

A Quick Explanation:

How to
DISCIPLINE *without* STRESS[®]
PUNISHMENTS or REWARDS
&
PROMOTE RESPONSIBILITY

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PROMOTE RESPONSIBILITY

Irresponsible behavior is a major problem for, teachers, parents and society.
Rewards, punishments, and telling don't work with far too many young people.

Myths:

- **Rewards motivate young people to be responsible.**
They don't. The bribe becomes the focus—**not responsibility**. In addition, we are not honest with young people when we give them rewards for expected standards of behavior. Society does not give such rewards. *When was the last time you were rewarded for stopping at a red light?*
- **Punishments are necessary to change young people's behavior.**
Punishments satisfy the *punisher* but have little lasting effect on the *punished*. If punishment such as detention worked, why do the same students appear again and again? Once the punishment is over, the person has served the time and relinquished responsibility. Punishments engender enmity—**not responsibility**.
- **Young people need to be constantly told what to do.**
Complete this sentence: *If I have told you once, I have told you. . . .* If telling worked, you would not have to repeat yourself. In fact, telling is often interpreted as criticism and promotes defensiveness—**not responsibility**.

Rewards, punishments, and telling fail the critical test:
How effective are they when no one is around?

**Young people want to be responsible,
but we are using wrong approaches to help them.**

THE RAISE RESPONSIBILITY SYSTEM

The ***Raise Responsibility System*** handles disruptive behavior simply and easily. In the process, the system builds self-discipline, respect for self and others, and both individual and social responsibility. It also reduces stress for both adults and young people.

The three phrases of the system are (A) teaching the developmental levels, (B) checking for understanding, and (C) guided choices.

Phase I – Developmental Levels

Four developmental levels are taught:

D Democracy

<> **Highest level of behavior**

- Develops self-discipline
 - Displays civility and sense of community
 - Does good because it is the right thing to do
- Has a *commitment* for responsibility and a civil society
The motivation is internal.

C Conformity

<> **Appropriate and acceptable level of behavior**

- Complies
 - Cooperates
 - Conforms to expected standards
- * **NOTE: Conformity does not mean regimentation.**
The motivation is external.

B Bullying

<> **Neither appropriate nor acceptable level of behavior**

- Bosses others
 - Bothers others
 - Breaks laws and makes own standards
- Obeys only when enforcer shows more authority***

A Anarchy

<> **Lowest level of behavior**

- Absence of order
 - Aimless and chaotic
 - Absence of government
- Anarchy is the fundamental enemy of civilization.***

The difference between levels C and D is often in the *motivation*, rather than in the action.

Concept Variation

The concepts can be varied to meet the understanding of any age level. Following is a bulletin board outline in a primary classroom.

D Democracy

- Develops self-discipline
- Shows kindness to others
- Does good because it is the right thing

C Conformity

- Listens
 - Practices
 - Cooperates
- The motivation is external.

B Bullying

- Bosses others
- Bothers others
- Breaks classroom standards

A Anarchy

- Noisy
- Out of control
- Unsafe

Dianne Capell, who posted the bulletin board, wrote:

Several other teachers have begun using the same language to reinforce the children's understanding and some have actually started using the same plan. Of course, this has added a great deal to its effectiveness. All of my students can now recognize their own level of behavior and label it appropriately. They know almost instantly when they need to make better choices. This takes much less time away from instruction and keeps the classroom climate stress-free and positive.

Explanations of the levels

Level A – Anarchy

Anarchy is to the lowest level of behavior. The word comes from Greek and literally means "without rule."

Shortly after conducting one of my seminars for an elementary school in San Diego, California, the counselor related an experience to me. She walked into a primary classroom and listened to the teacher give the first grade students the lesson. The teacher then announced that when the assignment was completed, students could go to one of the learning centers. A few minutes later, the noise level began to grow increasingly louder. One of the first graders stood up and called out, "Anarchy! This is anarchy!" The noise level immediately decreased. The teacher had not said a word. The students controlled their own learning environment. This is surely a fundamental basis for having the classroom become a learning community, one where the students feel a part of and maintain their own class decorum. An *awareness* of the concept of anarchy facilitates self-management.

