a happier child with a strong sense of security. It also helps in understanding and correcting problem-behaviour. It is also important that they participate in school meetings and other opportunities to support a positive discipline approach.

Figure X: Roles and responsibilities in implementing positive discipline



## Creating a shared vision

The first step in implementing the positive discipline approach is to develop a shared vision of what the school aims to achieve. Rather than focusing on problems and bad behaviour, it helps to begin by looking at positives and what is already working at the school. This provides a foundation on which to build a common **vision** for a school community that is child-centred and empowering. This in turn provides the groundwork from which to talk about how the school can make the vision a reality. The vision should support:

- The creation of a child-friendly learning environment where learners, educators and parents feel respected, supported and valued; and where learners feel free to express their views and are encouraged to reach their full potential.
- Teaching and positive reinforcement aimed at building respectful and caring relationships.
- Strategies to reduce unacceptable behaviour that involves all role-players namely, educators, parents, learners and school management.

## Ensuring the school's code of conduct reflects a positive approach

The next step is to ensure that the code of conduct reflects a positive discipline approach. Under the South African School's Act, schools are also legally required to develop a code of conduct that establishes what is expected of educators and learners. It is important to ensure that this code of conduct reflects the principles of positive discipline. The code of conduct should not simply entail a set of rules and measures for punishment. It should provide a framework for creating a positive culture of behaviour.

Revising the Code of Conduct to reflect a positive discipline approach is not simply a legal and administrative requirement. By establishing what is expected of all school actors, what constitutes undesirable behaviour and rules and procedures for dealing with it, a comprehensive Code of Conduct can serve as a valuable tool in creating a positive school environment. However, a code of conduct can only become a resource if it is widely disseminated and enforced; it is not simply enough to create a code of conduct; it must become a reference point for staff, parents and learners.

Codes of conduct need to be developed in an open and democratic way. It is essential that the learners, educators, school administrators, non-teaching staff and parents all have an opportunity to contribute and provide feedback on the code of conduct, and that the rules reflect consensus among these actors. This is a legal requirement under the School's Act. It is also important for practical reasons: without the buy-in of all actors, policies can be difficult to implement and apply, and may be opposed by those they affect.

Codes of conduct should remain 'living' documents; they should be reviewed and updated regularly to ensure that they capture issues and changes in the school environment.



The Department of Basic Education has developed an example code of conduct that schools can use as a guideline in developing their own code that addresses the specific issues in a particular school. This is available at <http://www.education.gov.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=apCdZ3vKmp8%3d&tabid=335&mid=971>



### Commitment forms

It is important that the code of conduct is disseminated to and read by all relevant role-players. It is a good idea to get learners and their parents to sign a commitment form to show that they have read the code of conduct and agree to abide by its rules. This process should be repeated at the beginning of each school year and when changes are made.



See Appendix 1 for an example of Caregiver-Learner Commitment Form

## Incorporating teaching on social skills in the curriculum

The third step is to incorporate material aimed at developing children's social skills into the curriculum. Good social skills are critical to successful functioning in life. Social skills are also linked to the quality of the school environment and school safety. It is important that children learn the social skills they need, both to function effectively in the classroom and outside it. While most children pick up positive skills through their everyday interactions with adults others around them, it is important that schools reinforce this casual learning with direct and indirect instruction.

There are many different types of social skills. Key skills areas include:

- Survival skills (e.g., listening, following directions, ignoring distractions, talking nicely to others)
- Interpersonal skills (e.g., sharing, asking for permission, joining an activity, waiting your turn)
- Problem-solving skills (e.g., asking for help, apologising, accepting consequences, deciding what to do)
- Conflict resolution skills (e.g., dealing with teasing, losing, accusations, being left out, peer pressure)

Materials should target all age groups, and should be tailored to children's developmental stage. Material should also be tailored to the particular needs identified in particular schools. Some children may require more individual attention than others.

## Implementing the positive discipline approach

### The principles behind positive discipline

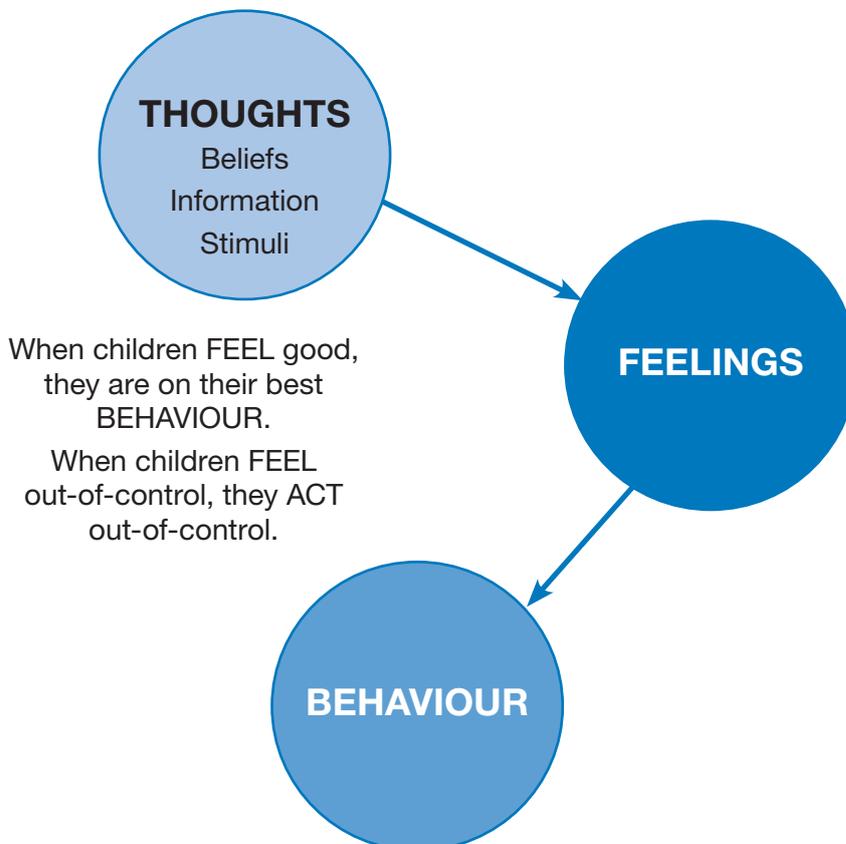
The positive discipline approach is based on several education principles. It is:

- **Holistic:** The approach recognises that all aspects of children's learning and development are connected to each other. For example, understanding children's social development helps to understand why their behaviour and motivation levels may change. The positive discipline approach is based on understanding the links between individual development, learning, behaviour and academic achievement, family relationships and community health.
- **Strengths-based:** It recognises that all children have strengths, capabilities and talents, and aims to emphasise and build on their abilities, efforts and improvements. Mistakes are not seen as failures, but as opportunities to learn and improve. Takes children's developmental stage into account and aims to discipline in an age-appropriate way (see Appendix 1 for more on the developmental stages and suggested teaching approaches)
- **Constructive:** Positive discipline emphasizes the educator's role in building learners' **self-esteem** and confidence, developing independence, and fostering their sense of **self-efficacy**. Rather than punishing learners' academic or behavioural mistakes, the educator explains, demonstrates and models the concepts and behaviours to be learned. Rather than trying to control learners' behaviour, the educator seeks to understand it and to guide it in a positive direction.

- **Inclusive:** Positive discipline is respectful of children's individual differences and equal rights. All children are included in the educational process, and all are entitled to the same standard of education. In positive discipline, the emphasis is on teaching to children's individual needs, strengths, social skills and learning styles within an integrated classroom – to the best of the school's ability. This includes identifying and understanding learning challenges, finding ways to teach every child effectively and adapting the classroom environment to ensure each one's success.
- **Proactive:** The focus is on helping children to succeed in the long-term. Rather than responding to problems with knee-jerk or short-term reactions, the focus is on understanding the roots of learning and behaviour difficulties and putting in place strategies that will help to address issues in the long-term.
- **Participatory:** It works on the principle that children are more interested in learning when they feel part of the process. Learners are motivated to learn when they feel engaged in the learning process. Positive discipline involves learners in making decisions. Rather than force and control, this approach seeks out learners' opinions and perspectives, and involves them in creating a classroom environment that supports learning.



In this way, the positive discipline approach challenges many of the ways schools often approach teaching. It requires rethinking many of our assumptions about how to teach and relate to children.



Old assumption	Positive discipline approach
Physical punishment is necessary to maintain control in the classroom.	Focusing on using power over learners creates power struggles. Over time, many learners will resist this control by acting out, lying, skipping school or dropping out. Educators should focus on facilitating learning, not trying to control it. Learning should be active and enjoyable for learners within a warm and structured learning environment. Engaged children are well-behaved children.
Without physical punishment, I will lose my authority and the learners' respect.	Authority and respect are often confused with fear. Authority comes from knowledge and wisdom; fear comes from coercion. Respect is earned and freely given; fear is a response to pain and humiliation. Respect builds relationships and strengthens bonds; fear erodes them.
Physical punishment has worked for decades, so why should we stop it now?	Many learners in previous generations hated school and dropped out. Many with great potential lost their motivation to learn. Many have painful memories and suffer from low self-confidence and depression. Some carry resentment and hostility throughout their lives.
It is the educator's job to give information and the student's job to remember it. They have to sit still and be quiet so that they can learn.	Children are active learners. They learn and understand best when they are actively involved in the learning process. When they are required to sit quietly and listen, their active minds wander. Children need to use their learning constructively, not just to remember facts. Educators need to provide many opportunities for learners to experiment, discover and build their knowledge.
My learners' silence in the classroom is a sign of their respect for me. When they speak or ask questions in class, they are challenging my authority.	Children build their own understanding of the world and all of the people and objects in it. They are born wanting to learn and understand everything. Their questions and curiosity should be encouraged and nurtured so that they continue to want to learn throughout their lives. Learners' silence is not a sign of respect. Usually it indicates fear, anxiety, disinterest, boredom or lack of understanding.
Children are incomplete beings. Educators help to build them into complete people.	Children are complete human beings. They might understand things differently than adults do, but they are just as intelligent and have all the same feelings as adults. Children are worthy of respect and they have inherent rights, including the right to participation.

