



# **Classroom Management Solutions: Who Is In Charge of Your Rehearsal, You or Your Students?**

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## A. Eight Basic Assumptions

1. Students—humans in general—want structure, routines, rules, predictability, consistency. We respond less well when there is chaos, disorganization, inconsistency, and unpredictability.

2. To middle school students, and most of the rest of us too, a sense of “fairness” equates to being treated consistently, being treated the same as everyone else around us.

3. Changing the rules in the middle of the game is not considered fair.

4. Guilt and fear are powerful motivators—but they are dehumanizing ones—not conducive to a musical teaching and learning environment.

5. Most “discipline problems” are caused by teachers, not students.

6. Nothing you try works the first time.

7. The best way to start a rehearsal is to start.

8. Every time you stop conducting, a contest begins...a competition to see who can talk first, you or your students...

## B. Four Types of Behavior Modification Applicable to Teaching *(definitions from study.com)*

### 1. Positive Reinforcement

**Positive reinforcement** is pairing a positive stimulus to a behavior. A good example of this is when teachers reward their students for getting a good grade with stickers [or simply a compliment].

### 2. Negative Reinforcement

**Negative reinforcement** is the opposite, and is the pairing of a behavior to the removal of a negative stimulus. For example, if a child is throwing a tantrum because they don't want to eat vegetables, then taking the vegetables away would be a Negative Reinforcement.

### 3. Punishment

**Punishment** is designed to weaken behaviors by pairing an unpleasant stimulus to a behavior. Receiving a detention for bad behavior is a good example of a punishment.

### 4. Extinction

**Extinction** is the removal of all reinforcement that might be associated with a behavior. This is a powerful tool and works well, especially with young children.

PREMISE #1: Through effective application of **extinction through rule enforcement**, we can avoid punishment, the latter of which is dehumanizing and not conducive to a musical rehearsal environment; and, we can maintain control of our rehearsal room with minimal interruption.

## C. Discipline vs. Punishment (*Coloroso*)

- Why one works and the other only appears to work:

***Punishment*** is adult oriented, imposes power from without, arouses anger and resentment, invites more conflict, exacerbates wounds rather than heals them; is preoccupied with blame and pain; does not consider reasons or look for solutions; does something to a child; involves a strong element of judgment; and demonstrates a parent [or teacher]'s ability to control a child.

***Discipline*** is not judgmental, arbitrary, confusing, or coercive. It is not something we do to children. It is working with them. It is a process that gives life to a child's learning. It is restorative, and invites reconciliation. Its goal is to instruct, guide, and help children develop self-discipline—an ordering of the self from the inside, not an imposition from the outside.

- The process of discipline accomplishes four things the act of punishment cannot do:
  1. Shows children what they have done.
  2. Gives them as much ownership of the problem that they can handle.
  3. Gives them options for solving the problem.
  4. Leaves their dignity intact.

## D. The Whys and Hows of **Making** Rules

1. Have rules. (*Don't not have rules.*)
2. Your rules are YOUR rules. Create rules that will work for you, for now and for the long haul.
3. Have as few rules as possible.
4. Rules should be simple enough for all students (and all other stakeholders) to understand.
5. Rules should be enforceable.
6. Rules should be common knowledge (announced, explained, published, posted).
7. Your rule structure should be administrator approved (so that you know he or she will back you up).
8. With mature students, rules might be developed together and mutually agreed upon (*via* group discussion).

PREMISE #2: There is a difference between **forgetful, unintentional** behavior and **intentional, belligerent** behavior. Punishment need not be applicable to forgetful, unintentional behavior.

## E. Whys and Hows of **Enforcing** Rules (to Extinction)

1. **Begin** enforcing your rules from the very beginning of the school year if possible.
2. Enforce the rules **consistently**. • A rule that is enforced at least 80% of the time will (eventually) be adhered to. A rule that is enforced less than 80% of the time will not be taken seriously.
3. Enforce the rules **dispassionately**. • Your rule structure is a source of your power; it is your suit of armor, your flak jacket. There is no reason to lash out or become angry. Your rules protect you from having to do that.)
4. **Expect students to test your rules.\*** This is normal behavior.
  - By testing your rules, students learn that you will be consistent no matter what. Trust is eventually established. Students feel “safe” in your rehearsal environment knowing that the rules will be enforced. \* **Rule testing decreases over time.**
5. **Ignore irrelevant behavior.** • If a student's behavior that is not covered by your rules is not bothering other students, then don't let it bother you. Let it go.
6. **Enforce the rules within the framework of a predictable routine.** Utilize the warm-up period to establish an environment conducive to a predictable routine.
  - Conduct warm-up exercises that can be done by ear, without printed music, and use this time to establish eye contact, facial expression, body language, and proximity to bring the energy level and concentration level of the occupants of your rehearsal room to “readiness to work.”
7. **Enforce the rules repeatedly** as necessary.  
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  - from global to local (all dispassionately):
    - general announcement to full ensemble
    - regional statement (sections, rows, etc.)
    - personalized nonverbal communication in a regional context (eye contact or proximity)
    - announce one-on-one after class

## F. More Tools for Music Classroom Management

- The Three F's: Be Fair, Firm, and Friendly
- Praise in Public, Punish in Private
- Know Your Own Hot Buttons and Customize Your Rules to Avoid Engagement
- The one-eye, one-ear rule. If you are OK with a minimal, reasonable amount of talking during your rehearsal, try this approach: *“If you need to talk with someone next to you when I am not working directly with you, keep one eye and one ear on me at all times (so that you are ready to start with everyone else), and never talk loudly enough to be a distraction.”*
- “Alex, I need to see you after class.”
- “Calm down.”
- stand up/sit down (fresh start)
- Make Students Responsible for Their Own Behavior:  
**“What’s Your Plan?”** (*“Wow, sorry to hear that, what are you going to do to make sure that doesn’t happen next time?”*) (Coloroso)

## G. Examples of Available Power in Cases of Belligerent Behavior

- eye contact, facial expression, proximity, verbiage/silence
- telephone call to parents (document it)
- three-way conversation (teacher, student, principal or counselor)
- four-way conversation (teacher, student, parent, principal)
- internal detention
- school detention
- suspension
- expulsion
- legal system–juvenile court

### **Sources:**

Judith M. Smith and Donald E. P. Smith, *Child Management: A Program for Parents and Teachers* (Champaign, Illinois: Research Press Company, 1976).

Judith M. Smith and Donald E. P. Smith, *Classroom Management* (Learning Research Associates, Inc., 1501 Broadway, New York, NY 10036)

Barbara Coloroso  
[kidsareworthit.com](http://kidsareworthit.com)

“Winning at Teaching Without Beating Your Kids” (audio media)

“Kids Are Worth It—Giving Your Child the Gift of Inner Discipline” (book)