



HighLight Key – Behaviour Management

It is not enough merely to 'manage behaviour'; hence we suggest that the term 'behaviour management' is deficient. There is a need for agreement and training in what is acceptable as right and wrong, and what is appropriate, with regard to personal behaviour and relationships. True mentoring involves correction and sometimes consequences through loss of privilege. All such 'discipline' must be just and equitable with the aim of the restoration of the student once misdemeanours are dealt with. There needs to be a distinction between forgiveness and consequence. Unconditional acceptance of the student is the basis for all correction. See appendix for contrasting accounts of this process.

Contrasts

Compare the two scenarios which follow this introduction:

Jamie stood sullenly beside the Head Teacher's door; his face black as thunder; his school tie askew; his shirt hanging out. He was in trouble again, and he knew it. He had just been forcibly ejected from Mr Taylor's math's lesson for yet again refusing to cooperate with the math's teacher's instructions. Jamie's stubbornness had escalated from an argument with the whole class as audience, to a 'full-on' rebellion when he had 'lost it'; swearing and shouting at the teacher.

The heels of Mrs Jones, Head teacher, tapped out a menacing staccato as she strode purposefully up the corridor towards Jamie.

Scenario 1

Jamie saw with a quick glance from under his eyebrows that she was red in the face and angry. He was in for it now! He kept his head down focusing on the linoleum floor "You again!" she shouted as she drew near, "What have you done this time?"

Jamie could feel her frustration hitting him like a wave. He gritted his teeth and kept quiet, refusing to look up.

"Get in there!" she snapped, flinging the door open so hard it slammed against the filing cabinet.

"Now," she panted, confronting him, "you speak to me this instant – do you hear? What have you done?"

Without looking up he handed her the report slip from Mr. Taylor.

"So," she continued, scanning it quickly "you've been rude to Mr. Taylor and not done your homework?"

"Ugh" he grunted. "But it was too hard, anyway, there was trouble at home."

"Excuses, excuses," she cut in sarcastically, "always excuses. Look at me when I'm talking to you!"

He raised his eyes reluctantly, choosing to gaze over her shoulder defiantly before dropping them again. Boy! Her face was red!

"And you swore at your teacher! I won't have it, do you hear, I won't have it!" Her last phrase ended in a shriek.

"You're no good, Jamie Dunston – you've been trouble since day one, you're lazy and rude. Mr Taylor is a good maths teacher."

Her words stung him into action. He shouted "He hates me, he's always down on me – he pushed me out – I'm reporting him. I've told you, it wasn't my fault. How many more times? There was trouble at home! And I hate you too!"

"That's enough?" she snapped, "you are now on temporary exclusion; the next time it will be permanent. Go to the lobby – I'm ringing your parents to pick you up."

"Good!" he shouted, "exclude me. I can't wait to get out of here!"

He stormed out of the room muttering under his breath "You old cow!"

Scenario 2: This scenario demonstrates a Christian approach.

Jamie glanced up quickly and saw that Miss Jones was looking very displeased. He was in for it now. He kept his head down focusing on the linoleum floor.

"Jamie – go in," she said calmly, opening her door. "Now sit down," easing herself into her swivel chair.

"What's the trouble? You seem to be outside my door too often." Her voice was friendly, which surprised him, and her tone was patient and concerned. He handed her the report slip.

"It's Mr. Taylor, he hates me." He muttered his eyes down and refusing to meet her gaze by keeping his eyes down.

"Jamie, look at me." She said gently. He looked up unwilling and saw, to his surprise, that she didn't look angry.

"What happened?"

"I'm no good at maths. Mr. Taylor only likes the bright ones."

"It says here you didn't do your homework. Why was that?" she asked, not commenting on his accusation.

"He wouldn't understand" grunted Jamie, "Me mum and her partner Joe had a row and when I stood up for me mum he shouted at me – he's not my dad, so we had a punch-up."

"So the homework never got a look in," she inserted, "That's understandable. But it says here you swore at Mr. Taylor – is that true?"

"Yes," he admitted, "I lost my rag and then he sent me out."

"Jamie, let's unpack this. First of all, you say that Mr. Taylor hates you and favours the bright ones."

"Yes – it's true." He said defensively.

"Alright we will have a talk together with Mr. Taylor at lunchtime. Now," she continued, "let's tackle the homework issue. I understand with the trouble at home you couldn't get it home. I'm sorry you had such an upset." She added.

