Teaching Children to Care

Management in the Responsive Classroom

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3) Provide a workable, realistic, specific action as a consequence

A workable consequence is specific and related to the problem — leaving the group is related to being disruptive in a group; missing recess isn't. Realistic means possible for the child and teacher. Children can clean-up, wash off graffiti, provide a service, give up a privilege, help rebuild or mend, or find nicer ways to say things. Teachers also need to think about what is practical — if a child has to stay until a piece of work is complete, then the teacher must be prepared to stay with her or arrange for supervision.

4) Provide a time limit

It's important to restore privileges quickly so that children are able to resume their responsibilities and try again. A child who is not managing in the block area loses the privilege of working there for the rest of the day, but tomorrow, "I expect to see you show me that you can follow the rules." We can repeat consequences and extend the times, but generally there is an assurance of another chance. (In some cases, of course, a consequence is not effective with a particular child. *Nothing* works all the time with children.)

5) Emphasize the language of "choice" and "privilege"

"If you wish to remain in this group, you choose to follow the rules." "You may come with us and follow the rules, or stay back. Your choice." "If you want to benefit from my teaching, you need to do the assignments."

6) Use empathy and structure

Empathy shows faith in the student's ability to improve, and reaffirms that I like the person, even if I don't like the behavior. Structure sets limits and provides a way for children to follow through. Explain what needs to happen, without apology or negotiation.

5

Problem-Solving Class Meetings

- Children rapidly increase their teasing and picking on one another.
- Cliques and secret clubs begin, excluding others.
- Money disappears from coat pockets.
- Nasty messages circulate and graffiti appear on desks.
- Transitions become chaotic and take too long.
- A child is afraid to ride the bus because he has been taunted and teased about everything from his curly hair to his sibilant speech.
- Independent assignments are messy, careless, and filled with mistakes, although the children insist they have checked them over before turning them in.

Every one of these problems occurred in the course of last year and, plus or minus others, each year that I have been a teacher. Yet I am convinced that these problems provide a context for developing moral and ethical thinking. I do not mean that we sit children down and rant and rave, telling them what will happen if such and such happens again. And I do not mean that we enlist the "do-gooders" to identify and expose the "do-badders." If our goal is to give children the courage to think about the problems they experience and to search for ways to act that reflect moral thinking, then we need a very different approach.

Years ago, William Glasser wrote in *Schools Without Failure*, "Given little help, children tend to evade problems, to lie their way out of situations, to depend upon others to solve their problems or just to give up." Without our help, children will "solve" a problem by manufacturing an excuse, blaming someone else, or providing an empty promise to the teacher so she will

shut up. But children will become involved in problem-solving if we give them help in dealing with what matters most in their lives. The episodes of the playground, the bus and the classroom have deep and immediate meanings compared to contrived work sheets, or abstractions children gather from soap operas and older siblings.

Specifically, we can involve the whole class in problem-solving through meetings. It is one technique for dealing with the nasty messages, the taunting on the bus, the missing money, or the careless work. I use a problem-solving class meeting format taken largely from the work of William Glasser and Rudolf Dreikurs, combined with other approaches I have tried and found successful.

Purpose of class meetings

"The two main purposes of class meetings are to help each other and to solve problems," writes Jane Nelson in *Positive Discipline*. William Glasser (*Schools Without Failure*) describes class meetings as a time when "the teacher leads a whole class in a non-judgmental discussion," and children learn that "they can use their brains individually and as a group to solve the problems of living in their school world."

The first goal of class meetings is to generate honest discussion among children. We must give permission for children to say what they really think, not what they think we want to hear. A non-judgmental tone is essential for honest and open discussion.

The second goal is to develop children's capacity to solve problems. In a class meeting, it is the students who must propose and choose the solutions that they think will work, not the teacher. The solutions often work because there is an investment in them working, not because they are so brilliant. Other times, solutions will fail, and must fail. But a failure can produce an even greater educational dividend — the process of revising and learning from mistakes. "I worry that there isn't time for failure," one teacher cried. And that may be one of the greatest failures of our schools — the lack of time we give children to learn from necessary mistakes.

There are a few things that do *not* belong in any class meetings. *Do not:*

- Allow children to blame or accuse others
- Enlist other children to detect and identify wrong-doers
- Punish the whole class for the behavior of a few individuals

These tactics build resentment and suspicion, not cooperation. To involve the class in finding a just solution is to enlist cooperative and collective enterprise. "What do we need to do right now to keep our classroom safe?" is a good question to initiate a meeting. "Who did it?" is not.

