

SPECIAL REPORT

The **E**ducation Company

*Solving school discipline problems
one intervention at a time*

A photograph of two young boys in school uniforms talking. The boy on the left is wearing a green shirt and a backpack, and the boy on the right is wearing a blue and green shirt and a backpack. They are both looking at each other and appear to be in conversation.

Managing Student Violent Assaults and Breaking Up Student Fights

Introduction

While dealing with extreme parents, misbehavior, and interruptions may be some of the most difficult parts of teaching, all teachers would agree that coping with violence is by far the worst problem to deal with. While this is less of a problem with younger children, violence can occur at any grade level. This behavior is dangerous and upsetting for other students and teachers, as well. There are many reasons violence occurs in schools and classrooms; it helps to understand the reasons, as well as tactics to avoid the occurrence in the first place.

Overview

Managing violent students and situations is something that every teacher should be prepared for. A good plan should be in place, whether you think you will need it or not. You may never have to use your managing violence plan, and that would be the ideal. If you are alert and sensitive to the moods of your students, and know which are having problems with violence, you may be able to thwart boiling tempers or aggressive behavior before a student explodes to the point of violence. However, every teacher should keep in mind that violence can occur suddenly and without warning, and that the unprepared teacher will be caught off guard and may end up intensifying the situation rather than calming things down.

Handling the Extremes

To use a football term, the best offense is a good defense. Essentially, you should be prepared to deal with student aggression before things get out of hand. The best way to do this is to stay calm. Staying calm is the number one best way to not intensify a tense situation. The teacher should remain as nonaggressive as possible in situations of student aggression. Students need a good example of how a mature adult handles hostility, anger, frustration, and out-of-control behavior. Many students who are violent and aggressive do not have a good, solid role model to emulate when life gets difficult, or, they may have good role models at home, but current friends are influencing their behavior.

It isn't difficult to spot the more aggressive students in your classroom at the outset; keep an eye on those students and try to work with them individually, offering them other outlets for their violent reactions to frustration or anger. Sports and other activities

Physical Intervention

might be the answer for some students. Showing movies that address the issue of violence, and showing solutions and positive outcomes may also be useful. Many educators of high school students use William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* as an example of how violence and anger destroy love and potential. There are multiple novels, movies, and plays that can be used to teach students about the negative results violence brings to the aggressor(s) and the victim(s). Some will also help aggressive students identify with characters, so they don't feel isolated or more separate from others. Through these teaching aids, they may realize that the presence of violent, aggressive youth is not anything new, nor is it something they invented. Hopefully what students will see is that the end result of using violence to get what they want will end in frustration and impotence, rather than the power and control they are seeking.

A note about reality/choice therapy. If you have the time or the inclination, reality/choice therapy methods work well with aggressive students. The idea is to help them realize that they are not getting what they want through the methods they are using, and to help them find other ways of achieving what they desire.

Some tactics you can use to reduce the chances of violence occurring in your classroom are:

- Reduce access to possible victims.
- Establish reasonable norms and expectations.
- Avoid confrontation.
- Minimize competition.
- Use nonverbal signals and reminders.
- Provide desirable incentives.
- Intervene early, and before aggression turns to violence.
- Provide constant supervision, if required.

How to end fights if they cannot be thwarted:

- Stay very calm, cool, and composed, no matter how difficult that may seem during a crisis.
- Do not be aggressive yourself. You may certainly be assertive, firm, and direct, by telling the student(s) to "stop," but do not, under any circumstances, threaten the student(s) verbally or physically.
- Stay out of the student's space.
- Be nonintrusive and noninvasive.
- Do not move toward the student, or invade his or her space.
- Communicate expectations calmly, but firmly. Always tell the student to stop, with an accompanying hand signal.
- Send for help and get rid of the audience.
- Don't argue, and do not respond to verbal abuse.
- Use physical intervention only as a last resort -- and then, only if policies permit you to do so and you are trained to do so.

Most experts agree that a teacher should only use physical restraint as a very last resort, and only if there is immediate danger of physical harm to the student or a victim. If you have no experience, or have not been trained in physical intervention, you should not attempt it unless you feel you have a reasonable chance of restraining the student. In other words, if you are a 120-pound, five-foot teacher, who is dealing with a 200-pound six-foot raging student, you should not try to subdue the student. If the student seems high, so angry that he or she is not at all listening, has a weapon or something that could be used as a weapon, do not try to subdue the student. If you are physical match for the student, and you feel you can reasonably restrain them until he or she calms down enough to come to their senses, then do so.



Conclusion

Student violence against teachers and other students is often frightening and difficult to deal with. Addressing the underlying issues that are causing violence in problem students might be the most effective defense a teacher has at his or her disposal. Suggesting sports or physical activity that will release some physical aggression is a good place to start. Offering alternatives to aggression to get what they want (reality/choice therapy) also works well for many aggressive students. A teacher should always be prepared for the possibility of violence, because these events often occur unexpectedly, and without warning. Try to use aggression and violence as a teaching tool and remember to stay as calm as possible in any violent situation.

Educators learn how to create a safe, positive learning environment where students behave responsibly and take accountability for their conduct. They explore strategies to organize and manage the classroom with increased confidence and a calm sense of control. Through professional development, educators discover how to create a learning environment in which their students can excel, and in which they can go home feeling a sense of accomplishment.

This professional development is designed for K-12 teachers, special-subject teachers, administrators, counselors, resource teachers, and substitutes. Contact the Education Company for a Free Discipline Discussion.

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