

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

What is the Responsive Classroom Approach?

It is a way of teaching that creates a safe, challenging, and joyful classroom and schoolwide climate for all students. Teachers who use the *Responsive Classroom* approach understand that all of students' needs—academic, social, emotional, and physical—are important. Elementary and middle school teachers create an environment that responds to all of those needs so that your child can do his or her best learning.

The *Responsive Classroom* approach develops teachers' competencies in four key areas:

- Engaging Academics—

- **Using positive language.** Teachers choose words and tone that encourage students to work hard, enjoy learning, and persist through difficulties.
- **Teaching in ways that build excitement about learning.** Teachers give students some choices in their learning. They also plan active lessons (ones that get students up and moving) and interactive lessons (ones that encourage students to share their information, ideas, and questions).
- **Giving students opportunities to reflect on their learning.** Teachers ask students to think about what they've learned, both individually and as a group, because doing so helps students learn more and builds community.
- **Reaching out to parents.** Teachers contact parents to discuss their child's learning and progress.

How to teach social skills

Teachers understand that students may not come to their classrooms knowing how to take turns, listen, disagree respectfully, walk quietly in a hallway, or do many other things that reflect positive school behavior. To help the students learn, teachers will carefully:

- Break skills and tasks into small parts
- Briefly describe the behavior they're looking for
- Model the behavior
- Give students plenty of practice and feedback
- Reteach as necessary throughout the year

When to teach social skills

Teachers weave social skills teaching into everything the students do—academics, recess, lunch, and even entering and leaving the school building and classroom. During a math lesson, for example, third graders learn how to count money while also learning how to listen respectfully to a classmate's idea for how to solve a problem. During recess, students of all ages learn how to include everyone in their games.

Although teachers help students learn social skills throughout the school year, they focus most strongly on teaching these skills during the early weeks of school. It's during this time that expectations for behavior are clearly laid out and students are taught how to meet these expectations. When teachers take the time to teach and model these skills well in the beginning of the year, they spend less time on behavior problems and more time on learning all year long.

When to create classroom rules

During the early weeks of school, teacher and students create rules based on the students' goals for learning.

Students follow the rules more willingly because they helped to make them. Teachers refer to the rules many times throughout the day and year, helping students understand how following the rules helps everyone to learn. Some schools also have a few basic schoolwide rules that everyone follows in the hallways, lunchroom, and other common spaces.

When to discipline misbehavior

Teachers understand that all students will, at one time or another, test or break the rules. When that happens, teachers discipline firmly but kindly and positively. The goals are (1) to stop the misbehavior as quickly as possible so that the child (and classmates) can get back to learning and (2) to teach the child to reflect on and control his or her own behavior.

The *Responsive Classroom* approach of 80+ strategies for teaching social skills, self-management, and problem-solving skills is available in the book *Responsive Classroom: A Guide to Creating a Positive Learning Environment* by Mary Kay Schwab and Linda Ward Beech, Scholastic Teaching Resources.

language (Karen, what should you be doing right now?). When students are clearly misbehaving, teachers use redirecting language (Mike, hands in your lap). And when students are doing well, teachers use reinforcing language (I noticed that you cleaned up very quickly today). Teachers also make sure that the consequences for misbehavior are related to the misbehavior and respectful of the child.

Many teachers also use positive time-out (although the class may decide on a different name, such as take-a-break) to help students regain control when they're just beginning to lose it. Time-out offers students a quick way to calm down, reset, and rejoin the class with dignity—it's not a punishment.

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