Jamie was surprised she understood! He was calming down now.

"But what should you have done?"

"I should have got a note from me mum explaining it." he admitted.

"That's right," she said. "Now let's discuss your response to Mr. Taylor – what do you think about that?"

"I shouldn't have sworn at him and lost me rag," he admitted slowly, "but," excusing himself, "he doesn't like me anyway so I don't like him."

"OK Jamie, but we are going to talk this out with him. Now go tidy yourself up and go the library for the last quarter of an hour before lunch when we'll meet with Mr. Taylor."

Jamie grunted a 'thank you' and went off.

They met together. Mr. Taylor, like Miss Jones, was calm and heard out Jamie's explanation without comment. Afterwards he said, "I'm sorry things are so bad at home Jamie, but you should have explained to me."

"You wouldn't have understood – you only like the bright ones anyway."

"You should have tried me" said Mr. Taylor, "and it's not true Jamie, that I only like the bright ones. I want to help you and others who struggle but you must ask for help – you never ask. I'm for you Jamie," he stressed leaning forward. Jamie met his earnest gaze and was rocked – it seemed like he meant it.

"Now Jamie," said Miss Jones, "Do you think an apology is in order? You were very rude to Mr Taylor."

"Yes," he admitted. "I'm sorry Mr. Taylor. But I don't like maths!"

"I forgive you, let's put it behind us. I know you find it hard but we have to work together and if you'll admit it when you need help we could make progress. You may be surprised." He smiled.

Jamie was beginning to feel better – perhaps Mr. Taylor wasn't so bad after all.

"Now Jamie," said Miss Jones, "the whole class heard and witnessed your rudeness. What do you think you should do?"

"I could apologise to Mr. Taylor in front of 'em, I suppose." He answered soberly.

"Yes, I think that's only right – and what about the homework?" she added.

She wasn't letting him off the hook Jamie thought, but he couldn't help respecting her fairness and her steady, calm approach.

"If Mr. T can explain it I'll have a go at it tonight," he replied.

"Good," said Miss Jones and Mr. Taylor together, smiling at this stereo approach.

"By our normal standards I should suspend you Jamie as this is a serious breach of conduct and it's not the first time. But, because of the difficulties you're going through at home, I'm going to give you another chance."

“Thank you!” he gasped in surprise.

“Jamie, if you want help with the situation at home we can arrange for you to talk it through with a counsellor.”

“Thanks,” he answered, surprised, “I’ll think about it.”

“Once you’ve put things right with the class and tackled the homework we’ll put this behind us Jamie,” she said, meeting his gaze, “you are more important than the work. We’re for you and if you’ll co-operate with us we can really go places.”

She really means it, he thought.

“Thanks, Miss Jones, thanks. Thanks Mr. Taylor. I’ll give it a go.” he said with relief.

“You’re dismissed – get some lunch.” she said opening the door. He went out feeling so differently to how he had come in. He felt as light as air!

Why the difference?

What is the reason for the different approaches to these two scenarios? And how is it in the first, a rebellious Jamie is confirmed in that rebellion and all relationships fragmented, whilst in the second the issues are resolved and relationships actually strengthened?

The difference is that the second is based on biblical principles which are redemptive, bringing about reconciliation and restitution. The first, however, is non-relational and attempts to deal with anger by meeting it with anger and frustration. Each person is speaking only out of their own strength and emotion: the result – disintegration.

What is the reason for the difference between the two head teachers? Is it just that the second was a kinder person with better child-management skills? No, these two stories are based on two contrasting philosophies.

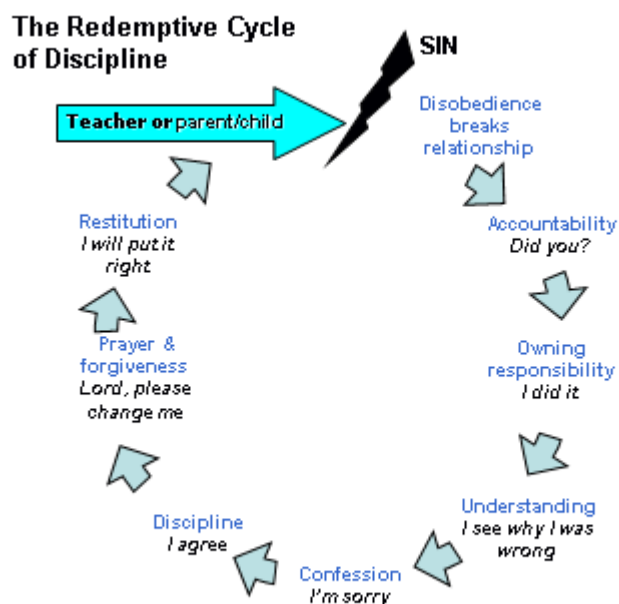
In [scenario one](#) the Head teacher is dealing with Jamie on the basis of a philosophy based on punishment whereby Jamie has broken the rules and must face a legal type of penalty. There is a measure of truth in this – the breaking of rules does result in consequences which might include punishment of some sort. The focus of this approach is mainly a concern that the ‘crime’ of Jamie must be punished in some way. This is what happens in society: when laws are broken there is a penalty of some sort, depending on the crime.