Level B – Bullying

Bullying is the level above anarchy. (Young people have no problem with the term "bullying," but some teachers do. "Bothering" is an alternate choice for these teachers.) A student behaving at this level violates the courtesies of class operations and accepted standards. The bully attempts to become the ruler by making the rules. As the authority figure, a bully determines the standards. Bullies boss others by violating others' rights—the teacher's right to teach and students' right to learn.

Accommodating a bully only encourages bullying behavior. We make our biggest mistake in not understanding the nature of a bully. If a bully prevails, irresponsible and provocative behavior will be repeated. The sooner a person stands up to bullying, the easier it will be to handle and the sooner the behavior will change.

Leonard Eron, professor of psychiatry at the Institute of Social Research at the University of Michigan, conducted a 26-year study that tracked eight-year-old aggressive boys. He reported:

If a child is the tormentor not the tormented, don't dismiss his bullying as a phase. The earlier you intervene, the better. Studies show that aggressive kids tend to grow into, not out of, their behavior.

Classroom bullying is more prevalent than many educators think, and experts say it should no longer be tolerated as 'part of growing up.' The research suggests that teachers and principals underestimate the amount of bullying that takes place under their noses—on playgrounds, in hallways, even in classrooms—and that too many educators are reluctant to get involved. Charol Shakeshaft, a professor at Hofstra University in Hempstead, New York, reported that, "When we talked to teachers, they said they didn't think it was acceptable and they didn't like the adolescent climate at all. But they didn't know how to stop it." What was surprising in the studies was that students were picked on more often in classrooms. While boys are more often the perpetrators and victims of direct bullying, girls tend to bully in more indirect ways. They manipulate friendships, ostracize classmates from a group, or spread malicious rumors. Researchers who have studied the issue say that bullying starts in elementary school and peaks in middle school. It is too pervasive and too damaging to ignore, according to John Hoover, an associate professor of teaching and learning at the University of North Dakota. He asserts that ten to twelve percent of kids are miserable in school because of bullying. Assuming the lower figure of ten percent, that means in a school of 600, sixty students are coming to school fearful for their well being. Not much learning takes place when students are in constant fear because of being bullied.

Only at this level do we use the gerund or verb form, "bullying," instead of the noun form of "bully." This reduces any tendency for anyone to refer directly to a student as a "bully." *Reference is always made only to the level, never to the person.* Also, the verbal form emphasizes that a student **chooses his own level of behavior—regardless of the situation, stimulus, or urge.** When a student has behaved inappropriately, the student *has chosen* to do so.

This point about the student's power to choose his responses was given major emphasis in my **Education Week** article, "Rethinking Our Thinking on Discipline: Empower—Rather than Overpower." The editors highlighted the point: "**Teaching young people about choice-response thinking—that they need not be victims—may be one of the most valuable thinking patterns we can give them.**" (The article can be found at the website listed below by clicking on the link *Quick Summaries.*)

Students learn that their behavior plays a role in determining the type of teacher they want. Neither A (anarchy) nor B (bullying) is an appropriate or acceptable behavioral classroom level. Behavior at this level encourages a *controlling* reaction from the teacher. When students operate on this level, they are telling the teacher, "Use authority on us." If students are on level A or B, the teacher operates on level B—just to survive. When students understand the levels, a teacher can stop an unpleasant situation with a simple, "Do you want me to become a level B teacher today?" Given the choice, students invariably say, "No we will be on level C." What a nice and simple way to solve the problem.

Some key points to remember: First, the teacher *never* labels or calls a student a bully. Second, the *level* of behavior is identified, not the behavior itself. And third, as we shall see later, the responsibility for acknowledgement is the *student's*, not the teacher's.

Level C – Conformity

Conformity is the next level of behavior and is as essential for classroom decorum as it is for a civil society. No society can exist without some measure of conformity. The term means complying to and cooperating with expected standards. *The term does not mean or connote*

regimentation. Rather, it means to be connected and involved with others. It refers to the accommodations people make when they are naturally inclined to accept the values and rules of their immediate groups and society.