Rules for class meetings

These were developed by Franklin Mediation Center at the University of Massachusetts (see Bibliography). Students agree to:

- Try to solve problems
- Not use any put-downs — physical or verbal
- Listen to each other and not interrupt

I present these to the class as the three important ground rules for class meetings, but ask if they think we need others to help solve problems and speak honestly. Sometimes children suggest the added rule of confidentiality, for example.

Each rule needs to be discussed, as well. For example, it is useful to talk about the possibility that solving problems as a group may mean giving up your own ideas when you think others are better. I have often modeled this, because children can get into a contest over the owner of an idea. "Suppose I have a solution and Terry has a solution. How should I decide what solution to use?"

I also role-play put-downs, like making faces, rolling eyes, exchanging glances with a friend, or showing indifference with body posture. In class meetings, children also learn to exercise vital social skills. It is important to be aware of these skills, and to remember that they depend on a developmental progression which involves maturation as well as experience.

Skills for class meetings

Children are learning to share by exchanging ideas and views. An important aspect of participation is learning to use the "I voice," rather than the "you

oice." We help children communicate their own feelings or attitudes, rather han criticize and blame others for the problem. Is it just the fault of the lunch ide that bedlam breaks out? Can this class of eleven-year-olds move from aying, "She can't control us" to "What can we do to better control ourselves?"

When another group begins to discuss a problem they have raised about oo much noise, they initially say, "Some kids start arguing and talking as soon as the teacher leaves." If the question is redirected — "If I like to talk, what can I do about it so that it doesn't become too noisy?" — it exposes the genuine need to have a time to talk in school. Then the problem becomes personal and the "I voice" is used. If we focus on the personal, immediate questions, we sow the seeds of genuine participation.

Active listening is another necessary but difficult skill. It involves attention to the meanings and intentions of what someone is saying. It includes the ability to paraphrase or repeat back the main points someone else is making. We use it when we teach children to have writing and peer conferences. We call it "receiving the piece," which means that you have attended to the meaning and message another communicates, and told what you heard or understood.

In a class meeting, we are teaching (as well as exercising) vital skills in cooperation and problem-solving. We will need to be patient and encouraging. Figure 5.1 provides an abbreviated list of social skills, adapted from *The Developmental Acquisition of Skills* by Sarah Pirtle, which I use as a guide to assess children's growth. I compare results from before a program of class meetings with those after six months. These skills have a developmental base. As children mature, they are better able to reflect, consider multiple view points, anticipate the outcome of various solutions, and even control the impulse to speak out of turn (although even as adults we interrupt too regularly).

Class meetings — and the skills they require — take practice. Teachers need practice in creating a comfortable and secure atmosphere. It's usually best to start with morning meetings, or circle times, which focus on group sharing and lively group interactions like games, singing, and personal sharing. Next, work on developing cooperative skills and team work in academic or artistic enterprises, in small or large groups. Teachers and children build familiarity and trust gradually, through many group activities. Once you've established some common ground as a class, problem-solving meetings can deal with the tougher issues, and result in deeper bonds.

Class meeting procedures

- Meet once a week at a regular time
  Meeting once a week gives children time to digest and reflect, and makes the procedure special.
- Keep time

Thirty minutes for 3–5th grade, forty-five minutes for 6th–8th grade is the maximum. There is a tendency to prolong a meeting when the discussion is going well, or to finish up an issue. But long meetings are difficult for many children, so they begin to dislike them. It is better to come back to the issue next week, with a fresh and renewed interest.

- Meet in a circle, not at desks
  I prefer to have older children sit in chairs for this meeting, rather than on the floor.
- Set up a weekly agenda
  Teachers and children may put issues on the agenda.
- The teacher takes the role of "gatekeeper"
  She sets the tone, begins and ends the meeting, keeps the group focused on the topic and on the meeting rules. This includes selecting and presenting

Figure 5.1

BASIC SKILLS FOR PROBLEM SOLVING

K–3rd Grade
At these ages, children can:
- Describe problems or give information without using put-downs or blame
- Give their own opinions in a group
- Express their own views and thoughts (using the "I voice")
- Listen while another shares ideas or opinions
- Maintain eye contact
- Wait rather than interrupt
- Say something affirming about the ideas or solutions of others
- Accept more than one possible solution to a problem
- Choose the most "workable" solution to the problem and then stick to it

4th–6th Grade
At these ages, children can:
- Develop more than one solution to a problem
- Explore different points of view
- Anticipate different outcomes of proposed solutions
- Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of solutions and give logical reasons
- Use active listening to paraphrase and recall the ideas of other students
- Listen and respond to others empathically
- Agree to consequences and abide by them

topics. Teachers need to have final say over whether a topic is appropriate for class discussion and problem-solving.