In the [second scenario](#) the Head teacher is operating from a different and more relational basis which is Christian in origin. She needs to deal with the rebellion of Jamie but she has a wider objective: the well-being of Jamie himself and not just his punishment but his restoration. This is

based on an objective of restorative or 'redemptive' relationship. This is how Christians believe God deals with us, in a fatherly and redemptive way. There are still consequences. This approach is aiming to understand Jamie, the person, to discover what was behind his behaviour; to deal with the problems in whatever measure lies in the Head's control and to restore relationship with Jamie and his teacher. The following diagram uses a sequence of steps to deal with the problem but also restores relationship. This has been successfully used by many headteachers, staff and parents who have testified to its effectiveness.

The Redemptive Cycle of Discipline

In classroom daily life, as we have already seen, both the Christian and the non-Christian child will encounter problems within and without themselves. None of us, or our communities, will be perfect in this life. In his dealings with us, God's short term goal is to expose and deal with sin, bringing accountability; but his long term priority is always to restore the relationship. This is the aim of this cycle.



We must beware of using it just as a tool to resolve problems – if it is not in the spirit of grace it will not achieve its purpose of working with the Holy Spirit to change the heart of the student and to restore the relationship with the God.

At the top of the cycle is an arrow indicating the forward progress of the teacher and pupil, (or in a home situation, the parents and child); they walk together in harmony until sin enters in and breaks

the relationship. The student falls in temptation to some action or attitude and is dislocated from the relationship by their guilt.

Step 1: Accountability

Immediately the teacher or parent must step in and, as we saw with Adam and Eve and with Jamie, the first encounter must help the student to face the situation. They may want to hide; eye contact will undoubtedly be lost but the first question must be asked: “Did you do this? Have you done this?” At this point the student will decide whether to own up or not. If there are witnesses, as in Jamie’s case, this must be firmly but gently pressed until the incident is owned by an admission “I did it”. This takes them to:

Step 2: Owning responsibility

Owning responsibility is an important step for accountability – a step avoided by both Adam and Eve! What if there is no ownership? What if there is no proof, but you or others, suspect the student? Without witnesses the teacher is left with no option but to accept the student’s denial, if this is their stance. We do not have omniscient knowledge! The suspicion will be pursued by questioning but ultimately the student’s answer must be temporarily accepted. “If you’re sure you are not involved we will leave the matter. If you want to talk further at any time, I am available.”

The Ambush Prayer

In such a case it is important now to pray what I call “The Ambush Prayer”! If this student is guilty then we pray to God “to ambush” them by them falling into sin when there *are* witnesses. My experience over several years is that God will do this as he is committed to helping them to face any such character failure. We may also pray for conviction by the Holy Spirit. In one incident of a stolen watch in our school, while we were fairly sure who was guilty, the person totally denied it. As a staff we prayed and it took three weeks for the student we suspected to come forward and admit his guilt.

Step 3: Understanding

Once the student has owned up we must ensure he must fully understand (a) that it was wrong (b) what consequences it could lead to. In the case of young children, we may be dealing with immaturity and a complete unawareness that their action was wrong. In the case of students new to school there may be an ignorance of certain aspects of the school’s code of conduct – allowances must be made for this.

In the case of Philip, aged 5, who had been seen throwing a stone in the playground, the issue was clouded both by his immaturity and his lack of awareness of the dangers of such an action. However, there was a third complication. When asked “did you throw a stone?” the answer came “Gary made me”. It was difficult to get him to budge from this displacement of guilt? Repeatedly he excused himself by blaming Gary! In the end the conversation went like this:

Teacher: “Yes we will deal with Gary in a minute, but whose hand picked up the stone?”