Source: J. Durrant, 2010.

When it seems a student has misbehaved, the first challenge is to understand the reasons for the child's behaviour and to evaluate whether the behaviour actually deserves a disciplinary response. Often poor behaviour results from factors outside a child's control, such as transport problems, for example, and disciplining the child will not eliminate the behaviour. Other times, children make poor choices based on flawed beliefs. For example, sometimes children make no effort to arrive on time for school because they do not believe that punctuality is important. These beliefs can be corrected through a disciplinary response – they are correctable beliefs.

## Understanding children's behaviour

Behaviour is understandable and purposeful. Learners do what they do for a reason, even if we don't understand what it is. It is important to try and see the world through their eyes, and to understand the issues that may be affecting how they act in class. We need to ask ourselves if they are having difficulty with the classroom situation or whether it is something outside of the classroom and school that may be causing the problem. Only then can we begin to respond to behaviour wisely, confidently, and effectively.

When trying to understand why a child behaves in a particular way it helps to ask questions such as:

- **Is there a problem with the subject material or approach?** Children sometimes misbehave because the work is too hard or too easy for them, because they are bored, because the teaching method does not fit the learner's learning style, or because the educator's expectations are unclear or unreasonable.
- **Is the child emotionally motivated?** Children often act out to achieve specific goals, such as getting attention, feeling powerful and in-control, or in reaction to a real or perceived hurt or injustice. Children also sometimes misbehave as a way of avoiding tasks at which they fear they will fail, or to cover-up when they feel inadequate.
- **Does the behaviour reflect problems at school?** For example, children who are bullied or experience some kind of victimisation or trauma at school may become fearful, anxious and withdrawn. Some may act out, bully or hurt others as a way of dealing with their emotions or making themselves feel better (see *School Safety Framework Early Warning System* module on Preventing and Addressing Bullying).
- **Does the behaviour reflect personal problems or problems at home?** Many children have to deal with immense emotional challenges at home and these are not left at home, but are carried into the classroom. Children sometimes act out as a way of dealing with problems at home, such as a family member being ill, conflict in the family, trauma or abuse. Many children who bully others are bullied at home, or attack others as a way of dealing with the negative emotions created by family problems. Children may also become quiet or withdrawn, have trouble getting on with others or find it difficult to concentrate and engage with lessons.
- **Does the behaviour reflect socio-economic issues?** Hungry children, for example, find it difficult to concentrate and tend to perform at a lower level than children who are well-fed. Where children have a lot of responsibility at home, such as needing to do many household chores, care for others or work, they may be tired, struggle to complete homework, come to school late or be absent often. Overcrowding, noise and a lack of electricity at home can also prevent children from completing homework. Very poor children may struggle to afford transport to school, school uniforms or books and stationery.
- **Could it reflect medical or biological issues?** Feeling unwell or depressed, for example, influences how children behave. It's normal for children to occasionally forget their homework, daydream during class, act without thinking, or get fidgety, but if these are ongoing problems they may be linked to **attention deficit disorder (ADD)**, sometimes also called attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Children who struggle to read and spell could have dyslexia, which affects the way in which the brain recognises and processes symbols, or some other learning difficulty. Hearing and vision problems can also contribute to poor behaviour.



### Does positive discipline take up a lot of educators' time?

Positive discipline is an investment in creating a life-long motivation to learn. It does take time and effort to understand the approach and learn the skills. But, by investing this time now, you will save time later. This is because:

- Positive discipline helps children become self-disciplined, so there will be fewer behaviour problems to handle
- Lessons are more interesting and learners more motivated, so they will pay attention more, study more and achieve higher grades.

Physical and emotional punishment seem easier options, but they tend to:

- Breed resentment and hostility, which increases behaviour problems
- Lower interest and motivation, so learners pay attention less, study less and achieve lower grades
- Can create resistance, with the result that they must be repeated and intensified over time

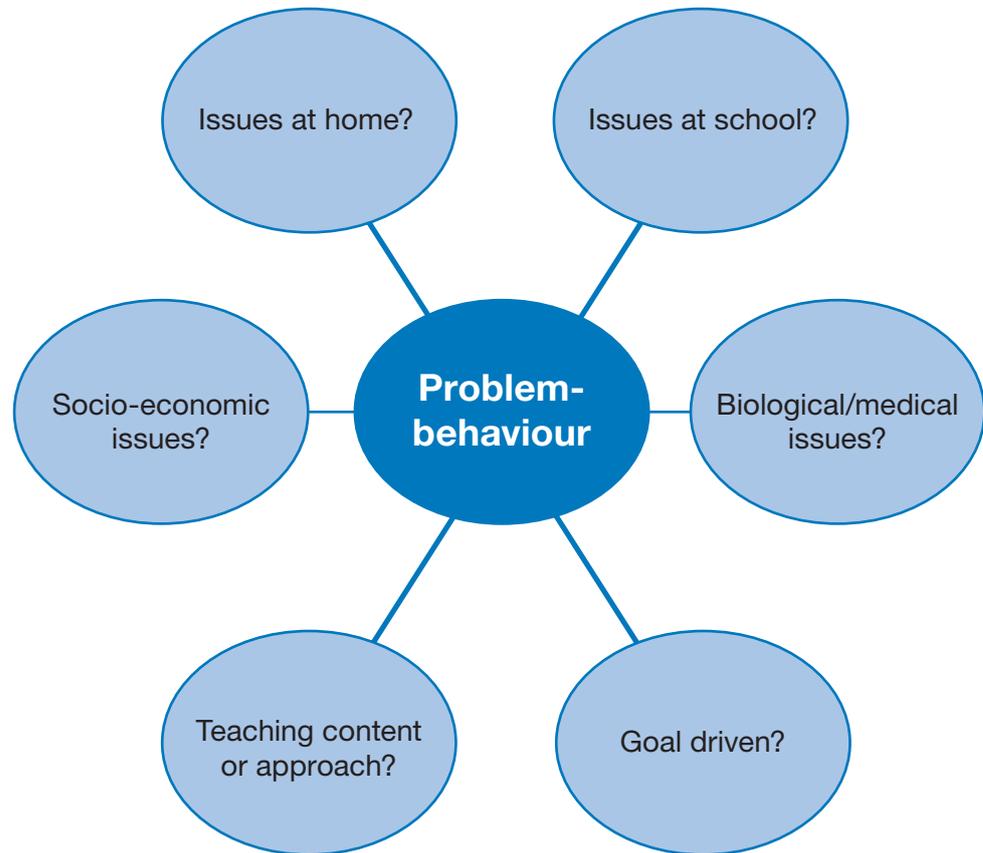
Source: UNESCO, 2006



For more on biological and medical issues and how they affect behaviour, see Joan Durrant, 2010. *Positive Discipline in Everyday Teaching: A guide for educators*. Save the Children, Sweden. Available at: <http://seap.savethechildren.se/Global/scs/SEAP/publication/publication%20pdf/Education/Positive%20Discipline%20Everyday%20Teaching%20FINAL.pdf>

It is important that educators talk to learners to understand their backgrounds and the issues and challenges they face; it is important to get to the bottom of what is behind the behaviour rather than focusing on only what someone has done wrong. Understanding the context and circumstances that shape learners' behaviour will not only point to solutions, it can also prevent unfair punishments, which often feeds an ongoing cycle of anger, resentment and disruptive behaviour.

**Figure X: Potential roots causes of misbehaviour**





## Spotlight on child-headed households

Some children are responsible for providing for and caring for younger siblings, even though they are very young themselves. Where parents have died and there are no relatives who are capable of caring for the youngsters, children must take on adult roles and all the responsibilities of adulthood and parenthood. Some of these children-carers still manage to attend school, although many end up dropping out of school. School staff may only realise there is a problem when children are absent frequently or are struggling to cope.

Schools have a responsibility to support child-carers. The special relationship that exists between a school and its learners cannot simply cease to exist at the gate of the school; schools need to find ways of accommodating and assisting children left to care for their siblings.

### Identifying child-heads

In addition to getting to know learners, educators and other school staff should encourage children to ask for help if they need it. They should also encourage other learners to speak out for learners who are struggling but are reluctant to request assistance.

### Supporting child-heads

Where a problem is suspected:

- Talk to the child and try to understand what is happening
- Provide ongoing moral and emotional support
- Find ways of accommodating their circumstances, such as greater flexibility in homework deadlines, or helping them with homework
- Identify and contact organisations that can help the child, such as the local offices of the Department of Social Development, non-governmental organisations such as child-welfare societies and Child-Line, for instance, or community structures.
- See if the school community can help in other ways, such as by providing food, help with uniforms and school materials

### Judging Lindiwe: An educator's experience

Lindiwe is 14 and is often absent. When she does come to school, her homework is never done and she often falls asleep in class. She drove me CRAZY! I tried speaking to her but she was always sullen, so I sent her to the principal.

He then called me in and when he spoke to her, she burst into tears and her story came out. Her mother had died recently of AIDS and she now has the added responsibility of caring for four siblings. They live in an informal settlement with no electricity or running water.

When I was made aware of her circumstances, I felt bad that I had judged her without trying to find out why she was behaving in that manner. We realised that the school needed to intervene and help this child get social support. The problem was so much bigger than her undone homework or her lateness.

Source: RAPCAN, 2008.

