

COPING WITH UNDESIRABLE BEHAVIOR: REPRIMAND

A reprimand is simply a rebuke or criticism for misbehavior. Reprimands can be given in front of the entire class or publicly, or they can be given to a student individually or privately. Reprimands can be passive, direct, or manipulative. Another possible differentiation is between soft and loud reprimands. Manipulative or coercive reprimands, e.g., the teacher threatens or comes very close to threatening the student based on the teacher's actual or perceived positional authority, should never be used by a teacher. The only possible exception would be in cases of a threat to life or potential bodily harm. Private reprimands can be passive or direct. Likewise, public reprimands can be passive or direct. Below are the possibilities.

Private & Passive Reprimand
Private & Direct Reprimand
Public & Passive Reprimand
Public & Direct Reprimand

The private reprimand is always to the individual, or perhaps a small group of individuals. It can be passive, something like, "Would you do me a favor and be sure to pay attention to Mary as she presents her report?" Or, it can be direct, "Be quiet, take notes on Mary's presentation as some of the material will be on your test."

The public reprimand is to the group. It is done openly with the intent to shame the offenders in front of their peers. The passive, public rebuke can be to the group in general, such as "Be quiet, students!" Or, it can be to the offender(s) yet mildly so, e.g., "John, would you like to help the class come to order? Please sit down." Contrarily, the direct, public rebuke hits hard with confrontation, "John, sit down or else!"

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Each type of reprimand has many variations in-between. Kids unfortunately often can be brutally honest. So with any passive approach, the teacher must be prepared if the student replies in the negative to a request. In such cases, a shift to a more direct approach may be necessary.

Resources:

Houten, Ron Van, and Daniel M. Doleys. "Are Social Reprimands Effective?" *The Effects of Punishment on Human Behavior*, ed. Saul Axelrod and Jack Apsche. New York: Academic Press, 1983.

Their classification of reprimand as punishment is unfortunate, e.g., verbal punishment, but the research indicating the overall directive value of reprimand as effective is appreciated. One excellent insight, "It is clear that eye contact, touch, intensity of reprimand, physical proximity, and other variables influence the efficacy of reprimands."

O'Leary, K. Daniel, Kenneth F. Kaufman, Ruth E. Kass, and Ronald S. Drabman. "The Effects of Loud and Soft Reprimands on the Behavior of Disruptive Students." *Classroom Management: The Successful Use of Behavior Modification*, 2nd ed. New York: Pergamon Press, 1977.

Fails to distinguish variations of soft and loud reprimands. Does not consider such differentiation in experimentation and analysis of data.

Woolfolk, Anita E. *Educational Psychology*, 7th ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1998.