The desire for conformity on the part of young people brings to mind the cartoon showing a group of girls dressed in school uniforms. Their blouses, skirts, socks, and shoes are identical. The girls are talking with a group of boys who attend a different school that does not have school uniforms. However, the boys are wearing identical caps, shirts, pants, and shoes. One boy says to the girls, "At our school, we don't have to wear uniforms." But, of course, the boys are wearing uniforms—uniforms of their group. The boys' dress is motivated by peer pressure to conform.

The craving to fit in is so seductive that many young people do not have the strength of personality to resist. This pressure affects student achievement. It is largely because of peer pressure that some students do not want to show they can do better in school. Being smart does not fit into some student subcultures. The *Washington Post* profiled a girl who allowed her grades to drop from A's and B's to C's and D's in order to win back her friends. The president of the National Education Association even reported that he personally knows a teacher who resorts to a ruse in order to protect her high-achieving students from peer retribution. The teacher writes an F on the students' test papers with the note, "See me after class"—at which time she confidentially reveals their real grades of A's or B's.

Gardner Reynolds, of Laredo, Texas, shared some thoughts on peer pressure at the middle and high school levels.

Peer pressure: now here is a force most pernicious and most powerful in the lives of teenagers. It can make a youngster who is friendly and cooperative in a "one-on-one" with a teacher turn into a complete hellion when he has a group of his classmates to impress with his "cool." A student who does try to accomplish something worthwhile in class is immediately labeled a "teacher's pet" or a "nerd" by the "cool" students.

This is a rather "topsy-turvy" view of things: good is bad and bad is good. Try to work within the system and achieve something and you are an outsider from the "in-crowd"—a nerd or a dork or whatever the current colloquialism is. Rebel against authority, exhibit disrespect and insolence to teachers and administrators and you are "cool dude" worthy of respect and emulation by your peers. Fail your classes, get sent to the office on a repeated basis and you are "with it."

James Coleman identified the influence of peer pressure in his 1961 classic book, "*The Adolescent Society: The Social Life of the Teenager and Its Impact on Education*." He was the first to suggest that adolescents can be thought of as their own ethnic group. They have their own language, their own uniforms, and a strong tendency to conform. More recently in 1998, Judith Rich Harris wrote "*The Nurture Assumption: Why Children Turn Out the way They Do*." She concluded that the debate is no longer nature vs. nurture. It is now nature plus nurture plus peer pressure. The peer group in today's society often displaces the family's influence when youngsters reach middle school age.

The key concept of level C is that the *motivation is external*. The motivation comes from outside. Once students become aware that external forces are *manipulating* them, they begin to feel liberated. A sense of freedom ensues when students have an understanding of external motivation. Such awareness and subsequent articulation assists adolescents to resist group temptations of an "anti-learning subculture." Understanding the inducement of peer pressure

also helps young people decide against engaging in irresponsible acts not only inside but also outside of school.

Level D – Democracy

Democracy is the highest level of development. At this level, the motivation to be responsible is *internal*. The student has integrated the regulation of important behaviors. Dr. Edward Deci, professor of psychology at the University of Rochester who has studied motivation extensively, refers to this level of development as being autonomous—undertaken or carried out without outside pressure. He states in his book, *Why We Do What We Do*:

Autonomous functioning requires that an internalized regulation be accepted as your own; the regulation must become a part of who you are. It must be integrated with your self. Through integration, people become willing to accept responsibility for activities that are important but not interesting—activities that are not intrinsically motivating.

Behavior at this level is manifested in characteristics reminiscent of the classical virtues, i.e., qualities of character by which individuals habitually recognize and do the right thing. The four classical virtues of *prudence*, *temperance*, *justice*, and *fortitude*—as old as Aristotle—are just as compelling today. *Prudence* is practical wisdom and making the right choices. *Temperance* involves much more than moderation in all things. It is the control of human passions and emotions, especially anger and frustration. *Fortitude* is courage in pursuit of the right path, despite the risks. It is the strength of mind and courage to persevere in the face of adversity. *Justice*, in the classical sense, includes fairness, honesty, and keeping promises. All depend upon self-discipline. Self-discipline implies responsible behavior. Clearly, the democratic level is the level that teachers aspire for their students.

