

Special Needs Inclusion Project (SNIP)

TIPSHEET #6: The Power of Positive Messages

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Scenarios every teacher has experienced and wants to avoid:

- 1) Students arrive in your after-school class and wander around, chatting, while you repeat complicated directions over and over again, getting louder each time, to no effect.
- 2) You say, "Don't run with scissors!" and the child stops running, only to begin hopping with the scissors.

Setting Class-wide Expectations and Routines

Strong classroom management is built on expectations that the whole class agrees upon, ideally with a community contract signed by children and parents and posted visibly everyday. Once you have agreements in place, it is a lot easier to redirect children's behavior because you can remind them of the agreements that "we all agreed on." Effective agreements are generated by students and

"Remember, the whole class, including you, agreed that we would listen carefully. I need your attention."

- Positively worded and specific
- 5 or fewer (but you can have many examples of each agreement)
- Communicate expected behavior (instead of "no" or "don't")
- Written in child or teen friendly language

For Example

CLASS AGREEMENTS

- Be safe
- Be respectful and listen carefully
- Leave candy and electronics at home
- Be kind to myself and others
- Try my best

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Giving Instructions that Actually Work

When giving directions, nothing else matters if you don't have the child's attention.



GET THEIR ATTENTION

- get close enough that they can hear you (crouch down to their level)
- make eye contact
- say their name first

When you mean to give an instruction, be sure you actually give an instruction ("hang up your bag on the hook") rather than:

- make a request ("I wish you'd quiet down")
- ask a question ("can you take out your homework?")
- or offer a choice that you don't mean ("Do you want me to call your mother today?")

Food for Thought

- Some students need more time to respond to directions, so give them a window.
 - That window -- "I'll come back in one minute and check on you" -- can also allow students to "save face" and spare you a battle of wills.
- Is this an instruction the student must comply with, or can you give them some choice (e.g., "you need to find a game to play, would you rather play kick ball with a group or jump rope on your own?")?
- Give your directions one or two at a time, without interrupting yourself. Avoid long, complicated instructions that sound like "blah, blah, blah."
- Instructions will always be more effective when they are also visual: written on the board or a handout, using gestures, or demonstrating what you are asking students to do.

Find additional Tip Sheets and more information about the Special Needs Inclusion Project (SNIP) at:

www.SNIPSF.org

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www.supportforfamilies.org

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- These principles are most effective when they are part of a program-wide positive behavior support plan.

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