Assign other roles to students once they become familiar and comfortable with class meetings

The class may want a note-taker to record and summarize, or a person to read the agenda. Some teachers suggest a student "affirmer," who gives encouraging feedback during the meetings.

Steps for problem-solving meetings

. Introduce the problem and review the rules
. Gather information
. Begin discussion — "What do you need in order to . . .?"
. Propose solutions
. Choose a solution
. Choose a consequence
. Close the meeting

Tattling and picking on each other

1. Introduce the problem and review the rules

"I have noticed that there has been a lot of tattling and picking on one another lately. I hear complaints about name-calling and see that some people are feeling bad. I don't think this makes our classroom a good place to work. I want to talk about it in our meeting today. Does everyone agree to try to work on solving this problem, with no put-downs and listening to each other?"

I go around the circle. Everyone nods. If I know that some students have a hard time with meetings, I emphasize the decision and choice to attend. "Are there people who feel they may have difficulty with these rules and would rather not participate today?" Sometimes, a student leaves, but usually returns the next week with much better behavior.

In initial meetings I may select problems from a list "brainstormed" by the class. I want to make sure that the content of the meeting matters — it should be immediate, real, and solvable. I tackle easy-to-solve problems to build success and confidence.

2. Gather information

Begin by asking a specific question so that everyone has a chance to respond. It needs to be a question which focuses on personal observations and feelings, but does not make (or ask children to make) moral judgements. I do not want to ask if it's wrong to pick on others, partly because the answer is so obvious

and partly because children continue to do it, despite everyone's agreement that it is wrong. If I begin with the wrong question, the discussion can only become accusatory or defensive, depending on whether you are a "picker" or a "pickee." Instead, I want to phrase an open question:

"We all probably pick on people some times or deliberately tattle. Sometimes if I'm in a bad mood, I might begin to pick on someone, or I remember tattling on my brother, if I wanted to get him in trouble. I wonder if you could remember a time this week when you picked on someone or tattled. Gerry, will you begin, please? Were you a tattler or a picker?"

At this moment the class chuckles a bit, but they are involved. As I go around the circle, I find that most of the children quickly describe their place:

"I pick on people."

"I get picked on," another adds.

"Both," a number reply. The nods of others in the group seem to confirm the personal testimonies. The honesty is striking.

"What makes you feel like picking on someone," I ask next. Or, if a child seems uncomfortable, "What's your guess, why do you think some kids might want to pick on other kids?" When a child is reticent, I might say, "Would you like more time to think? I'll come back to you if you raise your hand when you are ready." A few children will hold back in the early meetings or have difficulty expressing their own feelings, but may take part in finding solutions.

As you gather information, it is important to give *everyone* a chance to have a say. This is a time for only brief comments, not conversation. In the beginning, teachers will often need to redirect and reinforce expectations:

"See, Billy is always bothering me and he don't listen when I tell him to stop, so then I tell the teacher," says James.

"So, when you are bothered and the person doesn't stop you feel like you have to tell the teacher." (Here I just rephrase the statement, eliminating Billy's name).

"I stop but . . ." begins Billy.

"Billy, let's wait on discussion. Molly, you're next."

To encourage information gathering:

- Go around the circle
- Make questions specific
- Narrow or refocus a question if a child seems unsure
- Encourage short responses but not conversation

At the end of the information gathering, the teacher sums up what she heard, and models active listening.

"I heard many of you say that sometimes you pick on someone else and sometimes you feel picked on. A lot of you said that it's a way to be funny and a way to be cool, especially between boys and girls. I heard some people say that they like making people laugh, but I also heard someone say that they think it's funny to get people mad. I also heard that mostly you tattled when you ask others to stop and they didn't. So you weren't listening to each other. It sounds like it's hard to know when picking on people is just 'dumb' or when

ets 'mean.' And I still think that most people don't always feel good about vhen it gets mean, although a few think it's not a problem, just 'comedy.' d anyone hear anything else?"

I try to discern attitudes about the issues and to find the common themes. this case, it seemed that much of the taunting was a way to get attention d make contact, particularly with the opposite sex. In only a few instances as there an undercurrent of actual hostility, and that seemed restricted to one two children. The taunting and the tattling both resulted from problems ith social skills.

