

# Promoting Discipline & Learning

by Dr. Marvin Marshall

## *The Effectiveness of Discipline Without Stress*

This article first appeared in the August 2009 issue of teachers.net

### **The Raise Responsibility System is so easy to implement.**

Jillian Esby, an elementary science teacher in Los Angeles, California sent me the following and said, "I'm glad you enjoyed my success story, and yes, I would be honored if you would use it to help others understand the great benefits of the [\*\*Discipline Without Stress\*\*](#) program."

Here is her story.

Last Friday, three third graders left their homeroom in route to my class (science) and on the way chose to yell and scream and play an impromptu game of tag. (At my school, we don't walk the kids from class to class, and all the classroom doors lead outside, so they were coming across the playground.)

Upon hearing the commotion, their homeroom teacher flew out of her room and wound up in front of mine, fuming at the gall of these kids. Since she got there first, I let her handle it. She said, nearly yelling, "Which one of you children decided to act like a preschooler and run and yell while you were coming over here? I'll stand here and wait until whoever it was comes forward!" And of course, no one moved a muscle because they could see how angry she was. She went on and on about acting like wild animals, what the other teachers would think if they saw them, etc. It was clearly ineffective because after three minutes of this, still no one confessed. There was a lot of staring and mean looks coming from her and silence by all of us! I knew the right way to approach this situation, but being that she has been teaching 30 years longer than I have, I let her go on. She finally left it that the kids should all think about this incident over the weekend, and they would start on Monday morning by writing apology letters to the other teachers who they may have disturbed.

Once the kids were in my room, I took a different approach. I asked what level running and screaming was on. They clearly knew it was A. Then I reiterated that a Level A choice was never acceptable. But I put this spin on it: I said that even though some of them had made a Level A choice already, now they had an opportunity to change it to a Level C choice by cooperating and taking responsibility.

I explained that no one could make them do this, but if they choose to, this situation could turn into an acceptable one by their cooperating. We talked about responsibility and how once a poor choice is made, we shouldn't have to wallow in it forever--that we could make a choice to fix it and move on.

Because the levels are so concrete and understandable, the kids weren't dwelling on the Level A behavior any more; they were working on turning it into a Level C. Shortly thereafter, three kids came up to me and said they wanted to make a good choice and take responsibility. The conversation followed from there: "How do we walk between classes? Why wouldn't we want to yell and run?" etc. I didn't feel extra punishment was necessary because I wasn't sure they ever understood these things in the first place.

**It was like a light-bulb moment when we talked about someone's getting hurt without a teacher around to help.**

Finally, I elicited consequences if this behavior should happen again, and we moved on.

I should mention that I'm new to [DWS](#) and just finished reading the [book](#). **If someone with only a month of experience can have these kinds of interactions, it must be good. Read the book!** Implement now, perfect later! It has made me feel so much happier throughout the day. No more me against them feelings.

Jillian

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