## The motivations behind some types of misbehaviour

Educational experts suggest that the negative behaviours can often be categorised into four basic underlying causes: attention seeking, showing power, revenge and feeling inadequate – although children are not always aware of the underlying motivation behind their behaviour.

- **Attention seeking:** Receiving attention is linked to self-esteem; most children want attention – even if it is negative attention such as scolding and punishing. If a child cannot get attention through good marks or group work, they may try to attract attention in other ways, such as by disrupting the class. Punishing them gives them the attention they want, and encourages them to repeat the behaviour.
- **Showing power:** From a very young age, children are aware of the fact that they can influence the world around them. The desire to test their power is natural. Some children, however, only feel good by manipulating others to get what they want. They measure their self-esteem by challenging adults and established boundaries. The constant testing of these limits can make adults feel frustrated or angry, making the child feel powerful and in control.
- **Revenge:** Children who lash out physically and/or emotionally at his or her peers or caregivers may feel that they have been unfairly treated or hurt by others. A child that has suffered real or imagined hurts may seek revenge through unfriendly words and/or actions, or withdrawing or refusing to cooperate. These children often are or become depressed.
- **Feelings of inadequacy:** Some children feel they cannot meet the adult's expectations, and may give up or withdraw in the hope they will be left alone. Feelings of inadequacy may be expressed through withdrawing in order to

avoid failure whenever the child feels a task is beyond his or her capabilities. Teasing the child or pushing them to do better may only make the child feel even less valued and less capable. As in the case of revenge, these children may be or become depressed.

Different types of behaviour should be dealt with in different ways, and there are many different strategies that educators can use to address particular problems.

Motivation	Examples of behaviour
Seeking attention	Active: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Playing tricks and jokes on adults or peers, dressing abnormally, crying, making noise</li> </ul> Passive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Forgetting or neglecting to do things.</li> </ul>
Showing power	Active: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Displaying aggression, fighting, challenging, teasing, being disobedient and uncooperative</li> </ul> Passive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being stubborn, resistant</li> </ul>
Revenge	Active: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Harm or hurt others, become rude, violent, destroy things</li> </ul> Passive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Look at other people with resentment and/or <b>disdain</b></li> </ul>
Inadequacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gives up on tasks easily, does not make any effort, does not participate</li> <li>Skips or drops out of school</li> <li>Escapes through alcohol, drugs or other <b>self-destructive</b> behaviour</li> </ul>

## Creating a classroom environment conducive to positive discipline

The first step in implementing a positive discipline approach is to create a classroom environment that is conducive to positive discipline. Effective classroom management can help to create an environment and space that is conducive to a positive discipline approach. It also makes teaching easier and less stressful. There are several things that educators can do to manage classrooms more effectively:

- **Establish ground rules.** Set class rules with learners at the beginning of the year. These can be re-evaluated at the beginning of each new term. Make sure that everybody understands the logic behind each rule. Put the rules where they can be seen or give each learner a copy. You could even turn them into an agreement, by asking each learner to sign a copy.
- **Be serious and consistent about the implementation of the rules.** The rules should apply equally to everybody in the class. Be fair. This is critical in creating a relationship of trust between educators and the learners. Make sure that any disciplinary action is carried out firmly and consistently but fairly.
- **Focus on relationship building.** Create opportunities to talk and listen, so that you get to know each child. Children who feel valued will not need to seek attention as often. Build a relationship in which learners feel respected, understood and recognised for who they are. Lay the foundation for open communication channels.



### Building relationships with learners

There are many easy, simple things that educators can do to build relationships with the learners in their class. These include:

- Smiling and using a friendly voice
- Learning and remembering their names
- Making an effort to talk to each child and showing an interest in them
- Asking them about their hobbies and interests
- Finding out about their lives
- Making time for them if they have problems
- Asking how they are if they have been ill
- Making it clear that you care about them
- Being sincere in the way you talk to them
- Display learners work and/or involve them in setting up classroom displays

- **Be professional.** Be on time. Arrive 10 minutes early for a class so that you have time to make sure everything is as you want it. Prepare thoroughly for each class. Anticipate that some learners will finish before others and have something for them to do. Be self-critical: if something does not work, consider all the reasons why, including that you may be at fault, and identify how to do better next time.
- **Learning materials and approach.** Make sure that the work is relevant to the learners. Include things like conflict management, problem solving and tolerance in your learning materials, as well as in the way in which the classroom is managed. Provide opportunities for learners to practice their skills. Build a cooperative learning environment in which learners learn how to work together.
- **Be inclusive.** Talk to and involve every child. Use materials, pictures, language, music, posters, magazines that reflect the diversity of the class so that no learner feels left out. Create opportunities to discuss, acknowledge and value the differences among learners including their culture, language, religion, gender and age. Encourage them to listen to and respect other points of view.
- **Give learners the opportunity to succeed.** Learners who feel positive about themselves and their ability to succeed learn and behave better. Schools sometimes do things that can discourage children without realising it. For example, only acknowledging those learners who get very high marks can discourage less academically successful learners who try hard but do not achieve top marks. It is important to reward children when they have worked to the best of their ability, rather than focuses on their success relative to others. Take steps to avoid favouritism and celebrate a broad range of student achievement.
- **Allow learners to take responsibility.** Involve children. When children are involved in making the rules, they are more likely to follow them and to take responsibility for their actions. Provide space for learners to be responsible. Make student responsibility charts and make each learner responsible for something, such as running a community project, taking care of a class pet or filling in the class list for the educator. Being responsible for the day-to-day events that take place in the class, will develop their sense of self-worth as well as their ability to take responsibility for themselves and their communities.
- **Identify and tap into sources of professional assistance.** Identify sources of information and support. There are many websites, for example, that provide detailed information on positive discipline. Discuss concerns, ideas and strategies with colleagues and share stories. Where learners have particular problems, such as emotional problems, learning barriers or problems at home, talk to professionals who may be able to help, such as social workers, psychologists or counsellors.

## Developing a classroom code of conduct

Like a school's code of conduct, a classroom code of conduct sets out rules to help everyone to work successfully together. A classroom code of conduct should include not only what educators expect from the children, but also what children expect of their educators. The rules should be developed with and by learners.

Be selective in deciding on the rules. Children find it difficult to remember lots of information. Choose between four and eight rules for your classroom, otherwise they get too hard to enforce and lose their meaning. Rules should be stated as clearly as possible so that learners can understand what behaviour you expect of them.

Rules for learners might include:

- We must all be on time for our lesson
- We must make sure we bring all the books we need
- We must raise our hand when we want to speak
- We must listen when other people are speaking
- We should talk quietly when working in small groups
- We must try our best to always do our homework

Rules for educators could include:

- I must arrive on time for the lesson
- I must be well prepared for the lesson
- I will try my best to make lessons fun and interesting
- I must be patient and help learners when they don't understand something
- I must be fair, hear all sides of a story and not have favourites.

As with the school code of conduct, the classroom rules need to be visible and current. They should be revised and updated regularly, such as beginning of each school year or each term. It is important to keep the code in everyone's mind. In between revisions it should be re-printed, repainted or recreated every now and then so that it gets noticed. Put the rules up on the wall where everyone can see them. Another option is to paste a copy in each learner's homework book for them and their parents to sign. This is a good way of strengthening communication between home and school, and encourages caregivers to help in ensuring that children arrive at school on time and complete their homework.



## The importance of involving parents

Building relationships with parents is a critical component of implementing a positive discipline approach. The positive discipline approach is most effective where there is communication between parents and educators, and consistency in discipline style between the school and home environments. Where children regularly misbehave, meeting regularly with their caregivers can stop children playing the school against the home, or their parents against their educator. Involving parents can also help to identify and address issues affecting children's behaviour. It also helps to improve children's academic performance.

There are many different ways of engaging parents. Some useful strategies include:

- **Sharing codes of conduct.** Send copies of the school and classroom code of conduct home with learners and/or review and discuss the code at parent-educator meetings. Encourage parents to discuss both the school and classroom code of conduct with their children and to sign and return copies of the codes.
- **Meet caregivers.** Hold regular parent-educator meetings where you can get to know caregivers and discuss the learner's achievements, progress and any issues that exist. Arrange home or school visits when you need the caregiver's support. Try to find a solution together with the caregiver and the learner and set up follow-up meetings to review progress.
- **Share good news.** Do not just focus on bad news; make an effort to share good news with parents and caregivers. Phone parents or write a note telling them about the child's achievements or progress.
- **Homework.** Show parents how they can help their child with homework. Check with learners and caregivers about how they are coping with assigned work and whether it is necessary to adjust the level of homework. Think carefully about what kind of homework tasks you are setting and whether these skills are best taught at school or at home. Homework is most helpful in tasks that rely on repetition such as spelling and multiplication tables.

Most importantly, show an interest in the child. Parents are more likely to hear a range of feedback about a child if they feel the educator knows what is special about the child.

## Creating a classroom conducive to learning

How a classroom is arranged can make a big difference, both in terms of learning and the educator's ability to manage the class. Arranging desks in rows one behind the other, for example, makes it harder for the educator to move between rows, and learners who sit at the back may participate less, and become more mischievous as it is harder to monitor their behaviour. A hot, stuffy classroom, for instance, can also make it more difficult for children to concentrate, increasing the chance that they will act out.

