Intervention Focus in Dealing with Misbehavior
(http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/misbehavior.pdf)

Unfortunately, too many people see punishment as the only recourse in dealing with misbehavior. They use the most potent negative consequences available to them in a desperate effort to control an individual and make it clear to others that the behavior is not tolerated.

Because of the frequency of student misbehavior, teachers often feel they must deal with the behavior problem before they can work on the matters of engagement and accommodation. This is especially the case when deviant and devious behavior creates an unsafe environment.

As a result, teachers and other school staff increasingly have adopted social control strategies. These include some discipline and classroom management practices that model behavior that fosters (rather than counters) development of negative values. Exhibit 1 presents an overview of prevailing discipline practices.

In schools, short of suspending the individual, punishment takes the form of a decision to do something to students that they do not want done. In addition, a demand for future compliance usually is made, along with threats of harsher punishment if compliance is not forthcoming. The discipline may be administered in ways that suggest the student is seen as an undesirable person. As students get older, suspension increasingly comes into play. Indeed, suspension remains one of the most common disciplinary responses for the transgressions of secondary students.

As with many emergency procedures, the benefits of using punishment may be offset by many negative consequences. These include increased negative attitudes toward school and school personnel. These attitudes often lead to more behavior problems, anti-social acts, and various mental health problems. Disciplinary procedures also are associated with dropping out of school. Extreme disciplinary practices often constitute "pushout" strategies.

A large literature points to the negative impact of harsh discipline.

Most school guidelines for managing misbehavior stress that discipline should be reasonable, fair, and nondenigrating (e.g., should be experienced by recipients as legitimate reactions that neither denigrate one's sense of worth nor reduce one's sense of autonomy). With this in mind, classroom management practices usually emphasize establishing and administering logical consequences. Such an idea is generalized from situations where naturally occurring consequences are present, such as touching a hot stove causes a burn. (See the Exhibit 2 for more on the topic of logical consequences.)

Specific discipline practices ignore the broader picture that every classroom teacher must keep in mind. The immediate objective of stopping misbehavior must be accomplished in ways that maximize the likelihood that the teacher can engage/re-engage the student in instruction and positive learning.

From a prevention viewpoint, few doubt that program improvements that engage and re-engage students can reduce behavior (and learning) problems significantly. Application of consequences also is recognized as an insufficient step in preventing future misbehavior. Therefore, as outlined in Exhibit 3, strategies for dealing with misbehavior should encompass interventions for

- preventing and anticipating misbehavior
- reacting during misbehavior
- following-up.

Exhibit 1

Defining and Categorizing Discipline Practices

Historically, the two mandates that have shaped much of current practice are: (1) schools must teach self discipline to students; and (2) teachers must learn to use disciplinary practices effectively to deal with misbehavior.

In 1987, Knoff offered three definitions of discipline as applied in schools:

"(a) ... punitive intervention; (b) ... a means of suppressing or eliminating inappropriate behavior, of teaching or reinforcing appropriate behavior, and of redirecting potentially inappropriate behavior toward acceptable ends; and (c) ... a process of self control whereby the (potentially) misbehaving student applies techniques that interrupt inappropriate behavior, and that replace it with acceptable behavior". In contrast to the first definition which specifies discipline as punishment, Knoff viewed the other two as nonpunitive or as he called them "positive, best practices approaches."

In 1982, Hyman, Flannagan, & Smith categorized models shaping disciplinary practices into 5 groups: psychodynamic interpersonal models, behavioral models, sociological models, eclectic ecological models, and human potential models

In 1986, Wolfgang & Glickman grouped disciplinary practices in terms of a process oriented framework:

- relationship listening models

- confronting contracting models

- rules/rewards punishment

In 1995, Bear categorized three goals of the practice   with a secondary nod to processes, strategies and techniques used to reach the goals:

- preventive discipline models (e.g., models that stress classroom management, prosocial behavior, moral/character education, social problem solving, peer mediation, affective education and communication models)

- corrective models (e.g., behavior management, Reality Therapy)

- treatment models (e.g., social skills training, aggression replacement training, parent management training, family therapy, behavior therapy)

Exhibit 2

About Logical Consequences

In classrooms, little ambiguity may exist about the rules; unfortunately, the same often cannot be said about "logical" penalties. Even when the consequence for a particular rule infraction is specified ahead of time, the logic may be more in the mind of the teacher than in the eyes of the students. In the recipient's view, any act of discipline may be experienced as punitive – unreasonable, unfair, denigrating, disempowering.

Basically, consequences involve depriving students of things they want and/or making them experience something they don't want. Consequences take the form of (a) removal/deprivation (e.g., loss of privileges, removal from an activity), (b) reprimands (e.g., public censure), (c) reparations (e.g., to compensate for losses caused by misbehavior), and (d) recantations (e.g., apologies, plans for avoiding future problems). For instance, teachers commonly deal with acting out behavior by removing a student from an activity. To the teacher, this step (often described as "time out") may be a logical way to stop students from disrupting others by isolating them, or the logic may be that the students need a cooling off period. The reasoning is that (a) by misbehaving students show they do not deserve the privilege of participating (assuming the students like the activity) and (b) the loss will lead to improved behavior in order to avoid future deprivation.