As noted, the difference between levels C and D is often in the motivation, rather than in the action. The motivation on level C is *external*, but the motivation on level D is *internal*. Observing the difference between these two levels is most difficult. For example, assume a student sees a piece of trash on the classroom floor. If the student picks up the trash at the teacher's direction, the student is acting on level C. The student complies by implementing the teacher's request to assist in keeping the classroom clean. This is good behavior. Conforming is necessary for community. If, however, the student picks up the trash without anyone's asking or telling him, the action then is at level D. The piece of trash is picked up because it was the right thing to do. The behavior is the same at both levels, but the *motivation* is external in the first and internal in the second. Similarly, if a parent asks a youngster to make the bed before going to school and the youngster complies, level C behavior is demonstrated. However, if the youngster knows that the standard of the home is to make the bed before leaving and does so without being asked, level D behavior is demonstrated. These are simple explanations that students at any age can understand. *A critical component for growth and development is for students to understand that a primary difference between levels C and D is in the motivation.*

During the initial learning phase when students are becoming familiar with the hierarchy, reference is made to the name of each level, viz., anarchy, *bullying*, conformity and democracy. However, after students become familiar with the ABCD's of development, reference is only made to their letters. Also, little if any time is spent in differentiating between the levels. Neither level A nor B is an acceptable classroom behavior while levels C and D both meet expected standards of behavior.

Students quickly realize that they have a significant role in determining how the teacher relates to them. As mentioned earlier, if students operate on levels A or B, they encourage the

teacher to exercise authority. However, if the class operates on level C or D, the class encourages autonomy-supportive behavior from the teacher.

Teaching the Concepts

The stories read and *the examples created* to illustrate each level are what make the concepts useful, meaningful, interesting, and relevant. In addition, because *the examples created* bring real understanding, these concepts of social development can be taught to any young person, in any setting, to any class, at any grade level, and in any subject area.

Selected Key Points

Although the hierarchy of development accomplishes many purposes, four are listed here:

1. Using the hierarchy allows us to separate the act from the actor, the deed from the doer, bad behavior from a good person.
2. Using the hierarchy brings attention to students that they are constantly making choices and that they choose their own level of behavior.
3. Using the hierarchy fosters intrinsic motivation so students *want* to act responsibly.
4. The hierarchy fosters character education without ever mentioning red flags of values, ethics, or morals.

Teaching the levels of development is the foundation of the **Raise Responsibility System**. The approach corresponds to Stephen Covey's first fundamental habit of highly effective people: *Be Proactive*.

Understanding the levels of development and having students illustrate and discuss their relevance to their individual classroom is the first in a three-part strategy to create and maintain a positive, noncoercive learning environment at all times.

Phase II – Checking for Understanding

Disruptive behavior is handled by checking for understanding. This is a **guidance approach** and is **noncoercive**.

The purpose of this phase is to guide the person to acknowledge the level of behavior. The process of acknowledging, accepting, and owning one's actions are prerequisites to changing behavior. Change is most effective and long lasting through self-evaluation and self-correction.

When a student causes a classroom disruption, the teacher asks the student to recognize or identify the developmental level of the actions. This is simple cognitive learning theory of **teaching** (the concepts) and then **testing** (checking for understanding).

This **checking for understanding** is usually all that is required. *Acknowledgement of the level by the student most often solves the problem.* The questioning is non-threatening. You are guiding the student to recognize the level of behavior. Following is an example:

<u>T</u> eacher	<u>S</u> tudent
<u>T</u> : On what level is that behavior?	<u>S</u> : He was doing it, too.
<u>T</u> : That was not the question. Let's try it again.	
On what level is that behavior?	<u>S</u> : I don't know.
<u>T</u> : What level is it when someone <u>bothers</u> others?	<u>S</u> : I don't know.
<u>T</u> : The letter comes right after A in the alphabet.	
What letter comes after A in the alphabet.	<u>S</u> : B
<u>T</u> : Thank you.	

This questioning approach is the reason why teacher stress is reduced. The teacher takes a counseling posture because the teacher is guiding the student to acknowledge the level of the action. When we counsel and guide, we automatically refrain from being confrontational.