3. Begin discussion

It sounds like people in this class like each other pretty well and want to be iendly. What do you think you would *need* in order to be more friendly and top picking on people?"

I frequently begin discussion by asking the students what they think they night need in order to work on the problem. It is often an unusual question o consider — what do I need in order to stop picking on people, or stop attling, or whatever the issue might be. I do not expect children to utomatically know the answer. Questions give focus, point in a certain direction, and stimulate a particular type of discussion.

The discussion that followed (in a group of eleven-year-olds) focused on the nature of the joking in the group.

"No one should be joking about someone else's mother."

"Nobody should be calling you fat or ugly or stuff."

"Like if someone says your clothes look like you got 'em in the dog pound or something, you feel like you want to say something bad back, but you should be able to just not mind and not say nothin' back."

The first two comments reveal concerns with the language they used to joke, probably a crude imitation of the "ranking" they observed with older children, but lacking subtlety. The last comment goes a bit further, and considers the ethics of retaliation. It contrasts what the person feels like doing ("say something bad back") with what a person should do ("not mind"). However, none of the statements were phrased to answer the "What do I need" question. When I rephrased the statements, there was some discomfort.

"You mean I, Joseph, need to stop making jokes about people's hair or ways of dressing? Try saying it that way," I asked. Reluctantly Joseph did.

"Sometimes we know we should do things differently but we feel like doing them anyway. Why is that?" I asked. "Why do you feel a little like making these kinds of jokes?"

Again, it was a relief for the children to be allowed to talk about the reality of their joking. Many agreed that it made them feel smart, or cool, or powerful.

"You know, Miss Charney, if you put somebody down good and everyone laughs, then you feel, well, important."

About tattling, there were numerous statements about children not

listening to each other. "I tell her to stop but she don't listen to me. She only listens to the teacher."

"Can you think of some times when children do listen to each other?" I asked.

"At meeting."

"In groups with the teacher or sometimes when we do something like a project."

"I notice how well you listen during those times. Would you like to be able to listen even when the teacher isn't there? How would that make you feel?"

There was general acknowledgement that it would feel good. "Would you feel important like Joseph was saying?" I asked. Most nodded. At that point, the group was ready to "brainstorm" solutions to the two problems which I stated as the "bad jokes" and "kids not listening to kids."

"How do we start to have good jokes, and how do we get kids to listen to kids?" The meeting had taken forty minutes and it was time to stop. I asked if they would agree to think about solutions and bring them to next week's class meeting. I went around the circle, receiving a "yes" from everyone. I closed the meeting by affirming the way I saw them use the three rules. "I really liked your interest in solving this problem. It felt good that you were able to share honest thoughts. I noticed good listening and there were no put-downs. Excellent meeting, class."

4. Propose solutions

In the next meeting (or as part of the same meeting), I want children to brainstorm solutions. Real solutions have to come from discoveries about their needs. When we rush to solutions, or skip over the question of personal needs, we usually end up with "we should" solutions, which tell us what is supposed to happen, but do not bring us any closer to acting differently.

"We should all be nice to each other," one child says. "We should ignore it when someone says something mean." But what will really happen? It's important to help children look for real solutions resulting from a true explanation of the problem. That often means prodding or questioning. "Give me an explanation of how you could be nice to people, even people you don't like a lot." Sometimes it means framing a question so that children confront the contradictions of *wants* and *shoulds:*

"You *should* ignore it, but you *want* to hurt back."

"You *should* be quiet, but you *want* to talk."

"You *should* be nice, but you *want* to ignore someone."

I find that when children are able to explore these contradictions honestly, they also begin to recognize possible solutions.

When the class is ready to seek solutions, the aim is to explore as many ideas as possible and to suggest things without a critical response. I try to set an experimental and playful tone, rather than a sense that every idea must be serious. Good brainstorming needs a sense of release and ease. I ask children to say whatever ideas "pop" into their heads and assure them that they will

be "married" to the ideas. I write each idea on a chart. This is also kept t and *lively*, about ten minutes. If the brainstorming is successful, I move to a serious consideration of the solutions. If not, I may decide we need re time to consider ideas and either go back to more discussion or postpone or a week.

In this example of picking and tattling, the children's solutions involved ating taxonomies of jokes — what was OK to joke about and what wasn't. got very complicated and I feared it would be unwieldy, but thinking about iat was funny or hurtful was very useful, and endlessly controversial.

