

Promoting Learning

by Dr. Marvin Marshall

REDUCING STRESS BY PROMOTING RESPONSIBILITY—

Rather than by Attempting to Manipulate Behavior

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*If a behavioral change is necessary,
the stress should be on the student—not the teacher.*

A LETTER FROM A TEACHER

Marv:

Without what I have learned from you I would never have made it in the long-term sub job in the Special Education Department here at school.

At times I was alone with children who were constantly punished and rewarded. I started by not doing any of it but asking questions and having them reflect. They learned that no matter what they did I would not react to their behaviors—except to ask if what they were doing was appropriate and responsible.

Before long, I could predict their behaviors with others and with me. I was stress free and wondered how some of these teachers survived their tense stress they put upon themselves by being controlled by the aberrant student behaviors.

In addition, they struggled to keep track of the various bookkeeping plans to reward student behaviors. Some even had a separate book for the reward plans in which was kept a log of how many "gives" and "take-aways" each student had. Incredible!

When I get my next classroom, which I expect next year, I will start and end with the ABCD's of the RAISE RESPONSIBILITY SYSTEM.

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THE RAISE RESPONSIBILITY SYSTEM

The **Raise Responsibility System** is a proactive discipline approach that does not reward students for expected, appropriate behavior. It also uses a more effective and less stressful approach than "logical," "natural," or imposed consequences.

The usual approach to disruptive behaviors is to react. Some teachers believe they are being proactive when they use rules. **Establishing rules and expecting students to follow them is stress inducing, results in adversarial relationships, and is too often ineffective.**

Most teachers teach toward obedience. With today's students, too often this results in resistance, rebellion, and even defiance. However, teachers who PROMOTE RESPONSIBILITY find that they receive obedience as a natural by-product.

That is the strategy used in the **Raise Responsibility System** to which the teacher in the letter referred.

Part I

The foundation of the program is teaching four levels of social development. Level A refers to anarchy. Level B refers to Bullying/Bossing/Bothering. Neither of these levels represents acceptable behaviors.

Level C refers to conformity and exposes students to peer pressure. It explains **external** motivation and empowers students to resist inappropriate behaviors. Level D refers to democracy, which requires initiative and responsibility—doing the right thing because it is the right thing to do. This is the level of **internal** motivation. It teaches students to be victors, rather than victims.

Teaching the hierarchy of development accomplishes a number of goals:

1. It separates the act from the actor, the deed from the doer. This is critical. A prime reason why teachers and students react against each other is that the student has a natural tendency to self-defend when accused. By using the hierarchy, self-defense is eliminated because reference is never made to the behavior. Reference is always towards the benchmark of what has been taught: the hierarchy of social development.
2. Students become aware of the fact that they always choose the level at which they behave—consciously or nonconsciously.
3. Students learn how to deal with both bullying and peer pressure.
4. Responsibility, the prime characteristic of every character education program, is promoted without raising red flags of values, ethics, or morals.

Part II

The second part of the **Raise Responsibility System** is that of honing in on the skill of asking REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS, as was referred to in the above letter.

A foundation of the system is that no one **changes** another person. You can **control** someone else, but you cannot change another person. People change themselves, and the most effective approach for a person to change is through reflection—not through external approaches of rewarding, punishing, or telling. ("Telling," in contrast to "sharing," carries with it implied criticism—that what the person is doing is not good enough. Besides, no one likes to be told what to do.)

More on this topic is available at <www.AboutDiscipline.com>.

A reason why the approach is stress-reducing is that the teacher is positioned in a counseling mode. Questions are asked. A person normally does not become upset when asking questions.

The usual question is to ask the student to identify the LEVEL of behavior--A,B, C, or D. Since the student knows the levels, asking this question prompts the student toward reflection. (This is really just simple cognitive teaching. First we teach, and then we check for understanding.)

Remember these two points:

1. When you **tell, you** do the thinking. When you **ask, the student does the thinking**. Since you cannot change the student—the student only can do the self-changing—it is critical for the **student**, rather than the teacher, to do the **thinking**.
2. The person who asks the question controls the situation. (When someone asks you a question, don't you have a natural tendency to answer it?) Asking reflective questions is the noncoercive, stress-reducing way to control the interchange.

The quality of the answer depends on the quality of the question. For example, asking a "Why?" question is not wise. It gives the person an opportunity for an excuse, e.g., "I'm ADHD; I couldn't control myself." In addition, "Why?" has an accusatory overtone. Besides, it is difficult to pinpoint motivation, and since adults often do not want to articulate the real reason they do something, why should we think younger people are different?

Part III

The core of the **Raise Responsibility System** are parts I and II. However, there will be times when disruptive behavior continues. In these situations, **a consequence is elicited**—rather than imposed. When punishment (consequence) is **imposed**, the student becomes the **victim** and has no ownership in the consequence. In contrast, when a consequence is **elicited, ownership is automatic**. People rarely argue with their own thoughts.

By the way, **imposing a plan** is a major reason why it is often not implemented. The student has no ownership in it.

Using the simple-to-implement **Raise Responsibility System** promotes responsibility, reduces teacher stress, and contributes to the joy of learning and teaching.

More about the **Raise Responsibility System** can be found at:
<www.MarvinMarshall.com>.

To read about the failings of punishments and rewards, go to
<www.AboutDiscipline.com>.

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