There are several ways to create classrooms that are more conducive to learning. Creating a learning-friendly environment often occurs through trial and error; it is important to be creative and identify strategies that work for a particular class or context. Strategies include:

- **Plan and manage the space.** Ensure that there is enough space between furniture to allow you to move freely around the classroom during or after lessons. Ensure that exit ways and entry ways are not obstructed with bags and books so that learners can move without difficulty through these areas, particularly in an emergency. Create the flow on a piece of graph paper and arrange the classroom elements, set to scale, to create a classroom your learners and you will move through with ease. Arrange your desk in such a way that you are able to monitor all learners from your desk.
- **Trying new seating arrangements.** Different seating arrangements, such as arranging desks in clusters or in circle or U-shape, can improve participation and make it easier to manage children's behaviour. Arranging desks in a U-shape, for example, allows for greater eye contact, making it easier for the



Some things to think about when providing an academically rich and safe learning environment are:

- Will the learners feel comfortable?
- Is the classroom arrangement conducive to learning?
- Is the classroom safe?
- Can I monitor all the learners at once?
- Can my learners hear me?
- Do the learners know what is expected of them?
- Is my classroom free of traffic jams?
- Is there flexibility in my seating?
- Are there enough workstations and special interest sites?
- Are the classroom rules posted where the class can see them?
- Do I have all the materials and supplies needed to effectively teach?

educator to engage with each child and making it easier to monitor what is happening in the class. It also increases children's interaction with each other and encourages participation.

- **Create activity centres.** Activity centres offer a student, or small groups of students, the opportunity to work on projects or activities at their own pace. Within classrooms, a centre should comprise a workspace, a place to store tools and materials, and a place to post instructions. In crowded classrooms, activity centres can be located in different areas on the school grounds. Children bring with them what they need to conduct an activity at the centre.
- **Ensuring the room is at a comfortable temperature (as far as possible).** It is difficult for children to focus in a room that is stuffy. Open windows to improve the air flow through the classroom.
- **Ensuring a neat and tidy classroom.** Encourage respect for the classroom environment by ensuring that the classroom is clean, neat and tidy. Store class materials neatly, and ensure that children tidy up after class activities and keep their desks tidy. Make sure that children pick up any litter in the classroom and put it in the rubbish bin.
- **Making sure that supplies are ready for use and accessible.** Supplies and materials should be stored for learners to easily access throughout the day. Cabinets with drawers that are low enough for children to reach can be placed in a non-crowded area. Supply enough paper, pencils, markers, scissors, glue and other materials that the children need to complete classroom assignments. If stationery or supplies are needed for a particular lesson, arrange them before learners arrive to avoid delays in starting with the lesson.
- **Providing space for children to keep their things.** Make a space for learners to store their personal belongings. Cubbyholes, coat hooks or stackable containers are all possible storage spaces for backpacks, jerseys and lunch boxes. This will keep items from piling up in the aisles and under desks, making it easier and safer for everyone to move around the classroom.
- **Decorating the classroom walls.** Hang up posters of art, animals, solar systems, forests and student artwork. Around the holiday seasons, decorate the walls with festive holiday decorations and pictures.
- **Bringing in plants or a class pet.** Plants and pets, such as hamsters or a fish, can bring life to a classroom and can help build a sense of responsibility amongst children. They are also things that some learners have at home. If they see that their classrooms have similarities to their home environment, they will feel like the room is more inviting.

## The usefulness of different seating arrangements

Seating arrangement	Advantages	Works best	Works less well
Rows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Affords greater privacy and fewer distractions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Amongst older learners in middle and secondary school who require less direct instruction</li> <li>Where children need to work on tasks independently</li> <li>For tests and examinations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Amongst young children</li> <li>Where the educators want to encourage discussion and participation</li> </ul>
Clusters of four to five desks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Educators are able to circulate more easily around the classroom and assist learners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Amongst younger children and groups that require greater instruction</li> <li>Where educators want to encourage collaborative learning</li> <li>Where educators want to mix children with varying academic abilities</li> <li>For hands-on tasks that require practicing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In test situations as it affords less privacy and makes it easier for children to copy</li> <li>Where the educators want to instruct learners, as some may have their backs to the educator</li> </ul>
U-shape/semi-circle with educator at the front	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotes discussion and debate</li> <li>Allows for greater eye-contact between learners and learners and educators</li> <li>Provides a clear view of the educator and the black- or white-board or screen</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where the educator wants to instruct the class, as learners have a clear view of the educator</li> <li>Where the educator wants to encourage participation</li> <li>Where the educators want children to work together as a class</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where the educator wants children to work on their own or in groups</li> <li>Where the educator wants to work one-one as desks are very close to each other</li> </ul>
Two learners at a table	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotes collaborative work, while also supporting independent work</li> <li>Educators are able to circulate more easily around the classroom and assist learners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where the educator wants children to work in pairs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where the goal is to promote discussion</li> </ul>



### Useful websites

- For extensive resources on classroom planning and management, visit [www.ehow.com/classroom-behavior-management/](http://www.ehow.com/classroom-behavior-management/)
- For planning and teaching strategies, resources and case studies visit [www.teachingasleadership.org/](http://www.teachingasleadership.org/)

## Tips for maintaining control in the classroom

The best way to deal with undesirable behaviour is to prevent it happening in the first place. There are several things that educators can do to better maintain control in the classroom:

- **Tip 1:**  
**Clearly communicate expectations.** Establish and enforce clear rules and consequences regarding student behaviour. Learners should know exactly what is expected of them, and exactly what kinds of behaviour is and is not permitted. For example, you might say, “During this whole group session, I expect you to raise your hands and be recognised before you start speaking. I also expect you to respect each other’s opinions and listen to what each person has to say.” Recognise appropriate behaviour and reinforce it with praise or some kind of reward.
- **Tip 2:**  
**Make lessons interesting.** Children often misbehave because learners are not engaged or interested. Sometimes, a task can be too easy or too difficult for the student’s level, causing them to become bored or frustrated and lose interest in learning. Educators should try to develop activities that both match the subject matter well and keep learners interested and busy. This may take a few tries to get right.
- **Tip 3:**  
**Allocate and use time effectively.** It is easier for children to lose focus when there are gaps in classroom activities. Free time is something educators should avoid. Learners should always be kept constructively occupied. Make sure you always have some additional activities planned for learners who finish their assigned tasks ahead of time or you finish your main content more quickly than expected. Keep time between tasks or lessons as short as possible. Do not let a queue to form at the educator’s desk, the stationary cupboard or outside the classroom between periods. If children need to line up or the educator needs time to complete a task, get learners to do something to keep them busy, such as singing a song or tidying the classroom.
- **Tip 4:**  
**Deal with disruptions as quickly as possible.** Deal with disruptions immediately and with as little interruption of your class momentum as possible. If learners are talking amongst themselves and you are having a classroom discussion, ask one of them a question to try to get them back on track. If you have to stop the flow of your lesson to deal with disruptions, then you are robbing learners who want to learn of their precious in-class time. Sometimes all it takes is for everyone to have a good laugh to get things back on track in a classroom, but do not confuse good humour with sarcasm. While humour can quickly diffuse a situation, sarcasm may harm your relationship with the learners involved.
- **Tip 5:**  
**Start fresh every day.** Start teaching your class each day with the expectation that learners will behave. Do not hold a grudge or assume that a particular learner will misbehave. This does not mean that you ignore all previous issues of misbehaviour. It means that you should not assume that because Julie has disrupted your class everyday for a week, she will disrupt it today. By doing this, you avoid treating her any differently, which may encourage her to misbehave.

# Implementing positive discipline in the classroom

There are many practices that can help educators to implement effectively positive discipline effectively in the classroom:<sup>2</sup>

- **Focus on the positives.** Build children's self-confidence by recognising and supporting positive behaviour. This will encourage the likelihood of children repeating that behaviour. Explain how their positive behaviour can contribute to a safe and caring environment.
- **Set a good example.** Children learn by observing the adults around them. If adults regularly behave aggressively, then children may react in the same way towards others. Model the positive behaviour that is expected from children such as kindness, patience and tolerance.
- **Listen before judging.** Ask questions to find out why children misbehaved or did not complete their homework. Listen to children's explanations; they may have good reasons for not doing their homework, such as conditions at home.
- **Be consistent.** Be fair and consistent and avoid showing any favouritism. Apply the same rules to everyone. If an exception is made, discuss this with the learners and explain your reasons.
- **Separate the behaviour from the child.** If a child breaks a window while playing cricket, don't let your anger cloud your judgement. Remember that he has made a mistake, but that doesn't make him a bad person. Don't judge the child or call him a stupid fool. Focus on the behaviour and what needs to be done to make it right. Children often make poor decisions and they must be given the chance to learn from their mistakes.
- **Cultivate mutual respect for rights.** Children are more likely to respect the rights of others if their own rights are being respected. Schools should always respect the human dignity and physical integrity of both adults and children. It is unacceptable for an adult to hit a child – at school, or anywhere else.

## Case study: Focusing on the positives

I had a boy in my class who constantly disrupted my lessons and was rude and insulting to me. Punishing him only made things worse. At our monthly staff meeting I heard that this boy was an outstanding soccer player, who had leadership potential. I was shocked, how could this be the same boy? It got me thinking. The next day in class I said, "Hey, I didn't know you were a soccer star!" He beamed! He agreed to be a class monitor for a month and to co-ordinate a class project on the 2010 soccer World Cup – with my guidance. The change was amazing.

My lesson: Each child has a gift. My job is to look for that gift and build on it.

Source: RAPCAN, 2008.



