



Discipline Policy

*Our first question should be "What do children need?"—
followed immediately by "How can we meet those needs?"—
From this point of departure we will end up in a very
different place than if we had begun by asking
"How do I get children to do what I want?"*
-Alfie Kohn, author of *Beyond Discipline: From Compliance to Community*

Beliefs

- Human beings are motivated by three elements: autonomy, mastery and purpose.
- When instruction is effective, "discipline" is invisible.
- Parents and teachers share a common objective: we want what is best for the children.

The Process

*"Control leads to compliance; **autonomy** leads to engagement."*
-Daniel Pink, author of *Drive*

- A sense of **autonomy** is a significant factor in motivation. We would all prefer to be players rather than pawns. In our classroom, students are given as much autonomy as they can responsibly handle. Students are often given a choice of where they sit and with whom they work. Towards the end of the year, they will be given learning outcomes and they will decide how to demonstrate that they have achieved these outcomes. We are all more committed to the task at hand when we have a say in what it is and how it is accomplished.

*"The overall goal was always to be better than I was at that moment—whether
next week, next month or next year. The **improvement** was the goal."*
-Sebastian Coe, Olympic athlete

- The desire to get better and better at something is something everyone shares. The best way to achieve **mastery** is to work at one's own pace and at one's own level. In our classroom, the ideal is for students to be working at "Goldilocks tasks"—work that is not too difficult (hot) and not too easy (cold), work that is "just right". Students are provided with clear goals, immediate feedback and with work that well matches their abilities. When students are given work that is challenging and yet achievable, work that they can master, there is little frustration and few behavior problems.

*"**Purpose** provides activation energy for living."*
- Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, psychologist

- No one likes to feel as if their work has no **purpose**, or that they have been given "busy work". Before each lesson, students are reminded of what they are to be learning and why. In this way students are aware of the "big picture" of their learning. Real life examples are used to show the applications of what we are learning beyond the school walls. In our classroom, our year plan is posted on the wall as a road map, showing where we are going and how far we have come. Knowing the purpose for what we are doing provides students with the motivation to do the hard work required for learning it.

In Practice

"If students disappoint us, it is almost always because they are missing something they need."

-Alfie Kohn

The truth about learning is that it's hard. It requires focus, perseverance and above all, effort. Often students may struggle to maintain their focus and effort throughout the school day. Below are some of things we do to help us stay on task:

- **Stamina:** It takes practice to be able to run for a significant amount of time. Similarly, it takes practice to be able to read or write for a sustained period. Students that struggle with maintaining their focus over time will be given opportunities to improve their stamina. Smaller assignments, shorter periods of work and closer monitoring will be offered to students as they build their ability to stay on task for extended periods.
- **Seating:** Unlike in a traditional classroom, our classroom is made up of tables not desks. Students make a choice each period of where they need to sit. Most students, with no prompting, consistently make good seating choices. However, some students arrive in our classroom needing to learn where they work best. Typically, if a student is not able to focus on his/her work at their chosen spot, they will be asked to move. Sometimes it will be suggested that they try working in the hall. This is not a punishment but simply another option. Often students will choose to work in the hall where they will not be distracted by other students. Very rarely a permanent spot will be assigned to a student who repeatedly needs help making appropriate seating choices.
- **Interactions with peers:** When students interact inappropriately with each other, this is taken as a learning opportunity. The first question that is asked is always "Why did you do that?" followed by, "Why was that a bad choice?" and then "What could you do differently next time?". In this way students learn to dissect their own problems and come up with their own solutions. Logical consequences are imposed when needed. For example, when a group of students consistently leaves a table dirty after lunch, they are required to sit with different students at lunch to be reminded to clean up when they are done.
- **Communication with parents:** In cases where students are having significant difficulties focusing on their school work or interacting appropriately with their peers, parents will be informed. Parents can provide valuable insight into the problem at hand. Together, the student, parents, teacher and possibly administrator will come up with a strategy that will meet everyone's needs.

Inspiration

- **Beyond Discipline: From Compliance to Community** by Alfie Kohn (1996)
- **Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us** by Daniel Pink (2009)
- **With All Due Respect: Keys for building effective school discipline** by Ronald Morrish (2000)