It is very tempting for teachers to offer solutions, but we must try hard to ist. As soon as we give in, the children stop working. The teacher becomes solution-finder. We send the message that there is only one good solution, e which is deposited in the teacher's head for them dig out. For children to rn to solve problems, we must provide the structure and focus, but keep r good advice to ourselves. If there is only one solution, and it is ours, the oblem is not a subject for a class meeting. It is simply a teacher mandate, d must be presented as such.

5. Choose a solution

present two criteria for solutions. They must be:

Workable and realistic

In accordance with school rules

I begin by going down the chart and eliminating suggestions. When we do his as a group, the criteria are clarified. If there is disagreement, the solution emains on the active list, which often boils down to no more than three or four uggestions. I will then give children a few minutes of quiet time to think about he advantages and disadvantages of all the potential solutions. I point out that often no single solution is perfect, but that they should try to choose one. I ask hem to think of at least two good reasons for supporting their choice (rather than easons for negating the others). After they've thought for a few minutes, I ask someone to tell what solution they picked and their reasons for choosing it. I stay with that solution and ask if anyone else thought of other advantages.

I then move to disadvantages, modelling ways to disagree without insult. These include "I think" or "It seems to me" sentences:

- "I don't think it would work because . . . " instead of "That's stupid."
- "I agree with the part about _____, but I don't agree about _____."

It's best to avoid linking children's names with ideas. It's not George's idea but "an idea," which helps to establish some objectivity. If I feel that the children are choosing on the merits of George, not the merits of his idea, I will intervene.

After a period of discussion, the class may take a vote. If the solution is to be binding, it needs a consensus or a unanimous decision. "We need a solution that everyone feels comfortable accepting, even if it isn't your most preferred one." An advantage to seeking a unanimous decision is that it gives more weight to a minority opinion, since one lone voice can hold up the decision. I find that children generally take this seriously, but if I believe that it is merely a power struggle, I will invoke "majority rule" or speak privately to the student.

In this case, the children decided on this tattling solution:

"You would only tell the teacher if you had told someone to stop three times and they didn't. But if someone says to stop you gotta' try to stop whatever you are doing wrong to them."

It's of primary importance to specify how we will know if the solution is working. We agreed that our solution was working if:

- There is less picking on each other and tattling
- There is more friendly conversation and activity
- There would be jokes, but no jokes about bodies or family or clothing

To judge our progress, we designed a self-rating check list and a class rating checklist to be filled out weekly (See Figure 5.2).

6. Choose a consequence

What happens if the solution doesn't work, if people don't keep to the agreement?

"What if people don't stop and you tell them and then they're still picking on you?" someone asked.

"There should be a consequence," someone else suggested.

At this point, it was important not to entertain endless "what-if's." It was more important to close the meeting — to sum up the decisions that were made, to remind children of their solution, and to suggest that the agenda for next week was open.

In the weeks that followed, the class behavior was not perfect, but there was visible effort and improvement. The children seemed proud of their work on the problem and anxious for their solutions to work. The cooperative spirit of the meeting also spilled over, and the tone of the room improved. I also began to introduce other types of jokes and joke books into morning meeting and other parts of the curriculum. They especially liked finding out about puns and doodles.

7. Close the meeting

At the end of the meeting, the teacher compliments the class. This reinforces the positive efforts of the children to follow the rules, to listen, to respond, to show respect. If the rules do break down during the meeting, there is one reminder. If after that the rules still aren't working, the meeting should be stopped prematurely. I might say, "I see that it's hard for you to keep to your agreement right now to try to solve a problem; therefore, we need to stop. We will see if this problem is on the agenda for next week." I find that children are far more likely to come back to class meeting in a positive way if the meeting is stopped rather than allowed to deteriorate. The teacher also has time to think about whether the children were having difficulty with the

:ct or whether it was merely the pre-spring blues. Often the problem is
the subject.

