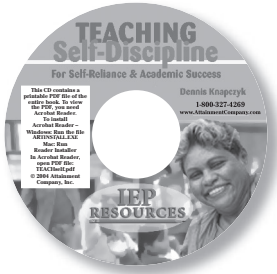


TEACHING Self-Discipline

For Self-Reliance and Academic Success



**IEP
RESOURCES**



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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements and Dedication	iv
About the Author	v
Introduction	vi
Chapter One: Thinking About Self-Discipline and Observing Student Behavior	1
Chapter Two: Turning Problems of Discipline into Self-Discipline Goal	19
Chapter Three: Managing Performance	31
Chapter Four: Managing Motivation	51
Chapter Five: Managing Judgments	71
Chapter Six: Planning and Monitoring Teaching Lessons	91
Chapter Seven: Managing Habits	115
Chapter Eight: Managing School Goals and Personal Goals	129
Appendix.....	139



“Discipline is viewed by many teachers as a necessary evil — something they have to do in order to create an atmosphere in which to teach. Rarely is it thought of as an actual instructional area.”

Introduction

Discipline is viewed by many teachers as a necessary evil — something they have to do in order to create an atmosphere in which to teach. Rarely is it thought of as an actual instructional area. In Teaching Self-Discipline we will look at classroom discipline as a curricular concern, comparable to teaching reading, math and the other instructional areas. Rather than presenting discipline as something teachers do to students, you will learn that it is something you can teach them to do themselves.

Typically, students learn self-discipline throughout their schooling. They learn to do such things as:

- Set goals and priorities for their behavior.
- Delay gratification of desired outcomes.
- Apply themselves to their work.
- Direct their behavior into acceptable channels.
- Make judgments and decisions about their actions.
- Moderate their actions in accordance with the demands of teachers and peers.

Thus, while self-discipline is an important part of what students learn in school, many approaches to discipline overlook this fact. Instead their focus is mainly on teacher-directed managing of students rather than on student learning. If we see discipline as an instructional issue, we begin to understand that our real aim is not getting students to behave, but to teach them to take responsibility for their own behavior.

In Teaching Self-Discipline you will learn how to help your students develop the skills to manage and regulate their behavior more effectively, and to use methods for teaching and reinforcing key self-discipline skills. The book describes the process of teaching and supporting self-discipline both with individual students and with groups. It addresses the most immediate and pressing needs of teachers, and also provides a framework for developing long-

range goals and lessons. It does not, however, attempt to show you how to address more serious and long-standing problems that may require clinical or systematic approaches, such as counseling, therapy or behavior management.

Teaching Self-discipline begins by introducing the concept of self-discipline and showing how it can be viewed as a curriculum content area.

Chapter One — explains how approaches to classroom discipline can be redirected toward teaching students to manage their own behavior and discusses how self-discipline skills are crucial to student behavior in three areas: Managing performance, managing motivation and managing judgments.

Chapter Two — shows how to turn problems of student discipline into self-discipline goals on which to focus your teaching. The next three chapters are devoted to the important skill areas pertaining to self-discipline.

Chapter Three — focuses on managing performance or the series of actions students must manage to complete tasks and activities successfully.

Chapter Four — centers on managing motivation which is the driving force for student behavior that comes from the results and outcomes of successful performance.

Chapter Five — discusses managing judgments which are the decisions about behavior that enable students to effectively adjust and regulate their behavior. Each of these chapters shows how to identify the instructional needs students may have in the skill area and presents a wide variety of teaching methods for addressing these needs.

Chapter Six — explains how to plan and monitor lessons for teaching self-discipline so you can integrate this area of instruction in your everyday teaching schedule and routine. The last two chapters show how to help students combine and extend their self-discipline skills to achieve higher levels of independence and self-direction.

Chapter Seven — discusses managing habits which are the building blocks of efficient, productive behavior.

Chapter Eight — focuses on ways to encourage students to take ownership and responsibility for achieving school goals and to take initiative in pursuing their personal aims and interests. Many of the chapters also contain worksheets and case study examples to guide your planning and teaching.

