**9-21-22 What New Teachers Really Need to Know About Classroom Management**

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**What New Teachers Really Need to Know About Classroom Management**

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All teachers start from the same place, so take classroom challenges in stride.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT



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If you’re a new teacher, this fall will mark your very first week with students (real students!) in a classroom (an actual classroom!). If you’re feeling like I was in the summer of 2016, before my first year of teaching *my own class,* you’re likely scouring the internet or skimming books for last-minute nuggets of wisdom to ease the anxiety. The internet is awash with advice for new teachers, especially on classroom management: Plan out the year, they say. Select appropriate classroom décor. Get ready for introductions to new students, families, and colleagues with different needs—and personalities.

There are, however, some tips that don’t rise to the top of a Google search—but that can make or break your school year. I’ve compiled three tips (from a vast trove of ASCD content on the topic) that would have served me well in my first few weeks as a new teacher, cementing the foundation for a successful start.

**1. Be Prepared to Foster Belonging**

“Be prepared” is the Boy Scout motto for a reason—there’s a depth to it. As I wrote in 2021, I [made several mistakes in my first classroom](https://www.ascd.org/blogs/we-belong-the-first-week-of-school-i-wish-i-had) because I hadn’t adequately *prepared* to foster belonging. Preparation, in a classroom management sense, doesn’t just refer to having the appropriate materials at hand, setting up seating assignments to minimize distractions, or planning for adequate instructional time. It means preparing an environment where understanding and compassion can take root and bloom in three, four, or seven months. It means, as superintendent Laurie Barron says in a recent interview for *EL*, making “intentional efforts to ensure that all students, not just those for whom it comes easily, [know that they belong](https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/laurie-barron-and-patti-kinney-on-the-power-of-belonging), that they have a place in *their*class and *their*school.”

Aside from ice breakers and introductions, Patti Kinney, who coauthored the ASCD book [*We Belong*](https://www.ascd.org/books/we-belong?variant=122002) with Barron (and participated in the interview), recommends planning a school or community-service project early to build class camaraderie, while setting aside time for regular class meetings to connect and discuss students’ concerns. In the first few weeks of the school year, Kinney and Barron suggest building student trust by sharing more about yourself, such as what you were like as a student, your favorite foods or restaurants, or if you have any pets. These simple practices can help foster a positive classroom culture.

**2. “Claim It” and Move On (Until a Better Moment Arises)**

As instructional coach Craig Simmons writes in his *EL* article “[The Real Deal on Classroom Management for New Teachers](https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/the-real-deal-on-classroom-management-for-new-teachers),” there will be moments when students challenge your authority as a teacher and make you question why you chose this profession in the first place—that said, it is important to allow all parties to save face even in the most charged situations. If, for example, Janice tells you what she is *not*going to do or makes a sarcastic remark to challenge you, instead of stopping the lesson and addressing the disrespect head-on, Simmons recommends temporarily “claiming it” and moving on. “Claiming it” means replying to Janice by saying something to the effect of “that might be true” and continuing with the lesson instead of escalating things with a question like, “Is that all you got?”

Several minutes after the disruption, Simmons suggests engaging the class in another activity (perhaps giving them a prompt or problem to solve and discuss in groups) and then quietly walking over to the door while making eye contact with the student who was disrespectful. Next, “disarm” the student by kindly asking that they follow you, as if nothing has happened, and address their behavior outside while the rest of the class is distracted.

“If the student doesn't follow you but shows no further disrespect, hold off talking about the incident until an upcoming ‘sweet spot,’ such as when transitioning to lunch or recess,” Simmons writes.

Vitally, [give students an off-ramp](https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/the-gift-of-forgiveness)—once you’ve addressed their behavior, move on. Avoid making them feel as though they will be forever judged.

**3. It’s OK to Take It Easy, Ask Questions, and Be Selective with Whom You Associate**

While you may be eager as a first-year teacher to prove yourself and work beyond your contracted hours, it is critical to set boundaries, especially when contending with a demanding classroom. Administrators, after all, know that you will be more effective as a teacher when you are rested and motivated. When something in the classroom is challenging your mental health, it is perfectly OK to drop by the principal’s office (or a mentor’s) for an informal chat.

As Chase Mielke writes in the *EL*issue *What New Teachers Need,* “The biggest challenge of your educational career will be [staving off burnout](https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/a-letter-to-new-teachers).” Mielke suggests seeking out veteran colleagues who aren’t embittered by the profession and who can provide a positive outlet for discussions on classroom management techniques. “Who we spend time with is who we become,” he writes. “Choose wisely.”

**Fake It ‘Til You Make It**

The best advice I ever received as a new teacher came from a colleague who assured me, beyond all doubt, that all teachers start from the same place: They all had, and will likely continue to have, doubts about their teaching practices and their handling of behavior issues, parent communication, and even work-life balance.

We need to normalize, however, that it’s fine to feel out of place, to forget things, to be imperfect. There will be mistakes. There will be trials. But it is also important to know that it will get better. Your first day, week, or year won’t define who you are or who you will become as a teacher. And looking back, I wouldn’t erase any of my mistakes. Even the toughest moments led to personal growth and fortified my response to future challenges.