Appropriate topics

:hers need to translate some topics so they are appropriate for discussion.
: common issue is cliques and exclusions. For example, a teacher observed
: eight-year-old Kevin was trying hard to find a place with the boys in the

ıre 5.2

'NDIVIDUAL AND CLASS SELF-RATING CHECK LIST

Name: _____ Date: ___

--- This week I picked on people
☐ not at all ☐ sometimes ☐ alot

--- This week I was picked on
☐ not at all ☐ sometimes ☐ alot

Class Tally for Week of ___

Picked on	Tally Marks	class Totals
☐ Not at all ☐ Sometimes ☐ Alot		
Picked on others ☐ Not at all ☐ Sometimes ☐ Alot		
Conclusions:		

room. He had generally played with one other boy, but now he wanted more friends. He was struggling for an "in" by doing favors or clowning for attention. Still, he was left out. In a class meeting, the teacher raised the topic of acceptance. "I see a problem in this class," he said. "Some people seem to be accepted and some people seem not to be. What makes people feel accepted and how do you show that you accept others?" he asked. The children were very specific. He then asked if classmates should be accepted even if sometimes they act like "jerks?" This question grew into an animated discussion of ways we might all sometimes act "jerky" and things to do about it without leaving someone out.

The topic of study habits and work is also fruitful. "How do you decide what is good work? What makes you want to do your best work or what makes you turn in work you know is not very good? What do you need in order to feel good about your work in this class?"

In general, material that is drawn from exposure to the media or older siblings, does not usually make for productive dialogues — drugs, scandals, or teenage pregnancies, for example. The children need to work from their own experiences rather than vicarious ones. They also need to work on problems that are appropriate to their skills and conceptual development, not ones that call for adult expertise.

But it may be possible to take these larger issues and redirect them into meaningful topics. For example, when a class began talking about parents and teenagers who smoke, I translated it into a discussion of "ways you take care of yourself and ways you might not." We were no longer talking about what others did, but why they ate candy or watched scary TV programs. By redirecting some questions, I have encouraged rich discussions about fears and what kinds of things kids do when they feel worried or afraid.

Regardless of my intentions and skills, there are times when I become frustrated and discouraged. I am determined not to have one more meeting. How many more times can I discuss work habits or room clean-up? There are times when I resort to more direct control:

"No one goes home until the math is done beautifully and accurately."

"The next time I hear a complaining voice, there will be no talking for the rest of the day in this room."

But I am still convinced that in the long run, my efforts to engage and involve children in dialogues about the rules and the consequences of breaking them are essential to developing their potentials for ethical behavior — especially when the teacher isn't watching.

Fighting in school

"I'll get you after school."
"I'll see you later . . ."
"Wait till you try to walk home . . ."

he issue of fighting seems worthy of a separate discussion. The hint, picion, threat or outbreak of violence is disruptive to the order and ty of school life. Responding to it as an issue, rather than reacting to ticular fights, may involve a problem-solving class meeting or a ader, school-wide approach. Punishment is the most prevalent and ditional response, but it is not an effective deterrent to school fighting. tentions and suspensions are more apt to produce defiance than mission, and fighting may even increase. A student returns to the yground angrier, more isolated and more responsive to taunts from ers. A student returns from a suspension even further behind in school, re vulnerable to academic failures and feelings of inadequacy. Rebellion nore likely than cooperation.

I walked by a fist-fight, outside of my school, just after three o'clock, one y during my second year of teaching. I was in a hurry to get to the subway d get home, so I ignored the fight. Truthfully, I was afraid of the fighting ildren — they were almost as tall as I was, and perhaps as strong.

For the next five blocks, an elderly man followed, accusing the teachers of t caring about the children. "You call yourself teachers?" he jeered. The voice hoes still. It was one of the hardest things I had to learn — to stop the fights, rging into the circles of riled children and sending them all home. Then, I uld do it with kindness, putting an arm around a fighter, clucking about the rinkled clothes and mussed hair. Even now, when street fights are more npredictable and laced with the fever of drugs, most children are only mildly sistant to interruption. There is tacit permission to fight if we ignore the reats we overhear, or allow fighting to go on outside the school yard. "I'll et you," mumbled by some fifth grader, within hearing of her teacher, is a ommunication to the teacher as well as to the enemy.

We can use logical consequences to cope with fighting. The whole system hould be discussed, put in writing and agreed upon. The more the student ody has a say in deciding the system, particularly for fighting, the more likely hey are to follow it. Peer-mediators, systematically trained in mediation echniques, have been very effective in settling disputes and decreasing fights during lunchtime and recess (see Bibliography). Lunch and playground aides would benefit from mediation training also, not only so that they wouldn't have to wait for teachers to return from breaks, but because we need to empower all school personnel to make the community's standards consistent and effective.

It is possible for the faculty to draw up a series of steps they are comfortable with and then to submit their proposal to students for suggestions and ratification. It is essential that students agree to follow these steps beforehand. For example, to agree that if a fight starts, they will have to take a time out and then accept mediation. The contract may be written and signed by all students and parents at any point during the school year.

