

Especially For Teachers:

10 Ways to Develop, Introduce and Reinforce Classroom Rules Following the Nurtured Heart Approach™

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Introduction

This guide will answer several questions I frequently get from teachers regarding how they can be prepared with rules based on the Nurtured Heart Approach™ before their students arrive on the first day of school. I certainly hope you will benefit from these “rules” as well. While you may be more comfortable establishing these rules at the onset of the school year, you can really start at any time: I have seen several brave teachers experience tremendous success with making changes anytime throughout the year. Students love to be recognized and celebrated in a very clear and specific way, and this guide will help you fulfill this need whether it is Day 1 or Day 100 of your academic year. But before I start providing answers to specific questions, I want to mention a few key concepts in order to lay a foundation for the rules that can really make a difference in the climate of your classroom.

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If your intention is to establish solid rules to **control** your students, you are probably going to struggle. The reason is simple: despite what many adults believe, *you* cannot control your students' behavior—only *they* can. Your role as an educator should not be to control your students but to demonstrate payoffs for behaving and consequences for misbehaving. If you let the consequences and payoffs do the teaching, you will feel far less frustrated.

On the other hand, if your intention is to help your students develop self-awareness and positive social behavior, you should focus your attention on when they are **following rules**. Train yourself to see what success and character truly look like, and verbally recognize your students when they demonstrate those behaviors. Try to avoid starting your recognition statements with “I like.” Rather, use “You are,” “I see,” or “I notice.”

For example, if a student is raising his hand, waiting to be called on:

DO say, “**I noticed** you have your hand raised and are waiting patiently for me to call on you.”

DON'T say, “**I like** that your hand is raised.”

The first statement aids in developing the student's self-awareness because you are mirroring his behavior for him, helping him **see himself** more clearly, while the second injects more of **your feelings** about how he is behaving and does little for developing his self-awareness.



The approach I recommend and why

I use **The Nurtured Heart Approach™ (NHA)** because I have found it to be the most effective approach to working with challenging children. This approach is founded on the core principle of the dynamic, or relationship, between children and the significant adults in their lives (parents, caregivers, teachers). It works tirelessly to help adults create **time IN** and decrease negativity, while providing clear and strict limits and consequences. Many parenting/teaching approaches work on using consequences and rewards to change behavior, but I have found them to be minimally successful, because they do nothing to enhance a child's self-esteem or confidence. If children are trained to behave well only because they get something in return, they will not likely carry over that behavior into environments where there is no reward to be earned.

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The NHA, by contrast, aims to motivate children *internally* by building them up from the inside out, so that they might become more aware of the skills and strengths they have to offer the world. They learn that the “prize” they can earn is emotionally nutritious and successful relationships with others.

The NHA is an approach that was originally designed for working with challenging and intense children. However, when schools became interested and applied it in their setting, they saw it had tremendous impact on all the students. Because the NHA is founded on the principle that all children have something to offer this world and it is our job, as the significant adults in their lives, to help them reach their potential, it makes perfect sense to use it with everyone.

The NHA has three major tenets:

1. To create emotionally rich time “in” with the child
2. To de-energize negative behavior
3. To provide strict limits and rules

As parents and teachers begin to learn strategies for incorporating these tenets into their home and classroom, they quickly realize the profound effect it has on all children.

Let me clarify, using a familiar analogy. When you are teaching according to the NHA, your responses are like a video game's: if students successfully follow the rules of the game, they are rewarded with a lot of **energy** in the form of tons of sensory messages communicating their success. The screen flashes, things blow up, credits accumulate, etc.

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If they break the rules of the game, however, it gives them **no energy**: it simply starts over and provides an opportunity to try again. In essence, it delivers a boring, but quick, time-out. The player therefore has only positive incentives to follow the rules in order to receive lots of payoffs. The attraction of breaking rules is minimal or absent. Similarly, we want to show teachers how to create a relational experience with their challenging students by creating an **emotionally nutritious** relationship with them when they are succeeding and by delivering boring time-outs when they are not. Children can quickly learn there is really nothing to be gained by breaking the rules.



Why this approach is so effective with challenging students

When children live their lives through adversity, they form the impression that they get more out of life by **NOT** doing things. This impression is reinforced each time their teachers and other caregivers relate and connect to them within the context of adversity.

Traditional disciplinary techniques do not work with intense and difficult children and, in fact, often make the situation worse. They focus only on the **problem** and feed the cycle of adversarial behavior. Children easily become confused about what is a reward and what is a punishment. Not surprisingly, when the teacher/student relationship is based on problems, all you get is a problematic relationship.

