

SURVIVAL SHEETS™ #8

What to do when a student disrupts the class

OVERVIEW

Student misbehavior is stressful because it's unpredictable. Having a clear, simple plan keeps you calm, professional, and in control. You don't need the perfect response: just a reliable one.

PROCEDURE

1. Decide on a consequence ahead of time for new or unusual behaviors. This step occurs *before* students show up. If you don't already know what you'll do, your instincts will take over – and instincts tend to escalate situations rather than resolve them. (See Survival Sheet #2.)
2. **Calm yourself.** Use one of these quick mental resets from psychologist Craig Manning (pick one and use it every time):
 - a. *Ask: "What can I learn from this?"* Treat the moment as an opportunity rather than a threat.
 - b. *Recall a neutral memory.* Pulling up a past moment requires your brain to slow down.
 - c. *Zoom out.* Ask whether this will matter much in ten years. It almost never will.
3. Move the interaction to **one-on-one** as soon as possible. This can be a quiet hallway conversation, a desk-side check-in, or a conversation after class. Correcting behavior publicly almost always turns it into a performance.
4. **Pause** if emotions are high. It's okay to delay the conversation. Saying, "We'll deal with this later" stops the behavior and buys you time. Consequences can wait.
5. **Identify the specific rule or expectation that was broken.** Stick to what you observed. Don't try to tell the student why they do what they do or critique their personality.
6. If the student denies it, don't argue. Just restate what you saw and move on to a discussion about consequences.
7. Ask what's behind the behavior. This is about understanding, not excusing. A simple "*Is there something I should know about?*" is usually enough.
8. **Restate the boundary clearly and calmly.** This step reinforces that expectations don't change based on mood or argument. The consequences, however, may change based on what you learn.
9. **State the consequence and what happens next.** Be clear, brief, and neutral. And then *follow through*.
10. If appropriate, **contact the parent.** Sometimes this can happen right then. Early, calm communication shapes how the parent understands the situation. Remember that this step is about partnership with the parent, not punishment.

TIPS/TRICKS

- **Don't send them to the office**, unless documentation is required (bullying, violence, etc.). This hands your authority to someone else and weakens your power in the classroom.
- **Don't deal with misbehavior in front of the other students.** Public corrections invite power struggles. It's enough for the other students to see you speaking privately with the offender.
- **Hold two truths at once: *misbehavior is not acceptable and students deserve dignity and respect.*** This is part of why it's best to isolate the misbehaving student – that action sets you up for doing both.
- **Remember that the goal is to *improve the behavior for next time, not to win the conversation.*** Many a teacher has "won" in the moment but lost the student in the long run.