Systems have many variations, but should probably include the following steps:

1. Declare a time-out
   Students are separated and removed from the scene so they can recover their controls and take time to stop and think. It is important that children are accompanied and monitored, not just sent out into a hall or off, by themselves, to another place in the school.
2. Mediate
   Allow them to say what happened and explain what they need to get along better. Use both empathy and structure. Be willing to listen and hear what each student has to say, but also be prepared to set limits and preserve the rules of conduct the class or school agreed upon.
3. Help with a plan
   Both sides need to compromise and agree. After students say what they need, and hear what the other person needs in order to get along, each agrees to try to work on it by doing one thing that the other needs. A successful solution is where both sides get one thing they want.
4. Make an agreement
   It should be both verbal and written. Both students need to sign it.
5. Agree on a consequence
   If the agreement is broken, the consequence should be clear and unambiguous.

This type of a system will not stop all fights. But I believe it will decrease fights and the fires that fuel them, rather than escalate them. This process may help children choose the tools of bargaining over the practice of knocking heads!

"Pretzels"

I invented "Pretzels," many years ago, to develop stronger social skills in a first grade class I was teaching. This class was particularly feisty and reckless. A day didn't pass without tears, tattling and teasing. And, in addition, a special threesome intimidated and bullied classmates out of lunch treats, playground balls, and small change. The idea of "Pretzels" was actually inspired by observing the keen bartering powers of some of the children ("Give me that and I'll pick you for my team") and by reading the book *Reality Therapy* by William Glasser. The technique proved effective for this class and on other occasions when I have used it for group building.

Goals:

- Help children identify and name positive social interactions
- Create, model and reinforce friendly and kind interactions, in order to build group trust and cooperation
- Provide a safe and concrete form of reparation when children hurt each other
- Provide a safe and concrete form of appreciation when children help each other

cedure:
Class circles up one time a week for thirty minutes.
Teacher passes out ten pretzels sticks to every student in the circle.
Going around the circle, each student may make two statements, each accompanied by an appropriate gesture;

- The first thanks someone for helping or for a special kindness that week. The student then offers a pretzel as a thank-you or token of appreciation.
- The second tells about a hurt or upset caused by someone in the class. The child making the statement then collects a pretzel as a token of apology or reparation.

ıles:
Everyone needs to take time to stop and think in order to recall a special kindness or hurt.
We may only talk about what happened during this week.
We may only talk about things that happen to ourselves.
We use a "tagger's choice" rule. If someone thinks that you bothered them, it is what they feel, so you pay. You do not argue.
"Pretzels" is confidential. That means that you do not talk about what happens in the Pretzels activity with other students in different classes. "Will you say to your cousin in the fifth grade," I ask, "'Guess what happened in Pretzels today!'?"
"Pretzels" is over when everyone has taken their turn and the teacher announces "Pretzels is closed." Discussions are finished.
When children had difficulty keeping to the rules at first, I exempted them from the group, allowing them to observe but not to participate. In some cases I set up a "pretzel bank," which accepted and paid pretzels on behalf of non-attending children. In all instances, after one or two times, students asked to return to the group and acted appropriately.

Using "Pretzels"

My introduction of Pretzels to the class emphasizes my positive goals for the class.

"We are going to begin a new activity, which has a kind of funny name but is really for a serious purpose. It's called 'Pretzels' and pretty soon you will find out why it has such a funny name. Pretzels is a way for us to learn to be friendlier and kinder to one another in school, which I think is very serious. I believe that in order for us to do our best work, we all need to feel safe and good in school, and teachers can't make that happen alone. Only when we do it all together do we make it safe and good. That is what I want us to learn and that is why we are going to try this serious activity with the funny name."

"First, I see people act in friendly and kind ways in our class. I see people help others open a thermos that is too tight. I see people help someone to spell a hard word. I see people say nice things like, 'I like your drawing of the house.' Who else has noticed nice and friendly comments or actions?"

The children respond and the teacher records responses on a chart, with the heading, "Ways We Are Helpful and Friendly:"

"Sometimes Sheila shares her jump rope with me when I ask."

"Glenda asks me to play a game with her sometimes."

"John lets me hold his markers."

"Robert gives me some of his cookies."

"People help you when you don't know some things and they tell you stuff."