Very often students apologize for their irresponsible behavior because it is a natural outgrowth of accepting responsibility. This only occurs because students do not feel threatened or harmed in any way. Students understand that the objective of the teacher is not to punish or reprimand but only to have students acknowledge the level of irresponsible behavior. Since the level is always level B, the short dialogue takes but a moment. Another benefit is that, if the dialogue takes place in front of the class, instructional time is not wasted. The levels of development are being reinforced.

This approach of separating the person from the behavior is critical and is a prime reason the developmental hierarchy must be taught first. Without the separation, a teacher is likely to ask, “*What are you doing?*” This may lead to a confrontational situation because the student will respond, “*Nothing.*” However, asking “***On what level is that behavior?***” fosters not only acknowledgement but also self-evaluation. You are not “attacking” the person; you are separating a good person from bad behavior—something often talked about yet difficult to do. The approach makes this difficult challenge very easy.

Practice is the mother of skill. Your questioning technique will improve and the process will become easy if you *practice* the skill of asking effective questions. Keep in mind **that effective questions are those which lead to self-evaluation.**

If a student continues to bully you or your class, the third phase, **Guided Choices**, is then used.

Phase III – Guided Choices

Guided Choices are used when a student has already acknowledged level B behavior and continues to behave irresponsibly. Authority is now employed—but without punishment.

Give the student a choice. Use only *one* question, such as:

- *Would you rather complete the activity by yourself **or** would you like Dale to help?*
- *Would you prefer to complete the activity in your seat **or** in the rear of the room?*
- *Would you prefer to complete the activity in the room **or** outside by the window?*
- *Would you rather complete the activity in the room **or** in the office?*

The question asked would depend upon your knowledge of the student, the dynamics of the class, and the situation itself. Additional guided choice activities are determined by the grade level, the individual student, and guided choice activities already used.

In both **checking for understanding** and **guided choices**, the teacher is **asking—not telling**. This is the reason why the strategy eliminates stress and confrontation during irresponsible behavior. We don't usually get angry when we ask effective, reflective-type questions. Although the teacher controls the situation, the student still has a choice. This empowerment of choice, regardless of how slight it may be, preserves the dignity of the student and, thereby, avoids confrontation.

Conclusion

The hierarchy of the four developmental concepts is taught to the entire class. As earlier quoted, just exposure to the levels of development encourages more responsible behavior. My surveys across the country indicate that teachers utilize the second phase, checking for understanding, with fifteen to twenty percent of students at most. The self-evaluative questioning strategy prevents most repeat offenses. Surveys also indicate that teachers need to use guided choices with only between two to five percent of students.

Since rewards and punishments are used extensively in so many schools, a word about them seems appropriate. Rewards change incentives away from the act to the reward itself. When we start giving rewards for expected standards of behavior, we too often hear, “*What will I get if I’m good?*” The giving of rewards for appropriate classroom behavior implies that such behavior is not inherently worthwhile. Is this the kind of message we want to give young people?

Similarly, the use of punishments to make students obedient often has a non-intended consequence. With today’s students, the use of punishments, threats, and coercion too often result in disrespect and defiance. However, if the teacher’s focus is on responsibility, then obedience becomes a natural by-product.

Rewards and punishments are counterproductive to fostering self-discipline and responsibility. They are external stimuli and, therefore, offer little lasting ownership to the person whose behavior needs changing. This is the paradox: Our goal is to assist students to be self-disciplined and independent problem-solvers. Yet, rewards and punishments set up students to be dependent upon external stimuli.

Here is my concern and should be the concern for every teacher and parent, as it is for society. *Young people are taught obedience at the expense of responsibility.* The shortcomings of obedience appear when teachers and parents are not on site as young people feel pressure from their peers to get high on alcohol or drugs, use graffiti on other people’s property, use a gun, or do something that is destructive to themselves and to society. **The ultimate goal is that young people act in a responsible way because it pays off for them.** If you have this vision of what is good for them—for them to develop autonomous level D behavior—then you will truly be fostering the type of citizenship that will perpetuate a civil society.

Marvin Marshall is a professional staff developer who presents for several leading seminar companies and international associations, at universities across the country, and to schools around the world.

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