

A WORD ABOUT GROUP PUNISHMENTS

(Revised from Captain Awesome – Oct. 10, 2017)

Do you have a class composed of students who are all delightful as individuals, but when you put them together, they seem to have their own agenda for how the class will unfold?

You're hoping punishing the entire class or using collective punishment for the actions of a few will remedy the situation. The "good kids" will put pressure on the "bad kids" to change their behavior, since it affected the entire group. However, you read that this type of punishment doesn't work. Too often, the kids who misbehave are popular kids and the kids who get punished lacked the social clout to protest. You want the power in your classroom to belong to the responsible kids who make good decisions.

Instead of collective punishments, try collective rewards. Kids earn points for attendance, homework, hilarious comments, being able to recite all fifteen self-discipline skills, leadership tasks, etc. A pre-determined number of points earn the class a desired reward.

If a whole class gets loud or off-task, points are docked from the tally that is in a corner on the chalkboard. No silent lunch, no extra assignments are needed. Some teachers put marbles in a jar to work up to a class reward. It's still collective responsibility, but it leaves room for a little more grace.

If there's a major offense and nobody 'fesses up, ask every student in class to get out a piece of paper and anonymously write down any pertinent information. If a student doesn't know anything about what happened, they can write a haiku or draw a picture. That way every student is writing something and nobody risks being identified as a snitch. Then read their comments and announce that you are fairly certain who committed the crime (even if you just have a vague idea) and that person has until the end of the day to come clean about it. It generally works.

You can't always avoid punishing innocent students but you can limit the group. If one side of your classroom is left a mess, don't make the whole class come back and clean during recess; only the kids who sat at those tables. If only the back of the line is horse-playing, there's no need to send the whole line to silent lunch. It's still not fair, but it's less unfair, and the kids recognize that.

Martens & Meller, 1990 - On the surface, then, punishment may appear to be a powerful and attractive behavior management strategy. But this power can come at a significant cost. Research indicates that punishment is sometimes accompanied by significant negative side effects. Students who are regularly the object of punishment may over time show a drop in positive attitudes toward school resulting in poor attendance and work performance, have a more negative perception of teachers and adopt a more punitive manner in interacting with peers and adults.