The Nature of Self-Discipline

Every teacher realizes that discipline is important in school. When the topic comes up, teachers immediately think of students like Ramon, who talks out in class; Tanika, who is always out of her seat; Julie, who doesn't get her work done; or Orville, who simply can't seem to control himself. The challenges involved in teaching students like these often have less to do with specific academic skills like reading, doing math computation or remembering spelling words than they do with getting these students to demonstrate the motivation, concentration, and self-control that will make their studies successful. When asked about the problems they face in their classes, most teachers will answer by describing the difficulties they have with controlling student behavior and encouraging active participation, rather than with teaching academic tasks.

But while teachers are readily aware of discipline problems among their students, it's less common for them to consider the real nature of self-discipline — the proficient, capable behavior that most students use to be successful in school. Every day, students apply themselves to their work, moderate their actions in accordance with the demands of teachers and peers, postpone gratification of desired outcomes, and engage in a host of other behaviors that allow them to direct and control their actions so they can make the most of learning opportunities. Because self-discipline is learned more or less incidentally, rather than through deliberate curricular instruction, we often fail to recognize how remarkable and complex it is. This chapter will give an overview of some of the important features of self-discipline, and it will offer a framework for observing and thinking about this area of behavior in your school settings.

“While teachers are readily aware of discipline problems among their students, it's less common for them to consider the real nature of self-discipline — the proficient, capable behavior that most students use to be successful in school.”

Self-Discipline is an Integral Part of all School Settings

Self-discipline is the ability to take responsibility and ownership for one's behavior, and it encompasses many of the actions, decisions and judgments students go through every day in school. We teachers often think of school demands in fairly simple and concrete terms: paying attention in class, making comments in a discussion, talking with friends in the cafeteria, filling in answers on a worksheet. But demands like these actually represent a considerable range of behavior that students must learn to negotiate proficiently. To perform well in school, students must be able to moderate and shape their behavior to fit changing circumstances, to judge the effects of what they do, and to determine the proper times and places to display their actions. They must also be able to persevere in their behavior, weigh alternative ends, track progress toward desired outcomes and draw incentive from both the immediate and the long term results of their performance.

Self-Discipline Requires Discrete Skills

Self-discipline involves specific skills that students must learn to use in a particular situation. These skills enable students to establish clear, precise goals for their actions, aid them in keeping a fixed purpose and direction in mind while doing these actions, and help them to evaluate their behavior and make future plans after performance has taken place. For example, when we have students work together on a small group project, we are actually asking them to plan and coordinate a considerable range of skilled behavior that includes:

- transforming our directions into a group plan for completing required tasks and sub-tasks,
- deciding on an effective approach for carrying out the necessary activities,
- establishing a division of labor in the group for performing the tasks and sub-tasks,
- building rapport among group members by chatting, smiling, and encouraging one another,
- negotiating differences of opinion and achieving consensus on how to accomplish tasks,
- supporting one another's work, such as by helping a group member understand how to complete specific tasks,
- monitoring the completion of tasks, and comparing the group's accomplishments with the teacher's expectations.

“Self-discipline is the ability to take responsibility and ownership for one's behavior.”

At the same time, students have to delay or control personal desires and impulses and make judgments about such issues as the rate and quality of their work, their position and standing in the group, and overall group atmosphere.

In the same way, non-academic situations such as talking with friends during lunchtime or playing on the playground also require a complex range of skills. Although we often think of such activities as fairly loose and free of form, they often include demands that are even more subtle and sophisticated than those students meet in class. When students have conversations in the cafeteria, for example, they are actually coordinating a notable range of behavior:

- listening to others when they speak,
- formulating relevant comments quickly,
- keeping up with changes or shifts in the conversation,

Teaching Students to Coordinate Performance

The most direct way of teaching students to coordinate performance is to teach them how to work with other people. By showing them how to work together, they will naturally learn the skills for coordinating their actions with those of adults and classmates. Cooperative activities can be built into almost any kind of instructional lesson or task. Students can team up in games, discussion groups and even in conversations. With young children and with students having problems in attention or cognition, you may need to be more concrete and direct in the approaches you use to help students respond to what is going on around them. You might start with talking through or role playing performance steps as the students are completing them. With older students you may have to focus more on the timing and fluency of actions to overcome being too hesitant or deliberate in behavior. Some specific ways for teaching students to coordinate their behavior include:

- having each member of a group read or tell part of a continuing story,
- asking them to comment on another student's answers,
- using activities or games in which a student's next response is dictated by the actions or moves of other people,
- asking them to signal when their row is ready before being dismissed for recess,
- having them review homework with one or two classmates before leaving for the day, or call a "study buddy" at home. They could discuss how they will schedule their time, share progress reports on their work and give suggestions for doing the next tasks.