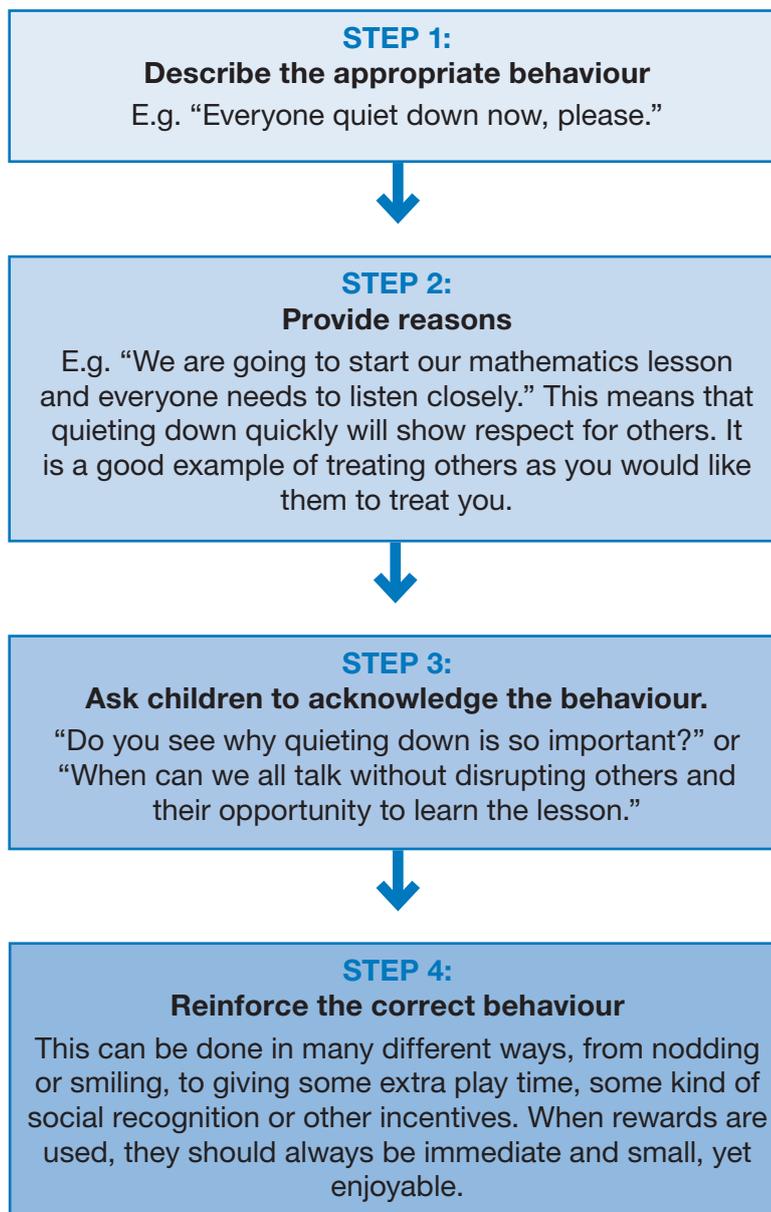
### Anne's approach

Anne walks into her Grade 4 class ready to start a mathematics lesson. As she walks in she says, "Everyone quiet down now, please. We are going to start our mathematics lesson and everyone needs to listen closely." After the class quiets down, Anne hears James still talking to his friend. Anne picks up an infraction slip and writes down "Failure to follow classroom rules" and then she asks James to fill in the top with his name, grade, educator, time, and date. Anne says, "James, I will put this infraction slip here on the corner of your desk. If it is still there when class ends, you may throw it away. If you continue to talk without being given permission, I will pick it up and it will be turned into the office for the headmaster to see." At the end of class, James threw away the infraction slip.

Adapted from Durant, 2006

## Disciplining constructively

While punishment is a single act, positive discipline is a four-step process that recognises and rewards appropriate behaviour:



The aim should be to make the children feel they are on a 'winning team' (the class as a whole) and to praise each child's efforts towards being a good team member.

## Some techniques for managing class behaviour

- **Countdown Technique.** Tell the learners you are going to count down from 10 and that you want them to be quiet by the time you reach 1. Reinforce this technique by waiting a few seconds after the learners have quieted down before proceeding with a lesson. Talk in a quiet voice so learners must sit still in order to hear.
- **Card System.** This works particularly well for primary school children. Each learner has a set of identical cards, usually a green, yellow and red card. Every learner begins the day on green, which is the colour for good behaviour. An infraction of a classroom rule or expectation results in changing to a yellow card. If the learner continues to misbehave, they receive a red card. Yellow card can serve as a warning, or carry a penalty, such as having to do a small chore or forfeit. A red card should carry a penalty, such as a warning letter or call to the child's caregivers or a visit to the principal's office. Children should be rewarded for remaining on green throughout the day or week.
- **Rewards.** When a child misbehaves, write their name on a large piece of cardboard, or create a reward chart (you can get the child to help). Put this somewhere visible. Tell the child that for each assignment completed, or for each followed instruction, they will receive a single sticker or tick on their reward chart – and that they will receive a prize when they get 10 stickers or ticks.
- **Group Rewards.** Group rewards encourage class members to work together. The idea is to provide rewards when the class as a whole behaves well. One misbehaving student takes away the chance of a reward from the entire class. The goal is to have learners behave so they can help the class earn a reward. The group reward often revolves around learners earning points, tokens, marbles or other objects to reach a certain number or fill a jar. Once the goal is achieved, the class receives a group reward such as an extra recess, prize or some kind of treat.



## Responding to inappropriate behaviour

It is best to draw as little attention to misbehaviour as possible. As long as the behaviour does not pose a threat to other learners or seriously disrupt the class, try to ignore it. Stopping to deal with misbehaviour can be more of a disruption than the bad behaviour itself. However, it is important to address behaviour where it prevents other children from participating or poses a threat to their safety.

### Strategies for addressing minor misbehaviour without disrupting the class

#### If learners are talking or messing around:

- Stand near them to let them know that you are aware of their misbehaviour, give them a stern look or tap them on the shoulder
- Say the student's name in a natural way and get their attention; for example "as you can see John, much of the Earth is covered by oceans."
- Ask them if they have something to share with the class
- Separate them
- Give them a job to do, such as handing out materials or stationery

Where behaviour is motivated by attention-seeking, power-seeking, revenge or children feeling inadequate, it is important to respond in ways that help to address these rather than fuelling them.

Motivation	Suggested ways to respond
Seeking attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ignore. Give the child attention when they are behaving well</li> <li>• Look sternly at the child without saying anything</li> <li>• Redirect the child towards more positive behaviour</li> <li>• Remind the child about the task and give the child potential choices</li> <li>• Impose consequences appropriate to the behaviour</li> </ul>
Showing power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try to stay calm - an argument needs at least two people to occur</li> <li>• Remember that either contending the child's power or compromising will make the child more eager to test his or her power again in the future</li> <li>• Try to understand the child's feelings and show that you understand them</li> <li>• Help the child to realise that they can use power and strength more constructively</li> </ul>
Revenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be patient. End the cycle of retaliation. Avoid punishment as this will encourage revenge</li> <li>• Maintain a friendly attitude while waiting for the child to cool off</li> <li>• Cooperate with the child to solve problems</li> <li>• Encourage the child; show them that they are respected</li> </ul>
Inadequacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't criticise or minimise the problem</li> <li>• Arrange time for training or extra classes, particularly for study. Split a task into several smaller ones, helping the child to start with an easy task for initial success</li> <li>• Encourage the child; focus on his or her strengths and internal value.</li> <li>• Don't show pity or excessive compassion; do not give up</li> </ul>

Source: Plan Vietnam, 2009

## Siphiwe's story

I'm not going to that man's class! I don't have to do what you say!" He runs down the hallway bumping into other children and educators, walks into the classroom in the morning stating what he isn't going to do, and yells or runs around the room whenever he feels like it.

This is my homeroom student, "Siphiwe." I feel angry about his behaviour. I'm tempted to hate him, but most of all, I'm frustrated with him, my lack of skills, and the system. ... I left school that day in tears, sick to my stomach because of this child.

The new week started off much as the week before had. Siphiwe was continuing his disruptive, unruly behaviour and was driving everyone crazy. But I had thought a lot about Siphiwe over the weekend. I realised that the way we feel when a student acts inappropriately gives us clues about the student's goals for the misbehaviour. Once we understand why the student is doing what he is doing, it is easier to find appropriate ways to deal with him.

Feeling angry is a clue that the student is seeking power, and irritation is a clue that the student is seeking attention. As I thought about it, I understood that most of Siphiwe's irritating behaviour was done in front of peers and adults in as loud and wild a manner as possible in order to get attention. Once he had our attention, he sought power by directly refusing to comply with our requests to stop, causing most of us to become extremely angry. I then realised that I had willingly been giving Siphiwe control over me and my classroom. I can't blame him; after all, I am responsible for my own actions. I began to understand that although I could not control him, I could control what I did and said.

I resolved on Wednesday morning that no matter what Siphiwe did, I would not give him the attention that his misbehaviour was demanding. I would ignore him. When he came to class ten minutes late, I pretended he hadn't entered. I gave the educator's aide a piece of paper and asked her to record everything Siphiwe did, but not to interfere with his behaviour in any way.

Siphiwe did everything but get naked during that class period. He ran up and down the aisles, played with another student's hair, and inched towards the door as if he was going to walk out. I said nothing. The rest of the class looked at me like I was crazy. I explained to them that our business was much too important to be interrupted by those who were not interested in learning, so we were going to go on as usual. I could have kissed every one of those learners who, although they occasionally giggled to themselves, completely ignored his antics, even when he would try to bother them.

Siphiwe's behaviour got worse. Throughout the period, he continually asked me for permission to go to the bathroom and to go to the Principal's office. I continued to ignore him.

Then, an amazing thing happened. Instead of walking out, he sat down. By the end of the class as I was dismissing learners by name, he came up to me and said, "Can I go too, Mrs. Berg?" He waited and waited as I called every other student's name, asking to go but not leaving until I gave him permission.

I wondered what would happen the next day. Would there be any change, or would I have to endure another round of Siphiwe's unacceptable behaviour? On Thursday, Siphiwe came on time, complete with paper, pencil, and book. He sat down quietly and raised his hand to ask questions. For the entire period, he didn't get out of his seat or talk without permission. He was a little squirmy, but I know what a hard time he has staying still. He didn't do any of his assigned work, but I think controlling his own behaviour was work for Siphiwe.

