

Setting Classroom and School Rules in Five Areas

In this *Edutopia* article, Richard Curwin (David Yellin College, Israel) addresses the perennial dilemma of freedom versus limits in schools. The Summerhill choices-without-limits approach – *Do whatever you want* – has problems, but so does the Camp Lejeune limits-without-choices approach – *Do what I say or else*: neither is an effective way to teach children to act responsibly. Curwin suggests a combination of the two – for example, “You cannot hit, but you can express anger. Here are three ways you can do it. Maybe you can add more.”

School rules must be well-formulated, says Curwin: “A good rule is behavioral, clear, and always enforced when broken.” *Be respectful* is not suitable as a rule, he believes, because it’s “a value, not a behavior. It is important to teach students to show respect, but it’s far too broad to enforce.” A rule that students must raise their hands before they speak is also unsuitable; it’s difficult to enforce and sometimes hampers free-flowing discussion. Hand-raising works better as a flexible expectation than a rule.

Curwin suggests involving students in developing classroom and school rules and expectations in five critical areas:

- *Academic* – Learning, homework, class participation, not interrupting others, and honesty. Some examples:

- Do your own work.
- Hand in all work on time.

- *Social* – Interactive issues including fighting, put-downs, insubordination, and misuse of technology. Examples:

- Keep your hands and feet to yourself.
- Touch other students’ property only with permission.
- Shut off all smart phones in class.

- *Procedural* – These include being on time, lining up, carrying notes to and from home, following the dress code, behavior in corridors, cafeteria, and library, and what to do if there is a dangerous situation in the school. Examples:

- Put your supplies away when you finish using them.
- When you hear me warn you, go immediately to the safe area.

- *Cultural* – The way we treat others regarding religion, race, sexual orientation, or disability. Examples:

- Do not offer food to a student who is fasting.
- Do not insult another student’s religious clothing.

- *Personal* – Rules and expectations to help students be better people and improve the way they treat others (some of these are universal and some are private). Examples:

- I will let others finish saying something before speaking myself.
- I will not text until my homework is finished.

“The 5 Critical Categories of Rules” by Richard Curwin in *Edutopia*, April 10, 2014,
<http://bit.ly/1tUw0Vc>

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