Most teachers have little difficulty explaining their reasons for using a consequence. However, if the intent really is for students to perceive consequences as logical and nondebilitating, logic calls for determining whether the recipient sees the discipline as a legitimate response to misbehavior. Moreover, difficulties arise about how to administer consequences in ways that minimize negative impact on a student's perceptions of self. Although the intent is to stress that the misbehavior and its impact are bad, students too easily can experience the process as characterizing them as bad people.

Organized sports such as youth basketball and soccer offer a prototype of an established and accepted set of consequences administered with recipient's perceptions given major consideration. In these arenas, referees are able to use the rules and related criteria to identify inappropriate acts and apply penalties; moreover, they are expected to do so with positive concern for maintaining a youngster's dignity and engendering respect for all.

If discipline is to be perceived as a logical consequence, steps must be taken to convey that a response is not a personally motivated act of power (e.g., an authoritarian action) and, indeed, is a rational and socially agreed upon reaction. Also, if the intent is long term reduction in future misbehavior, time must be taken to help students learn right from wrong, to respect others rights, and to accept responsibility.

From a motivational perspective, logical consequences are based on understanding a student's perceptions and are used in ways that minimize negative repercussions. To these ends, motivation theory suggests (a) establishing publicly accepted consequences to increase the likelihood they are experienced as socially just (e.g., reasonable, firm but fair) and (b) administering such consequences in ways that allow students to maintain a sense of integrity, dignity, and autonomy. These ends are best achieved under conditions where students are "empowered" (e.g., are involved in deciding how to make improvements and avoid future misbehavior and have opportunities for positive involvement and reputation building at school).

Exhibit 3

Intervention Focus in Dealing with Misbehavior

I. Preventing Misbehavior

  A. Expand Social Programs

    1. Increase economic opportunity for low income groups
    2. Augment health and safety prevention and maintenance (encompassing parent education and direct child services)
    3. Extend quality day care and early education

  B. Improve Schooling

    1. Personalize classroom instruction (e.g., accommodating a wide range of motivational and developmental differences
    2. Provide status opportunities for nonpopular students (e.g., special roles as assistants and tutors)
    3. Identify and remedy skill deficiencies early

  C. Follow-up All Occurrences of Misbehavior to Remedy Causes

    1. Identify underlying motivation for misbehavior
    2. For unintentional misbehavior, strengthen coping skills (e.g., social skills, problem solving strategies)
    3. If misbehavior is intentional but reactive, work to eliminate conditions that produce reactions (e.g., conditions that make the student feel incompetent, controlled, or unrelated to significant others)
    4. For proactive misbehavior, offer appropriate and attractive   alternative ways the student can pursue a sense of competence, control, and relatedness
    5. Equip the individual with acceptable steps to take instead of misbehaving (e.g., options to withdraw from a situation or to try relaxation techniques)
    6. Enhance the individual's motivation and skills for overcoming behavior problems (including altering negative attitudes toward school)

II. Anticipating Misbehavior

  A. Personalize Classroom Structure for High Risk Students

    1. Identify underlying motivation for misbehavior
    2. Design curricula to consist primarily of activities that are a good match with the identified individual's intrinsic motivation and developmental capability
    3. Provide extra support and direction so the identified individual can cope with difficult situations (including steps that can be taken instead of misbehaving)

  B. Develop Consequences for Misbehavior that are Perceived by Students as Logical (i.e., that are perceived by the student as reasonable fair, and nondenigrating reactions which do not reduce one' sense of autonomy)

III. During Misbehavior

  A. Try to base response on understanding of underlying motivation (if uncertain, start with assumption the misbehavior is unintentional)

  B. Reestablish a calm and safe atmosphere

    1. Use understanding of student's underlying motivation for misbehaving to clarify what occurred (if feasible involve participants in discussion of events)
    2. Validate each participant's perspective and feelings
    3. Indicate how the matter will be resolved emphasizing use of previously agreed upon logical consequences that have been personalized in keeping with understanding of underlying motivation
    4. If the misbehavior continues, revert to a firm but nonauthoritarian statement
    5. As a last resort use crises back up resources
      a. If appropriate, ask student's classroom friends to help
      b Call for help from identified back up personnel
    6. Throughout the process, keep others calm by dealing with the situation with a calm and protective demeanor

IV. After Misbehavior

A. Implement Discipline Logical Consequences/Punishment
   1. Objectives in using consequences
      a. Deprive student of something s/he wants
      b. Make student experience something s/he doesn't want
   2. Forms of consequences
      a. Removal/deprivation (e.g., loss of privileges, removal from activity)
      b. Reprimands (e.g., public censure)
      c. Reparations (e.g., of damaged or stolen property)
      d. Recantations (e.g., apologies, plans for avoiding future problems)

B. Discuss the Problem with Parents
   1. Explain how they can avoid exacerbating the problem
   2 Mobilize them to work preventively with school

C. Work Toward Prevention of Further Occurrences (see I & II)