The ability to concentrate on the task at hand is another key element of coordinating behavior with ongoing activities. Students with poor self-discipline are often not properly oriented to the tasks they are expected to complete, and are easily sidetracked by the people and activities around them. Teaching students to screen out distractions allows them to maintain a focus on the tasks and activities they are expected to complete. Begin by making sure they understand what is expected of them and how individual performance steps relate to accomplishing the broader task or objective. Show them how to orient themselves and prepare for an activity before starting it. The design of instructional materials and activities can also be a factor in encouraging better concentration, and you can often improve attention by using audio or visual materials, manipulatives, multi-sensory activities, computer-assisted instruction and other approaches.



“Personalizing performance is a crucial aspect of self-discipline as it helps students structure their actions in a way that is efficient and effective for them, based on their own learning and performance characteristics.”

Teach techniques for focusing on performance steps, while ignoring extraneous variables:

- teach students to work on one task at a time. Show them how to separate activities with a transition exercise (e.g., record keeping, assignment review, assembling new materials) to give closure on one task and to help them prepare for the next one,
- teach them to work alongside people who will provide good models of concentration and positive study habits,
- teach them to recognize the types of things that can create distractions (e.g., toys, books or papers from other classes) and to remove them from the work area beforehand,
- teach them how to watch for signs that indicate loss of attention (e.g., staring into space, daydreaming), and how to re-focus attention on the task by looking back over their notes or reviewing directions,
- teach them how to re-start an activity after being interrupted so they don't skip steps or have to re-do them.

During any activity, there are a number of things that compete for the students' attention: Friends they want to talk to, other tasks they prefer doing, other assignments they need to complete. Teach students how to develop a schedule for school work and personal activities to cover a class period, a day, a week, or even longer. A key to this approach is showing them how to structure time to complete specific performance steps you have set as instructional objectives. Not surprisingly, this technique is most often applied to homework and other academic tasks, but you can use the same approach to encourage students to participate in classroom discussions, practice conversation or play skills and perform many other activities.

Four steps to time management:

- **determining how time is currently spent** – students list what they do now and how much time they spend on each step or sub-task;
- **estimating time needed to accomplish each step or sub-task** – students typically underestimate the time it takes them to do school tasks and this step helps them gain a more realistic sense of performance demands;
- **preparing a “to do” list** – students develop a list of steps for completing the tasks or activities;

- **scheduling time for completing the items on the “to do” list** – students prepare a timeline for completing individual performance steps and the overall tasks or activities. They then use the schedule to carry out and track their performance.

3. Personalizing Performance

Performance steps for a task or activity are not rigid or inflexible and successful students vary in the ways they organize and coordinate performance. They may pace and shift their behavior to ensure that they meet the external demands of the situation, and to take into account personal factors such as their interest in the material, their understanding of how much time and effort the assignment requires of them, and their ability to maintain attention to the type of tasks or interactions involved. **Personalizing** performance is a crucial aspect of self-discipline as it helps students structure their actions in a way that is efficient and effective for them, based on their own learning and performance characteristics.

How students personalize their performances:

- assessing their limitations and strengths, and applying this knowledge to the demands of the situation,
- interpreting demands in terms of what is required of them,
- considering different ways in which they could complete performance steps and choosing the way that is best suited for them,
- seeking out or structuring environmental conditions that aid their way of completing steps,
- pacing performance to account for personal factors such as fatigue, level of interest and attention.

