

TEACHERS: *Preparing for a Successful Start of a New School Year*

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As a teacher preparing to start a new school year, there are some questions you may want to ask yourself. Your answers will contribute to the likelihood that the year will be productive and rewarding, not only for your students, but for you as well.

1. “What are my values and goals?”

Values are what you care about and what is really important. *Goals* are actions you take to help you move in the direction of your values. For example: You may value helping children grow intellectually; your goal may be to prepare an interesting lesson. Once you have prepared the lesson, you can cross it off your “to do” list but there is always more you can do to help children grow intellectually. While it is possible to achieve a goal, you can never achieve a value because a value is like a direction on a compass. So ask yourself “Why did I become a teacher?” “Why am I spending seven to ten hours a day at this profession?” Then, on a scale of one to ten, note how important this value is to you and write it on a piece of paper with the date. Next, ask yourself “How successful have I been with my teaching?” Rate this on a similar scale of one to ten and write that number down as well. These numbers are for you and no one else. A large discrepancy between these two numbers may indicate a problem that you might want to address.

2. “What do I plan to do?”

Think about how you typically teach and examine your actions to see if they are working for you. Remember, the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over, all the while expecting to get different results. If you fall into a hole, digging is not going to get you out. You have to recognize that digging is hopeless before you are able to drop the shovel and explore some new solutions.

3. “Am I prepared to suffer?”

This may seem like a strange question, but any attempt you make to change tactics or strategies is going to feel uncomfortable; it is a temporary discomfort that comes with the territory anytime we grow. No pain, no gain! Be willing to experience this discomfort as you try something new. And remember, there is a good chance that what was once uncomfortable will soon become familiar with practice.

4. Am I ready to use what others have proven to work?

It is helpful to use Evidence Based Classroom Management Procedures (EBCMP). EBCMPs refer to those methods that have been identified in peer-reviewed journals to significantly improve positive classroom behaviors. Below is a sample.

a. Rules. Rules should be posted and reviewed regularly. Rules should be specific, observable and positive (e.g., say “excuse me” when you have something to say and the teacher is talking rather than “do not interrupt”).

b. Reinforcement. Consequences have a dramatic impact on behavior. When a behavior meets with a desired outcome, the behavior will be strengthened. In addition, when the consequence is positive the learner will form an association between the positive consequence, the task and the person providing the positive consequence. Everyone wins! Reinforcement is most effective when it is immediate, consistent and contingent (only given when the desired behavior occurs).

c. Shaping. Little steps for little people means don’t expect too much. Meet each child at his or her current level and provide positive reinforcement for gradual improvement. The result will be a highly motivated and confident learner, and a successful teacher!

BTA provides clinical services, consultation, and training using evidence-based approaches within the context of sensitivity and compassion, while recognizing the uniqueness of each individual and setting.

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