

For Early Years classes

School _____

**OUR
CLASSROOM
BEHAVIOUR PLAN**



*Ms D. Smith
Room 15
Grade : Reception
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Behaviour agreements for early years classes

A note to colleagues –

This ‘behaviour-plan’ is a composite of examples of behaviour-agreements in use in schools. They are used with the respective permission of the teachers, and schools, concerned; with the provision that they be seen as framework examples.

(Bill Rogers and colleagues)

A **behaviour-agreement/plan** is – fundamentally – a shared understanding between teachers and students about fair, reasonable, safe, age-related, expected behaviour ‘in our class group’. The focus is the individual grade-class.

While its *formal* outcome is a published and shared ‘plan’ or ‘agreement’, it is the *process* and *practice* of what the document expresses and expects that will determine its meaning, its value and its utility for children, teachers and parents.

A behaviour-agreement – at this age level in school (4 – 8 years) – is as much for the parents as it is for the children and their teacher.

It is crucial that the class teacher discusses the related issues of behaviour and learning with her class group – *in the setting of a classroom context*. Essentially the teacher is seeking to build a *learning community* based on a clear, shared, awareness and understanding of ‘rights’ (as *right* and *fair* behaviours); responsibilities; rules and consequences. Of course at this age, and level of development, we would not use those *terms*; though many children will be familiar with the concept, meaning, use and experience of *rules* and *responsibilities*.

In building a learning community the teacher will :

- Discuss with the class group *why* we need to think about what behaviours are *right*, *helpful*, *co-operative* and *fair*. The basis of *rights* are those values held as good, appropriate, and fair regarding our behaviour here at school. Obviously this discussion is developed in an age-related way. My colleagues and I normally ask several questions to initiate and develop this classroom discussion :

❖ “What is ‘learning’? and “How can we learn well here?”

This question often raises issues relating to turn-taking in class discussions; hands-up ‘signals’; listening to others; sharing equipment at our table groups ...; quiet ‘working voices’ (“lots of us, in one classroom space ...”); how we help each other by talking about the learning activities together and helping each other ...; how to get teacher help fairly ...

❖ “How can we feel safe here? What do we mean by ‘safe’?”

(not just physical safety). These questions raise understanding about movement and our ‘small space here ...’; how we treat one another; how we talk with, and communicate with, one another; related issues of teasing and bullying are often addressed in this discussion ...

❖ “What is respect? How can / should we show respect to

each other here ...?” This raises clear understandings, and behaviours, concerning **fairness; co-operation; consideration in our relationships.**

❖ “What do we mean by manners?” Effective teacher-leaders never

assume basic manners such as : ‘please’, ‘thanks’, ‘excuse me ...’, ‘can I borrow?’

This sort of *guided discussion* helps clarify and consolidate *common* understandings and expectations about learning and behaviour. The focus on fairness / **right**-ness also gives a sense of collective ownership about ‘the plan’ or ‘behaviour agreement’ for *our class*.

- When making rules with infant age children it is important to keep the rules simple, few in number, positive in expression and using inclusive language where possible (‘our’, ‘us’, ‘we’, ‘all’, ‘together’, ‘everyone’ ... see Rogers, 2011 and Rogers and McPherson, 2014). It will always help to publish the rules in a large, poster, format with cartoon motif and add (progressively) photos of class members with ‘hands up without calling out’, ‘working co-operatively’, ‘keeping our classroom tidy’, ‘using equipment safely’ ...

- At some stage in a classroom discussion on rules we also need to discuss ‘*what happens when we ‘break’ the rules?*’ What does ‘breaking’ a rule mean? What we seek to do, in class discussions, is to raise the *related link between* behaviour and consequence; the ‘if-then’ link. “*If you make it difficult for others in class discussions (by calling out, butting in ...) then ...*”. “*If you make it difficult for people to do their classwork ... (here we give examples) then (you’ll be asked to work away from others ...)*”. “*If you push, shove, pinch, pull, grab. Hit out at others here ... then ...*”. (Here we discuss why *time-out* may be necessary).

Some behaviour consequences should be known in advance. This addresses behaviour consequences that relate to safety (scissors, fighting etc) or those related to *repeated* distraction of others’ learning and the concept and meaning of time-out. The most ‘intrusive’ consequence a teacher would use *in the classroom* is time-out (cool-off-time). This should always be used with *firm calmness* by the teacher. Sometimes the teacher can *preface* the consequence of time-out to a student with a ‘directed choice’ :- that ‘if’ the student continues to behave in such-and-such a way (be specific)’then’ they will have to ‘*go to time-out*’ (or ‘cool-off-time’, or ‘thinking time’). Five minutes is – normally – enough for a child to ‘calm’, settle, refocus. The teacher should always carry this through in a calm way, in a way that minimizes any unnecessary embarrassment to the child concerned. If the student continues to behave in an unsafe way or is repeatedly distracting they will need to go to supervised time-out (away from their class peers). (See Rogers, 2011 and Rogers and McPherson, 2014).
- The published document (the ‘agreement’ or the ‘plan’) will often have a photo of the teacher and class group on the front cover. If there is one document a parent is likely to read it is one that has photos of their child – and their child’s teacher – ‘on the front cover’. Photos are also used throughout the document to illustrate positive student behaviour and learning. This ‘plan’, or ‘agreement’, would normally be published and sent home to parents by the second week of term one. As with all use of photos of children it is essential to do so within whole-school protocols of photograph usage.

- Many primary schools use a similar *format* for their ‘classroom behaviour agreements’ *across all grade-groups* in the primary school. This gives a developmental consistency to the establishment phase of the year.
- A covering letter from the principal should accompany this document when passed on to the respective parent(s) / caregivers of each child in the grade / group*. This ratifies the document and gives a ‘whole-school’ sense of commitment about how the school perceives, and practises, behaviour management and discipline and behaviour support. It will also help to briefly define what ‘our school’ means by the term discipline in *any* correspondence to parents.

Discipline is – primarily – the way we (as adults and teachers) lead, guide, encourage, support, direct ... students to thoughtful, considerate and responsible behaviour. It is how we help children to ‘own’ their behaviour. It is not *primarily* about punishment; though the concept of *behaviour consequences* is a crucial part of discipline. Discipline has an *educational purpose and an educational focus*.

Thoughtful discipline is preventative as well as corrective; it also has a *protective and preparing function* as it relates to teaching students about rights and responsibilities (see Rogers, 2011 and Rogers and McPherson, 2014). This ‘behaviour agreement’ concept, process and practice enables that sense of shared purpose in learning and behaviour for children, teacher and parents.

All the best in developing your behaviour agreements with your grade / class.

Bill Rogers and colleagues

ROGERS, B. (2011) *You Know the Fair Rule and Much More : Strategies for making the hard job of discipline and behaviour management in school easier.* (3rd edition).

Camberwell, Victoria : A.C.E.R. Press.

(published in the U.K. by Pearson Education : London).

ROGERS, B. and MCPHERSON, E. (2014) *Behaviour Management With Young Children*

London : Sage Publications. In Australia : *Critical First Steps* (See website

www.billrogers.com.au)

* See also *Typical Letter to Parents* (2018).

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