Philip: “Mine, but Gary made me!”

Teacher: “Yes – but whose hand threw the stone, Philip?”

Philip: “Mine – but –”

Teacher: “So whose fault was it really, Philip?”

Philip: (the light dawning) “Mine”

Teacher: (phew!)

Step 4: Confession, I’m sorry

We’re after more than a taken grunt of “sorry” here. It is godly sorrow that leads us to true repentance. (2 Corinthians 7:10) We need the conviction of the Holy Spirit to produce the necessary humbling and genuine sorrow. If two pupils had been fighting and are brought “steaming” to the Head it is best to give them time to cool off before dealing with the issue. The heat of emotions will only cloud their thinking and they will not be able to articulate properly. We may need to leave the guilty to think around their offence until they are really sorry.

Step 5: Discipline

The next step is for the teacher to decide in conjunction with the Holy Spirit (quick arrow prayers will be heard!) what correction is needed. This depends on the school’s code of conduct and the type of sanctions available. It also depends on the student’s past record. If this is a first offence, we would deal differently than with persistent disobedience. “The law”, our code of acceptable behaviour in our community, confronts the student with his sin even though the plumb-line sets a standard for all to see how much they’re out of line. This faces the student with the conviction of their heart and can show them their need of help beyond themselves. They must come to realise, particularly in the case of persistent disobedience, that they are unable to crack this on their own. They need the help of God. At this point, with that revelation, they can be led through repentance to the acceptance of Christ and the power available to them through the Holy Spirit. In the case of a Christian student it should be easier to appeal to their conscience. When the necessary disciplinary correction is decided it is good to get the student’s agreement that this is just – even if unpleasant. “Yes, you warned me, I

accept this correction” or “I agree this is right.” Of course, in the case where the Holy Spirit leads a teacher to exercise grace – the opposite to what they deserve – this needs explaining both to the culprit and to the rest of the class. Their cry of “injustice!” or “it’s not fair!” must be met with the fact that they might be glad, one day in future, that God may do the same for them! This is grace! It is a wise teacher who prepares this ground at the start of a year, discussing the role of the Holy Spirit and the meaning of grace.

Step 6: Prayer and Forgiveness

It is important to bring the student and the issue before God in prayer. This gives opportunity for the student to express to God their regret, their offence and ask his forgiveness. Just as important, it gives the teacher opportunity to ask God to work on the internal spirit and heart of the student, changing them. This prayer is nearly always a special time. God is at work. Afterwards a warm encouragement, with expressions of a better future this sets the seal on the issue, leaving only one final step of restitution, where necessary. This sort of interview should always be attended by another teacher or adult as a witness. At least one teacher/adult must be the same sex as the student to guard against any charges of impropriety.

Step 7: Restitution

Where the student needs to repay or restore something taken or broken or where they need to apologise to some or, as in Jamie’s case, to the whole class, this needs doing immediately. A useful general principle I learned from a fellow church leader was “the circle of your transgression is the circle of your confession.” In other words, those affected by your wrong choice are those to whom you need to confess.

Thus the cycle is completed, the guilt is cleared, the issue is resolved cleanly and completely. So there are no looming threats of “no games for a week” or in a case being resolved by parents in the home, “no pocket money for a week” or “no television for a week/month”. These, in my view, are unfair and unproductive. God doesn’t deal with us like this, leaving brooding punishments hanging over us. Yes, there may need to be temporary removal of certain privileges; but our aim generally must be to correct clearly and quickly and demonstrate grace.

In school this cycle needs doing in private not in front of the class. In dealing with major incidents we may need 15-20 minutes; in more minor incidents we may follow the same procedure in 5 minutes using a private conversation, even in the classroom, but out of earshot of class members.

On countless occasions I have seen students led out of their wrong behaviour and brought into peace which in turn leads to a growth in their maturity. Most important of all, when we have completed the cycle, relationship is restored and fellowship with God is now unhindered. We have been redemptive. This is surely God's heart. How important it is that we should try to walk in step with the Holy Spirit!

Further Reading:

Just Schools – Restorative Justice:	Belinda Hopkins
Dare to Discipline:	Dr James Dobson
Bringing up Boys:	Dr James Dobson
Bringing up Girls:	Dr James Dobson
The Disconnected Generation:	Josh McDowell
Loving our Kids on Purpose:	Danny Silk
How to really love your Teen:	Dr Ross Campbell