What have I learned? It is not good enough to rely on what we have “always done.” If I had continued with the same old strategies that supposedly had worked for me in the past, I know there would have been no change in Siphwe’s behaviour. I know some educators believe that learners should simply act appropriately because we tell them to, but the reality is that many will not. We are the adults, and we have the responsibility to change what we do to meet the needs of all learners, not just the ones who sit still, behave appropriately, or understand a concept the first time we explain it to them.

Siphwe taught me that I cannot make anyone do anything, but I can change my classroom conditions to try to influence their decisions. The school librarian once told me that the real teaching begins when a student is having problems. We also cannot control everything, and we certainly cannot control anyone else, but we do have some power in the classroom. It is the power of what we, as professionals and human beings, choose to do in response to difficult situations. Understanding that point has made all the difference in the world to Siphwe.

Adapted from UNESCO, 2006



### TIP: the 4:1 ratio

When using positive discipline, follow a 4:1 ratio. Catch a student, or a class, doing something correctly four times for every one time you find them doing something incorrectly. Be consistent. By using this four to one ratio consistently, you show your learners that you really are serious about catching them doing something correctly and rewarding them immediately.

## Avoiding negative discipline

It is important to avoid criticizing, discouraging, creating obstacles and barriers, blaming, shaming, or being sarcastic. Examples of negative discipline responses include:

- **Commanding:** “Go over there and sit down!”
- **Forbidding:** “Stop that!” “Don’t touch that!” “Don’t do it like that!”
- **Criticising:** “You are going to break that”
- **Belittling:** “When are you going to get it right?” “When are you going to learn to do what I say?”
- **Threatening:** “I will send you to the Principal’s office!” “You are going to be in so much trouble”
- **Unreasonable punishments:** “You are going to stand in the corner for the whole day!” “I am giving you detention for the whole month!”

Removing children from the group, or isolation in a time-out chair or a corner may have negative consequences, as it can shame and embarrass the child and may encourage teasing.

Most adults occasionally do some of these things. Doing any or all of them more than regularly means that a negative approach to discipline has become a habit and could be impacts permanently on learners’ self-esteem and well-being.

Instead of constantly giving “don’t” commands, learn to rephrase your commands in a positive way, while clearly stating the desired behaviour. Instead of saying, “Don’t run in the classroom,” for example, try saying, “Walk in the classroom.” This states clearly how you want your learners to act. Sometimes you may want to give reasons for the rule, especially when you state it for the first time. Explaining a rule might sound like this: “Walk in the classroom. If you run, you might trip over a chair and hurt yourself; then you might have to go to the doctor.”



## Praise versus Encouragement

Many educators believe that praising learners will motivate them to behave appropriately. However, when praise is reserved only for difficult tasks or to a few outstanding children it can actually serve to de-motivate children. In fact, there is a key difference between praise and the concept of encouragement; while praise focuses on actual behaviour as measures by an adult standard of success, encouragement involves the learner and their efforts to learn. Key differences between the two concepts include:

Praise	Encouragement
Praise focuses only on those learners who achieve success. Usually occurs after something has happened or been achieved.	Encourage learners' efforts, progress and contribution provided before and during any action, not only when they have been successful but also when they experience difficulties.
Only few learners and a few behaviours are praised, such as a small number of excellent learners who get top marks.	Any learner can receive encouragement. After enough encouragement, learners may make a praiseworthy achievement.
Focuses on what educators and adults consider satisfactory, rather than whether learners are satisfied.	Learners help to decide whether or not they are satisfied with their achievements. They set their own standards with participation from their educators or other adults
Tend to rely on ranking measures; learners are considered successful, for example, when they get full marks.	Measure success against each learner's personal improvements rather than against the achievements of others.
Learners obey instructions but often do not understand of why they need to do so. Learners know when they have been good, but don't know why they have been good.	Educators try to see things from the learner's perspective. Where they see that children enjoy a particular exercise, for example, they will try and understand, so that this can inform future exercises.
Praise and rewards may be seen as a type of bribe. For example: "if you get full marks, I will give you some money". Gradually, children will learn that they should never do anything if they do not receive something in return.	Encouragement makes children proud of their achievements, efforts and contributions. Children can say "I will try hard at this subject even though I am not getting great marks because I like it."

Both have their place in the school environment, but the positive discipline approach emphasises encouragement, as a way of developing a desire and enjoyment of learning rather than praise, is more selective and reward- and outcome-oriented.



One of the most common sources of educator-learner conflict is the perception that the educator's expectations are unclear, unfair, or inconsistent. Educators are more likely to conflict with learners where:

- Grading schemes are difficult to understand or seem arbitrary
- There are no clear grading criteria
- There is no policy on late work, make-up assignments or tests

It is important that educators explain their expectations clearly and adopt a course grading scheme that is fair, easy to understand, and accurately reflects differences in student learning.

## Managing conflict in the classroom

Conflict is something that all educators have to deal with. Some conflicts result from misunderstandings about coursework or the educator's intentions, while others are social or ideological in origin and arise when learners disagree with the educator's (or the other learners') beliefs. In both cases, learners may feel alienated, hostile and angry. Preventing and dealing with conflict is an important skill. The following process can help educators deal with conflict:

### STEP 1:

#### **Acknowledge the issue.**

While it is often easier just to ignore a conflict situation, dismissing a learner's concerns or position can leave the whole class uncomfortable or angry.



### STEP 2:

**Stop and think.** Stop the activity and count to "10" before speaking or reacting. Stopping interrupts the argument and provides time for everyone's emotions to cool down, including your own. A pause also provides time to reflect on the causes and possible solutions to the problem.



### STEP 3:

**Evaluate your own feelings.** Did the event press any "hot buttons" for you? Feelings might include shock, embarrassment, self-doubt, feeling threatened, not wanting to lose control or making a mistake. The more you are aware of your emotions, the better you can control them and prevent them from driving your response. Do not allow yourself to show anger.



### STEP 4:

**Evaluate your own body language.** Your body language should send the message that you are receptive to what the learner has to say. An "open" posture can help to reduce tensions: relax your body, keep your arms away from your chest, stand with feet apart, and face the learner squarely. Standing too close to someone can feel threatening; stand at least 1 metre from the learner, especially if you are standing and the learner is sitting. Look directly at the learner.



### STEP 5:

**Assess the situation.** Think about what may be causing the conflict or problem. Is the heart of the issue a misunderstanding of course content, your expectations or the way you are teaching, or is it due to conflicts over personal beliefs, values and attitudes? Could you have done something — deliberately or inadvertently — that contributed to the conflict? Understanding the root cause will help you to handle the situation effectively and help prevent the conflict from reoccurring.



#### STEP 6:

**React.** Verbally confirm that what you heard accurately matches what the learner said. Try to use language that communicates empathy: “You sound angry.” “You seem to be upset about this issue—why is that?” “Tell me more about your viewpoint.” If the conflict is due to a misunderstanding or perceived inequality, acknowledge that you may be partly to blame and explain your point, or the process or procedure. Where it is due to conflicting beliefs, open a discussion on the issue. Focusing on the learner’s argument, underlying assumptions, factual errors, and the use of logic can help to prevent everyone becoming too emotional. Be willing to change your position if their position is valid and help learners to look for alternatives to their original positions. Be willing to agree to disagree; it is always possible for rational people to disagree.



#### STEP 7:

**Determine the appropriate venue for follow-up.** If one or two learners are involved, it may be appropriate and less disruptive to continue the discussion after class and reach a mutually satisfactory solution.



#### STEP 8:

**Prepare for the next time you teach the topic or course.** Reflect on what happened and what you have learned from the experience. Ask yourself whether the situation could have been avoided if you had done something differently. If so, make a plan to change. Get rid of “grey areas” in your instructions and approach; make sure that learners know what is expected of them and how they will be marked. Develop guidelines for class discussions.



“I’ve come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It’s my personal approach that creates the climate. It’s my daily mood that makes the weather. As an educator, I possess tremendous power to make a child’s life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humour, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanised or de-humanised.”

Ginott, Haim. (1976). *Educator and Child*. New York: Macmillan. p. 13.



## TIPS

### for educators on resolving conflicts between learners

It's inevitable that conflicts between learners will occur in a classroom. The goal for educators is two-fold: to peacefully resolve problems in the classroom for the benefit of all learners and to help learners develop skills to resolve their own conflicts. While the strategies educators' use will depend on the learners' grade level, there are basic principles involved in conflict resolution techniques.

**Step 1: Listen To Both Sides.** Calm down the learners to avoid any more flair-ups. Once things have settled down, ask them, one at a time, to give their version of the events that led up to the conflict. This will help establish a timeline of events for you. Listen closely to what learners have to say and try not to interrupt them, except to ask questions for clarification. Avoid jumping to conclusions or forming opinions before hearing everything that each learner has to say.

**Step 2: Remain Neutral.** Repeat each learner's version of the events. Ask those involved if you are correctly telling their viewpoint. In doing this, learners will know that you were listening to what they were saying without being partial and without overreacting to what they said.

**Step 3: Find Ways to Resolve the Conflict.** After everyone has had a chance to speak, move forward to determine how to resolve the conflict. Learners who feel they have been wronged, may want to see another learners punished. As the educator and mediator, you can guide them into acknowledging the feelings and viewpoints of others and offer ideas that would help prevent the situation from occurring again. If learners are still angry or refuse to see another's viewpoint, you may have to offer ideas of your own to get them to join in the conversation of coming up with solutions.

**Step 4: Follow Up.** Follow up to make sure that learners carry out the ideas that were agreed upon. The experience can also be used as a lesson for the entire class on how to handle conflicts.