Students often figure out tricks or shortcuts to pace their actions, or come up with easier or quicker ways to complete individual steps. These techniques help them overcome or compensate for difficulties they have with meeting behavioral demands. During recess, for example, students whose game-playing abilities are less proficient use their skills to support their more talented teammates. Similarly, during class discussions students may participate in a variety of ways, depending on their knowledge of the subject and their verbal skills. Students who are more verbal and outgoing form ideas on the fly by talking them through in front of class. Those who are more reticent or shy think through comments more thoroughly beforehand and refer to notes or their books to avoid having to extemporize. Students who have trouble remembering

course material compensate by responding to comments others are making. Those who have difficulty expressing themselves verbally rely on gestures and posture to show involvement in the discussion. In such ways, personalizing performance steps helps students compensate for their shortcomings and draw on their strengths in order to meet behavioral demands.

Teaching Students to Personalize Performance

Teachers of students with sensory or speech impairments or limitations in movement or cognition are well aware that these children have to learn unique and personalized ways of performing even the most basic tasks. But all students, whether disabled or not, benefit from learning their strengths and limitations, and applying this information to their behavior. The procedures you use can be fairly direct, like demonstrating alternative ways to arrange toys on a shelf, computing math facts, remembering the spelling of a word or recalling dates in history. They can be more indirect as well by giving them more latitude in the ways they complete assigned activities and challenging them to generate alternative performance strategies.

Approaches to personalize performance:

- having students come up with their own way of giving a report, such as a verbal presentation, a collage, skit, a poster session,
- showing them how they can use an array of materials and resources to do a science project,
- creating learning centers in which they can choose different types of activities,
- providing individually-paced computer math drills.

Making adaptations or accommodations in a task or activity can help students with particularly difficult steps that impede their progress. These modifications will accomplish the objectives you defined, but should also encourage students to come up with approaches they can manage themselves. This is an especially useful technique with students who display learning or behavior problems that make tasks difficult to complete in the ways that typical students perform them.

Modifications include:

- using books-on-tape, pictures, study notes, or computer programs to supplement a textbook,
- using different testing formats, e.g., in writing, orally, on audio- or videotapes,
- allowing students to highlight answers with markers instead of copying them on paper,
- giving them additional instructional aids and resources to use in math, such as calculators, number lines or counting sticks.

Teach students how to generate their own ways to perform tasks and activities and how to be flexible when accounting for their learning characteristics, preferences or temperament. Ask them to suggest alternative ways to do a particular task or activity, or encourage them to watch one another completing the performance steps. With repetitious tasks like doing worksheets, remembering math facts or studying for a test, show them how to create variety by making a game or a personal contest out of the activity. You could also teach them to incorporate strengths and abilities into their performance by using more non-verbal communication if they are shy, helping others at things they themselves are good at or contributing more actively in tasks that interest them.

Teaching students to manage their performance will provide them with the fundamental elements of self-discipline. As they learn to organize, coordinate and personalize the actions that form the larger patterns of behavior, they will come to exercise a new degree of self-reliance and control over their performance.

Suggestions for Using Worksheet 3

Worksheet 3 can help you prepare a checklist for observing a group or an individual as they complete a task or activity. You can then use the worksheet to record your observations and set objectives for instruction.

Using the Worksheet:

Begin with starting and ending steps

The simplest way to consider the full range of performance steps is to begin with the behaviors that start and end the situation. Typically the first step is



“Teach students how to generate their own ways to perform tasks and activities and how to be flexible when accounting for their learning characteristics, preferences or temperament.”

what students do to make the transition from the previous activity, and the last step is what they do to prepare for the next activity.

Keep steps in chronological order

Keeping the steps in a more or less chronological order makes it easier to use the checklist to follow along during your observations.

Keep the focus on required behavior

The list of steps indicate behaviors students need to perform to complete the task or activity. A full list will have about eight to fifteen steps.

Make sure the observation list reflects typical behavior

When you observe the behavior of individual students, your object is to compare their behavior to the C-level behavior of their peers in general education settings. Therefore, the checklist you make needs to reflect average behavior, rather than an ideal level of performance.

Use checklist to mark strengths and weaknesses

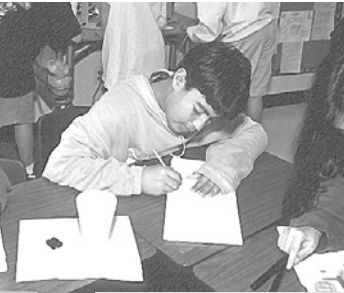
On the worksheet, simply mark “+” for steps that are done proficiently, and “o” when steps are missed or done poorly. This will allow you to quickly spot areas of difficulty.

