

Classroom Management Strategies

There are many things to consider when working to create a successful classroom environment for all students. While disruptions and distractions are inevitable in any classroom, there are strategies that you, the educator, can implement to help ensure that everyone feels prepared and confident in the classroom!

1. Begin the year by setting clear expectations. Be specific about the classroom rules and how students can expect you to respond to a variety of situations. This includes ensuring that students know the best way to get your attention, how to request to use the bathroom or take a break, if/when they can eat or drink, etc. Allow students to help write these rules and expectations, and then display them where students can see them. Start each class with a reminder of the rules, and a commitment to follow them.
2. Focus on culturally-appropriate, precise, sincere, meaningful, specific effort-based praise at key moments, such as when a student follows teacher directions, raises their hand when they want to speak, or assists a peer. Try to give this type of praise to all students at least once per class period. If we wait until students are engaging in inappropriate behaviors to acknowledge them or give them attention, we may inadvertently be teaching them that that is how to get attention.
3. If/when students do engage in inappropriate or maladaptive behavior, note the possible reason for this behavior before doling out a consequence. For example, if a student continuously interrupts the class because he/she wants to get sent out of the classroom, then the consequence for this behavior must be different than the student who interrupts in order to gain attention.
4. After a few weeks/months of meeting with your class, you should begin to notice patterns of when/what challenging behaviors occur most frequently. Note these patterns and consider proactive strategies rather than reactive ones. For example, if certain students are getting out of their seats and distracting peers at the halfway point of every class session, consider providing them with a movement/brain break before they begin distracting others.
5. Finally, some students may need specific plans, incentives, and check-ins in order to be most successful. Be thoughtful and creative about what you can do to keep students happy and engaged based on what their interests are and what they find motivating. If the student has a strong relationship with someone else in the school, allow for regular check-ins with that trusted adult so the student feels seen and supported.

Underscoring all of these recommendations is the need for relationship-building. Teachers should devote time every class (particularly at the beginning of the year) to connecting with students and getting to know their personalities, interests, and activities outside of religious school. Consider starting the year with a survey asking them about themselves and share similar information about yourself. Take the time every session to check with them about how they are doing, what is new, and what is on their minds. Genuine and authentic relationships are the foundation for any successful classroom management strategy.

Accessibility and Accommodation Considerations

*Please Note: This is not an exhaustive list of accommodations. For more resources on building an accessible classroom, visit www.mataninc.org

Everyone has a unique way of learning and each student needs different levels of support in order to succeed in a classroom setting. You will be teaching students with and without diagnosed disabilities; sometimes you will know what those are, and sometimes you won't. While certain students will require specific accommodations and modifications to lessons/activities, there are many universal features of an accessible classroom that enhance the learning experience for all students!. Here are some suggestions to consider!

Create a Physically Accessible Space:

- Keep the room as open as possible, allowing students with mobility needs to navigate it safely.
- Provide a variety of seating options (i.e. consider size of chairs and tables, flexible seating, standing desks, wobble chairs, or exercise bands at the bottom of chairs for fidgeting/bouncing).
- Display instructions/expectations and schedules clearly in the classroom in an age and skill appropriate manner (i.e. include visuals for non-readers and for clarity).
- Be aware of environmental factors that could lead to overstimulation such as loud noises, bright fluorescent lighting, visually distracting wall decorations, crowded spaces and intense smells.
- Create a “calm down corner” or “break space” in the classroom, if possible, where visual supports are available to assist with strategies to self-regulate.
- Provide fidget tools to students that may need them and set clear expectations on how to use them appropriately. Note: For some people, engaging in an activity that uses a sense other than what's required for the task at hand (i.e. listening to a lesson) — known as “Secondary Focusing” — can increase focus and improve performance.

Create Accessible Content for All Students :

- Provide choices for students as much as possible (i.e. options for a variety of ways to answer questions, various writing utensils, options for how to engage in an activity, choices for the order in which to complete tasks, etc.).
- Present new content through a variety of modalities (i.e. pictures/visuals, auditorily, with a video, writing things out, etc.)
- Mix and vary activity types (i.e. a physically engaging activity followed by a seated activity, followed by a small group activity).
- Provide opportunities for pre-teaching of concepts or skills before they are formally taught in the classroom. (i.e. vocabulary word previews, definitions, etc.).
- Offer word banks, graphic organizers, sentence starters and templates for writing.
- Model expectations for activities, assignments or projects so that students understand the goals.
- Utilize “check for understanding” strategies such as having students repeat directions, asking them to summarize small parts of the lesson throughout to see if they are following, etc. These techniques provide opportunities to gauge students' level of understanding and figure out if/when to reteach material.
- “Chunking”, or breaking down tasks into smaller elements, makes it easier to manage and complete those tasks.
- Provide frequent and natural movement and brain breaks throughout class, taking into account the developmental needs of students.
- Allow wait time between a teacher asking a question and seeking a response, as well as between a student's response and the teacher's reaction.