Source: Liz Cobs, *Conflict Resolution Skills for Educators*, eHow.com, available at [www.ehow.com/info\\_10040362\\_conflict-resolution-skills-educators.html#ixzz1v8fVHEMa](http://www.ehow.com/info_10040362_conflict-resolution-skills-educators.html#ixzz1v8fVHEMa)



## TIPS

### for parents/caregivers on dealing with parent-child conflict

**Tip 1: Cool off before dealing with a conflict.** Conflicts are harder to solve when you are emotional. Take a step back, breathe deep, and gain some emotional distance before trying to talk things out.

**Tip 2: Communicate.** Explain calmly what is the problem for you and ask your child to do the same. Do not lecture and do not make conflicts all about punishment. There may be consequences for the child's behaviour, but it is important to first understand their point of view and how they are feeling.

**Tip 3: Do not dig up the past.** It is easy when you feel angry to think about all the things that the child has done wrong. Do your best not to dig in the past and talk about all the things that need to change or improve on. Focus on what is making you angry right now. Once something has been dealt with previously, leave it and move on.

**Tip 3: Listen.** When children share their feelings, be careful not to excuse their feelings or explain them away. It can feel frustrating for caregivers to hear that children feel betrayed, cheated, unloved, rejected, or treated unfairly. The temptation is to tell them how they are wrong. Instead, listen to how they may be right and look for solutions.

**Tip 4: Restate what you heard them say and get them to do the same.** This helps to ensure that you understand each other. It also shows that you are prepared to hear them out rather than just focusing on your own point of view.

**Tip 5: Take responsibility.** It takes two to make an argument. Those involved usually each bear some degree of responsibility for the conflict. It is often easier to blame the child than to admit to your own role in creating problems, but it is important to acknowledge where you may have contributed to the conflict. This helps your child to feel listened to and serves as a basis for finding solutions.

**Tip 6: Be consistent and follow through.** Find consistent consequences and make sure that they are implemented every time and equally for all children.

# Dealing with misconduct

There are many kinds of **misconduct**, some more serious than others. The South African Education Department identifies five levels of misconduct, ranging from minor misbehaviour to serious, criminal behaviour (see Table A).

**Table A: Guidelines on assessing and dealing with misconduct**

Levels	Examples of misbehaviour	Examples of consequences
<p><b>Level 1: Misbehaviour inside the classroom</b></p> <p>Dealt with by: The class educator</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>lateness/bunking</li> <li>incomplete homework</li> <li>not responding to instructions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>verbal warnings</li> <li>extra work related to offence</li> <li>stay in class to complete work after school</li> <li>making amends</li> <li>community service</li> <li>classroom chores, e.g. sweeping</li> </ul>
<p><b>Level 2: Misbehaviour by breaking rules</b></p> <p>Dealt with by: Senior staff member</p> <p>Parental involvement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>smoking</li> <li>graffiti</li> <li>dishonesty</li> <li>abusive language</li> <li>disrupting class work</li> <li>leaving school without permission</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>written warnings</li> <li>disciplinary talk with learner</li> <li>signing a behaviour contract with learner</li> <li>talking with their caregivers</li> <li>daily behaviour report signed by educator and learner</li> </ul>
<p><b>Level 3: Serious misbehaviour or violation of school codes</b></p> <p>Dealt with by: Principal</p> <p>Parental involvement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>inflicting minor injury on others</li> <li>being racist, sexist or discriminatory</li> <li>vandalism, stealing or cheating</li> <li>possessing dangerous weapons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>written warning of noting that the learner could be suspended</li> <li>referral to social worker or counsellor</li> <li>community service</li> </ul>
<p><b>Level 4: Very serious misbehaviour or violation of school rules</b></p> <p>Dealt with by: Principal and school governing body (SGB)</p> <p>Involvement of parents, social work services and the South African Police Service (SAPS)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>threats using dangerous weapon/s</li> <li>causing intentional limited injury to others</li> <li>engaging in sexual activities</li> <li>possessing, selling or using alcohol/drugs</li> <li>forging documents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>refer learner for counselling</li> <li>apply to education department for limited suspension from all school activities.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Level 5: Criminal acts which violate school codes and breach the law</b></p> <p>Dealt with by: Principal, SGB and provincial education department</p> <p>Involvement of parents, social work services and the SAPS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>sexual harassment, abuse, rape or assault</li> <li>robbery, stealing or burglary</li> <li>using a dangerous weapon</li> <li>murder</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>apply to education department for expulsion or transfer of learner</li> <li>allow for civil or criminal prosecution</li> </ul>



See Appendix x for an example of a written warning form



### **Addressing misconduct: A principal's approach**

Fighting and swearing are ongoing problems at our school. To address these problems, we do the following:

- The fighting learners are separated to ensure their safety.
- They are sent to my office where they sit separately to cool down.
- I deal with the problem privately in my office.
- I try to be neutral and listen to both sides of the story.
- While one learner talks, the other listens without interrupting.
- I encourage them to talk about how they feel.
- I then involve them in finding a non-violent solution.
- I insist that the learner, who is not at fault, receive an apology.

Source: RAPCAN, 2010

Schools are responsible for determining what constitutes misconduct and how to deal with it. Schools need to make a list of kinds of misconduct they recognise, decide how seriously they are viewed and decided how to deal with the learners involved. This information needs to be incorporated into the School's Code of Conduct.

Schools' responses to misconduct must be in line with the South African Schools Act. The Department of Basic Education provides suggestions on how to respond to misbehaviour, particularly more serious incidents: These include:

- Providing verbal warning or written reprimands
- Supervised school work that will contribute to the learner's progress at school
- Demerits
- Performing tasks that compensate or benefit the injured party
- Replacement of damaged property
- Detention in which learners use their time constructively but within the confines of the classroom
- Suspension from school activities, including sports and cultural activities.

It is important to listen to each learner's story before making judgements. Speak to the learner and find out why a rule was broken before deciding whether to issue a warning, apply a consequence or offer help. There should always be a rehabilitative aspect to consequences; in all but the most serious cases, the emphasis needs to be on finding ways to understand why their behaviour was problematic and how they can improve in the future.





**Note: Formal disciplinary processes should not be taken lightly.**

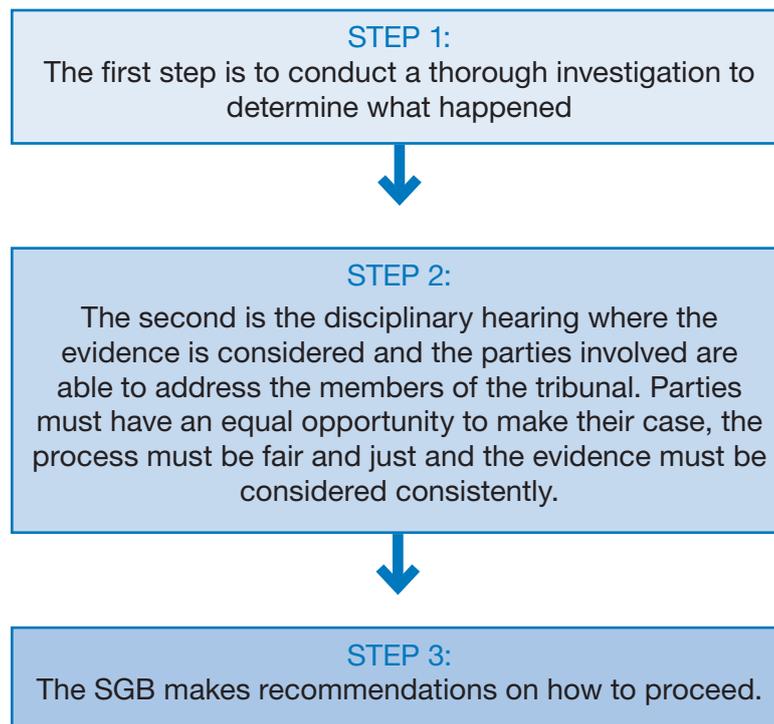
While schools have a responsibility to act against serious misconduct, it is important to remember that the outcome of a disciplinary process can have a lasting impact on the learner. Expulsion, in particular, can impact on a learner's prospects of future study and work. Formal disciplinary processes should always be a last resort, and only be used in very serious cases.

## Formal disciplinary processes

A learner suspected or accused of serious misconduct should be referred to the principal first. If the principal believes that the misconduct is serious enough, it should be referred to the SGB, who will oversee a disciplinary process. Formal disciplinary processes must be in line with the South African Schools Act.

An independent tribunal conducts the disciplinary process. The tribunal is appointed by the SGB, and must contain at least two people. These cannot be people involved either directly or indirectly in the case. It can include people from outside the school, with the written approval of the governing body.

There are several steps involved in a disciplinary process:



The school's code of conduct must form the basis of the investigation, the hearing and the findings and recommendations.

Under the South African School's Act, a learner can be suspended or expelled if found guilty of serious misconduct following a fair hearing. Suspensions last one week or less. A learner can appeal against a suspension or expulsion (see Appendix 1 for detailed provisions).