Conduct several observations

When observing groups, you get a pretty clear idea of student behavior with just a couple observations. But when you observe a single student, factors such as mood, amount of sleep, daily events, and others can cause significant changes in behavior from day to day. Therefore, it is best to watch the student perform the task or activity at least 3-5 times to get an accurate appraisal of strengths and weaknesses.

Set helpful objectives

The objectives you set should be based on steps that cause students particular or repeated difficulty. Watch for steps that throw students off their routine or lead to problems in subsequent steps.



“Teach them to incorporate strengths and abilities into their performance by using more non-verbal communication if they are shy, helping others at things they themselves are good at or contributing more actively in tasks that interest them.”

Worksheet 3 Example

Mr. Elsworth teaches three periods of ninth grade general science at Parkview High School. The students in his classes have a wide range of abilities, and although he keeps lessons aligned to the school's science curriculum, he tries to make accommodations so all his students can do well. This year, instead of scheduling independent time in his classes for students to do lab reports or begin homework, he is using study teams comprised of students of mixed abilities. He believes the diversity of learning styles and motivational levels of team members will provide a structure for students to get their work done and allow the better students to model self-discipline skills and good study habits. So far this year, the study team notion has had mixed results; several of the teams are doing well but some are struggling. He noticed that the poorer teams' lack of organization and direction are affecting the interactions and productivity of the members. Also, the difficulties these students show in working together have had an adverse affect on the teams nearby. He decided to closely observe Alicia's group, one of the weaker teams in his first period class, to see how to help it become more productive and self-disciplined. If he can get this team on track, it will set a positive tone for other groups. It might also give him insights into improving study teams in other science classes as well.

Mr. Elsworth began his investigation of Alicia's group by watching the behavior of the stronger teams to see why their groups work so well. He noted how they listened to directions and got a sense of what the assignment was before they settled into their groups. He also listed things groups did from the start of a study session until they turned in their work. He then prepared a checklist with places to make notes and comments to provide a more formal guide for his observations. He planned his observation to focus on the group's performance and to circulate around the room to oversee the rest of the class.

Over the course of a week and a half, Mr. Elsworth observed the entire sequence of steps on his checklist four times, and was surprised by some of the results. During his first observation, he noticed the group's tendency to start working before they knew what the assignment was. This quickly led to misdirection in student performance and to arguments over what they were to do. During the second and third observations, the group's lack of cooperation became apparent. He saw that some of the students were reluctant to give help to one another almost as if they were competing for a better grade.

In summarizing his finding, Mr. Elsworth defined the following objectives that he thought would help Alicia's group work more cooperatively.

Skills set in following objectives:

- learn to listen to or read directions before starting work,
- learn to handle disagreements without arguing,
- learn to ask neighbors for help and to give help to neighbors,
- learn to coordinate work with others in the group.

Mr. Elsworth feels these objectives will form the basis for a strong intervention for Alicia's group.

Worksheet 3: Observing behavior and setting objectives for instruction.Name: Mr. Elsworth Date: October 20Student or group: Alicia's study group Grade: 9**Task or Activity to be the Focus of Instruction:** *Working in study groups*

Performance Steps in Activity or Task:	Behavior Observed (+ = skilled, 0 = unskilled):				
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
<u>Listens to/read directions for the activity</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	
<u>Asks questions about assignment</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>+</u>	
<u>Gets out books and materials</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>+</u>	
<u>Goes quietly over to study group</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	
<u>Reviews assignment directions with group members</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	
<u>Plans assignment with group before working on it</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	
<u>Stays on task</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	
<u>Compares progress with partners</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	
<u>Asks for help from partners if needed</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>+</u>	
<u>Gives help to partners when asked</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>+</u>	
<u>Resolves disagreements without arguing</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>0</u>	
<u>Checks work with partners before handing it in</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>0</u>	
<u>Turns in assignments when requested</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	<u>+</u>	

Worksheet 3: Observing behavior and setting objectives for instruction.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Student or group: _____ Grade: _____

Task or Activity to be the Focus of Instruction:

[illegible]