After brainstorming helpful, friendly behavior, the teacher continues on to identify the negative interactions. "Sometimes, I also notice ways that you hurt each other physically or with your words. I see people push in line. I hear name-calling and teasing. I notice tattling and bossiness. What do you notice that we do in this classroom that hurts other people and isn't kind or friendly?" I do not want to get lists of accusations! I list on a chart, under the heading "Ways We Hurt Each Other" key words, such as "unfair," "teasing," "put-downs," "bossing," "bullying," and a few examples for each.

"Sometimes people say they hold seats and you can't hold seats."

"Kids pick their friends to be on teams."

"Kids say bad things about your mother."

"Kids take your stuff and don't ask."

"Kids say you're stupid if you don't know how to do something right."

We read over the charts, reviewing "Ways We Are Helpful and Friendly" and the "Ways We Hurt Each Other."

"My goal is to help, not hurt" I say emphatically. "What is *your* goal? What do you think makes us all feel good and like to be in school? What do *you* think?" I ask different children directly.

Eventually, everyone responds unanimously, "Our goal is to help and be friendly."

I then teach the children the steps in Pretzels. The children quickly proposed a modification, which involved how many pretzels were given out. They felt that if someone was very hurtful, they should pay more. So we set up a scale — three pretzels for hitting or calling bad names, but just one if a person is joking when they tease, or something was an accident.

When I first started Pretzels, I felt that it was a risk. I wasn't sure what would happen when children were singled out consistently for hurtful behavior. I wasn't sure if there would be an increase in resentments and retaliation. I also wasn't sure if children would be too intimidated by the bullying to be able to confront it. Mostly, I worried that there would be far more complaints than compliments and thank-you's, and that Pretzels would turn into endless gripe sessions, with little affirmative relief.

In fact, with the aid of teacher modeling and reinforcement, children came to love noticing the kind and friendly contributions of their peers. They enjoyed passing over the pretzels, and often volunteered extras, "'cause she really made me feel good when I was crying." They were highly observant and able to be very specific in their comments. Clearly, they enjoyed the role

iving praise and seemed motivated to receive it from others.
My fear that some children would be singled out was accurate. Martin, for mple, went into "deficit-pretzels," if there was such a thing. Robert and e learned about negative numbers, as well, since the other children weren't itant to identify their behavior. Strikingly, Robert, Martin and Elise quickly d up, till empty-handed of all pretzels. It was also evident that hostilities re decreasing rather than increasing. The class seemed more appeased and rtin, for example, appeared to be generally less aggressive.
Pretzels marked changes for me, as well as for the class. I recall paying artin a pretzel one week for helping me clean and set up the paints. Other ildren followed suit, so that Martin received a number of pretzels for helping hers out. Some time later, he exclaimed, with obvious pride, "Look, Miss arney I got six pretzels this week." And then he did a funny thing. He went er to another child and handed over his pretzel stash. "Here, you can have ese. I don't like pretzels," he said.

♦

Chapter 10, I describe another group process, "Center Circle," in which hildren identify and name social interactions in a format that is safe and upportive. Other gestures replace the exchange of pretzels. But for this first rade class, the pretzels were both gift and payment, a logical consequence of ne's own choices and actions.

Summary

I use logical consequences based on two assumptions. The first is that this approach is valid for all children and will work for all children. It is not restricted to the highly verbal, high-achieving or socially adept populations. It may take more time with children who are more impulsive, or by history more troubled, but it preserves the integrity of the child. Their direct and essential involvement in solving problems is as central to the process of growth and healing as sun and exercise.

Second, it is not a process that occurs in a vacuum. It depends on a responsive collaboration of teachers and students. Teachers work to set boundaries and limits, give structure and responsibility. Students plan their actions and think about their choices. It is a process in which both students and teachers make mistakes and, ideally, grow because of them.

6

Small Things — Time-Out

"Why do you think kids go to time-out?"
"Cause, like you aren't following the rules . . . and I pushed somebody."
Seth, age 6

"What's time-out feel like?"
"Like you've been bad. And you wanna' be good."
Anne, age 7

"Should you have time-out in your classroom?"
"Yes. If you didn't, everybody would be out of control and doing whatever they wanted. They'd just wrestle all day."
Jamaal, age 8

"What's the worst thing about time-out?"
"You gotta sit, sit, sit."
Steven, age 5 1/2

"Time-out" is one part of a system of logical consequences. All children, in the natural course of things, explore limits, test boundaries, lose control, act out, defy authority and "forget" the very rules that they uttered just five minutes ago. Used correctly, in combination with other techniques, time-out can help them to make mistakes and test the limits well within the guardrails of adult controls. It is a system which is protective, and at the same time allows the