# Glossary

Attention deficit disorder	Attention deficit disorder is a biological condition that makes it difficult for people to contain their spontaneous responses—responses that can involve everything from movement to speech to attentiveness. ADD in children usually appears in early childhood.
Belittle	To put down and devalue; to make a person feel small
Depression	Depression can be described as feeling sad, unhappy, miserable, or down in the dumps. It is normal for people to feel this way every now and then, for short periods or in response to trauma. A person is described as clinically depressed where these feelings continue for weeks or longer and start to interfere with a person's everyday life.
Disdain	To consider or reject as beneath one
Dyslexia	Dyslexia is a learning disability that can make it difficult for someone to read, write, spell, and sometimes speak. It is caused by problems in the brain's ability to translate images received from the eyes or ears into understandable language. Children with dyslexia are usually just as intelligent as other children, but have trouble recognising and processing symbols.
Empathy	Empathy involves identifying with and understanding another person's situation, feelings, and motives. It implies understanding and entering into another's feelings.
Gender	Gender norms refer to the socially prescribed attitudes and behaviour and roles given to men and women. Gender is not the same as sex; while 'sex' refers to the biological differences between males and females, 'gender' is about what society expects from males and females.
Humane	Characterised by kindness, mercy, or compassion
Humiliate	To cause someone a painful loss of pride, self-respect or dignity; or to seriously embarrass them.
Imbue	To inspire or influence thoroughly.
Inclusivity	Embracing everyone regardless of their race, gender, age, sexual orientation, where they come from or any other characteristic.
Internalise	To incorporate within one; to understand an idea and incorporate it into the way one thinks, acts and treats others.
Misconduct	Improper behaviour; behaviour that does not meet with rules and what is considered acceptable behaviour in a particular group or institution.
Modelling	Acting in the way that you want the children to act.
Oversight	Watchful care or management; supervision.

Peers	Other of the same age, group or status.
Permissiveness	Involves yielding completely to another person's wishes; allowing people to do whatever they want.
Self-destructive	Refers to behaviour that harms oneself physically or emotionally
Self-discipline	Involves disciplining or developing the power to discipline one's own acts, feelings and desires, usually with the intention of improving oneself.
Self-esteem	A feeling of pride in yourself
Self-efficacy	Feeling in control of your life; that you can influence the events that affect you life. It also refers to a sense that one is capable and can achieve what you are asked or want to do.
Stifle	To keep in, hold back or limit.
Vision	In the school context, a common vision refers to a common set of ideas about what the school community feels to be important and the goals it hopes to achieve.

# Appendix 1: Requirements for disciplinary processes

The South African Schools Act outlines aspects and procedures to be followed in the case of formal disciplinary processes. Key provisions include:

## The School Code of Conduct

- Schools' Code of Conducts must establish rules on due process that safeguard the interests of the learner and any other party involved in disciplinary proceedings
- The code of conduct must provide for support measures or structures for counselling a learner involved in disciplinary proceedings.
- A learner must be accompanied by his or her parent or a person designated by the parent at disciplinary proceedings, unless good cause is shown by the governing body as to why the process should proceed with a caregiver
- Schools need to protect witnesses. If it appears that testifying in person could expose witnesses under the age of 18 to undue mental stress or suffering, the governing body may appoint a competent person as an intermediary. All cross-examination or re-examination of the witness statements must occur through this intermediary

## Suspension and expulsion

- The governing body may, on reasonable grounds and as a precautionary measure, suspend a learner who is suspected of serious misconduct from attending school, but may only enforce such suspension after the learner has been granted a reasonable opportunity to represent their case regarding the suspension
- A governing body must conduct disciplinary proceedings within seven school days after the suspension
- A governing body may, if a learner is found guilty of serious misconduct suspend a learner for a maximum of seven school days, impose other sanction outlined in the code of conduct, or recommend that they be expelled
- A Head of Department must decide whether or not to expel a learner within 14 days of receiving such a recommendation
- A learner may be expelled only by the Head of Department; and if found guilty of serious misconduct after disciplinary proceedings
- A learner or the parent of a learner who has been expelled may appeal against the decision of the Head of Department to the Member of the Executive Council within 14 days of receiving a notice of expulsion. Pending the outcome of the appeal, the learner must be given access to education
- The Head of Department must make an alternative arrangement for the expelled learner to continue schooling

## Appendix 2: Age-appropriate discipline

Age	Developmental stage	Suggested disciplinary methods
6 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highly emotional. Loves one minute, hates the next.</li> <li>• Much confusion and trouble between self and others.</li> <li>• May demand, rebel, argue, or fight.</li> <li>• When in a good mood, is cheerful, energetic, and enthusiastic.</li> <li>• Needs much encouragement and praise, but behaviour often deserves criticism, however, this will only make behaviour worse.</li> <li>• Not yet able to tell the difference between mine and yours.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be patient.</li> <li>• Ignore or be impersonal when student answers with “I won’t” or “I can’t”. Avoid resistance and confrontations</li> <li>• Encourage. It may not be easy to find something to encourage, but try hard</li> <li>• Avoid sensitive issues if possible</li> <li>• Give in on occasion, especially if it will lead to a positive behaviour or learning experience.</li> </ul>
7 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quiet; rather negative emotions.</li> <li>• May be serious, self-absorbed, moody, worrisome, or suspicious.</li> <li>• Very sensitive to others’ emotions.</li> <li>• May feel disliked by others and that they are critical or making fun of them.</li> <li>• Procrastinates, has a short memory, and is easily distracted.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problems may arise because student is distracted.</li> <li>• When asking the learner to do a simple activity, tell them in advance and make sure that they heard the directions. Remind the student before he or she forgets and does something else.</li> <li>• Give small rewards for successes.</li> </ul>
8 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vigorous, dramatic, curious, impatient, and demanding.</li> <li>• Not as moody as age 7, but still sensitive.</li> <li>• Wants time, attention, and approval.</li> <li>• Beginning to think abstractly</li> <li>• Interested in and concerned about own possessions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give instructions in ways acceptable to the student.</li> <li>• Time, attention, and approval are good motivators.</li> <li>• Use problem-solving activities as a means to develop abstract thinking.</li> <li>• Give small rewards for successes.</li> </ul>
9 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quieter than at age 8.</li> <li>• Seems to be independent, responsible, dependable, and cooperative.</li> <li>• May sometimes be temperamental, but is basically reasonable.</li> <li>• Will take criticism fairly well if carefully phrased</li> <li>• Great interest in fairness</li> <li>• Group standards may be more important than adult standards.</li> <li>• Very involved with self and may not hear when spoken to.</li> <li>• May appear absent-minded or indifferent.</li> <li>• May show concern for others.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote responsibility through assigned tasks.</li> <li>• Use cooperative learning, but monitor interpersonal activities.</li> <li>• Use guided learning through projects, rather than constantly lecturing.</li> </ul>

10 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emotionally direct, simple, clear-cut, usually well-balanced, and yet still childlike.</li> <li>Less anxious and demanding than at age 9.</li> <li>Happy age. Most often good-natured and pleased with life. But may show sharp, violent temper. Can be very affectionate.</li> <li>Not a worrying age, yet a few earlier fears remain.</li> <li>Enjoys own humour, which may not be very funny to others.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Involve the student's ability to distinguish good from bad, right from wrong, truth from untruth</li> <li>Best technique is to know what is reasonable to expect.</li> <li>Involve learners in developing classroom committees, including disciplinary committees.</li> <li>Use humour in your teaching</li> </ul>
11-13 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Early adolescence, time of rapid changes.</li> <li>Developing their own identity and becoming more independent.</li> <li>Need for privacy increases.</li> <li>Moody. Importance of friends increases. May be very sensitive to teasing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Let your learners know that you care.</li> <li>Arrange "sharing" sessions or activities (such as essays) concerning student's experiences and feelings.</li> <li>Model mutual respect. Limit criticism and nagging. Do not allow teasing or tolerate insults.</li> </ul>
14-16 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Middle adolescence.</li> <li>Increasing independence, sexual development, and self-centredness.</li> <li>Very body or appearance conscious.</li> <li>Thinking is less childlike; they consider facts and can make good decisions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage positive relationships through sharing.</li> <li>Give ideas of creative things to do with their friends as part of learning.</li> <li>Set reasonable limits and be consistent and fair in enforcing rules. Make sure they know the rules and negotiate meaningful consequences.</li> <li>Praise, encourage and recognise positive behaviour and accomplishments.</li> <li>Share your own beliefs, concerns, and values about the world.</li> <li>Encourage your learners to call a respected adult friend when they need advice.</li> </ul>
17-21 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Late adolescence.</li> <li>Becoming more independent and self-reliant; less influenced by peer groups; developing adult-thinking capacity.</li> <li>Generally easier to handle than those experiencing early and middle adolescence.</li> <li>Exploring more long-term relationships.</li> <li>May have an opinion on everything.</li> <li>Self-consciousness about their appearance lessens.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue the actions for 14-16 year olds above.</li> <li>Regularly ask your learners what they think and believe.</li> <li>Respect their uniqueness and encourage such respect for others.</li> <li>Encourage independent decision-making. Praise and encourage.</li> </ul>

Source: UNESCO, 2006

# Appendix 3: Example of a learner-parent commitment form

## Commitment Form

I, .....a learner at..... School,  
understand the rules and their implications and hereby commit to:

- Abide by the Code of Conduct and Disciplinary System.
- Behave in a courteous and considerate manner and respect other learners, the Learners' Representative Council, all members of staff and visitors to the School.
- Treat everyone with respect regardless of differences in culture, religion, ability, race, gender, age, sexual orientation or social class.
- Take responsibility for my learning by attending regularly and punctually and completing all my assessment tasks on time.
- Cooperate with my educators and other School staff.
- Assist in making the School a safe place for all.
- Seek help if I need it.
- Let the School know if I feel my rights have been infringed, or if I experience any other difficulty

.....

Learner

.....

Parent/Guardian

.....

Date

# Appendix 4: Example of a written warning form

## Written Warning

Name of learner: ..... Learner ID number:.....

Subject:.....

Teacher:.....

The above learner has breached the disciplinary code.

Date of offence: ..... Grade of offence:.....

Nature of offence: .....

.....

.....

.....

Learner's statement:.....

.....

.....

.....

Learner:..... Teacher:.....

Witness:..... Grade Head:.....

Date:.....

One (1) copy to learner, original to be kept by GRADE HEAD. Learner's signature does not signify admission of guilt, but that charges and action taken have been explained.

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