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In the Nurtured Heart Approach™, the goal is to send the message that there is no longer anything to be gained from being adversarial. We communicate this by laying out clear and reasonable consequences, by refusing to energize negativity, and by creating a steady stream of emotional nutrition through ***time-in***. Because the relationship is the prize, and the child is fully experiencing connection and nurturing within it, there is no longer any motivation to misbehave. Just imagine some of your power struggles with your students: if you were not there to exchange energy with them, would they continue the battle?



The real reason children act out

Consider asking yourself these questions: “What is the payoff for my students to continue to demonstrate problematic behavior?” and “How do others react to children when they behave a certain way?” Beware of “Why” questions, which tend to lead you in circles and are not as important as you might think. All children are created to be in relationships with adults. They are dependant upon these relationships for their very survival. Children have a need to belong as well. Often times, children use behavior to ensure that they have meaning, purpose, and belonging and that they are recognized by their caregivers. Children quickly learn they cannot be ignored when they have problems. Their behavior is a very creative way for them to get their needs met. The Nurtured Heart Approach™ looks closely at this “exchange of energy” to help teachers discern what is the most effective way to help their students make better decisions.

“Exchange of Energy”

An “exchange of energy” refers to any signal we adults give kids in response to their behavior. It can be eye contact, posture changes, verbal reprimands or any other reaction that communicates to the child that we are paying attention to him or her. Challenging children often are looking for, and even craving, large doses of energy. More often than not, we give the biggest doses to kids when they have problems. This can inadvertently send the message to the child that we are more emotionally alive and connected with them when they have problems. Viewing your students’ behavior through these lenses, doesn’t it make sense that they would continue the behaviors that attract the most attention?

Wear your Nurtured Heart Glasses

In every situation, remember there is always something going right. Commit to seeing all instances of greatness and any evidence of success. View each moment through the Nurtured Heart Lens by keeping in mind the three legs of the approach:

- 1. Energize and recognize positivity**
- 2. Don't energize negativity**
- 3. Hold strict limits and consequences**



Use the 90/10 Rule

This is the key to making rules really work. Ninety percent or more of your energy, attention and relationship should be directed toward students when they either **follow** or **do not break** the rules. This task is a challenge for most people, since we live in a culture that is addicted to problems and often inadvertently rewards them with more and more attention. We have a misconception of what true discipline is: it is not correcting students every time they make a mistake, but rather teaching a student how to behave by demonstrating the consequences and payoffs for their behavior and training them how to recover and learn from mistakes. You can successfully establish rules through the Nurtured Heart Approach by recognizing, honoring and investing in your students when they are constructively following the rules.

Question #1:

Do I include the students in making the rules?

Absolutely. The more included the students feel in this process the better. You will learn a lot about them just by hearing the rules they come up with. Chances are you will get a lot of “normal” responses like “No talking when the teacher is talking,” “Be respectful” and “Raise your hand when you have something to say.” However, you will also get some like “No punching or kicking,” “No swearing” or “No stealing.” The variety of responses will give you invaluable insight as to what your students need and what rules they are taught in different environments.

Question #2:

Do I post the rules?

Post the rules only if you plan on referring to them throughout the school day and year. Too often, rules and expectations are written on a posterboard somewhere in the class and never referred to again. This practice can send the message that rules are not really that important. You should be referring to your classroom rules quite frequently, though, if you are making a habit of actively observing your students following the rules. Make the rules your students' friends by honoring students in front of the class when you see them following the rules.



Question #3:

What are the rules?

Whatever you want them to be. Don't put too much pressure on having the "right" rules. There are hundreds of possible rules; when you choose which rules you want for your room, just make sure they are clear. Often times, it helps to state the rules in the negative by starting with the word "no." For example, "No talking in the halls" is clearer than "Be respectful of the other classrooms when you are in the hallway." Feel free to give the students permission to add rules throughout the school year, and give them credit for following those rules. This will let you know what your students need from you and help create a positive social climate in the class and emotional safety, in turn creating more opportunities for the students to honor each other as they refer to the rules and find evidence that their peers have been following them as well.

Question #4:

How do I introduce the rules to my students on the first day of class?

Before they come in, have three or four rules in mind. As the students walk in the room, verbally recognize them for following the rules. Be clear and specific. Proceed to have the students point out others who are following those rules. Allow them to brainstorm additional rules, but make sure they give examples of their peers who they see following the rules at that moment. This will reinforce the idea that rules are the students' friends and begin to lay the foundation that they can get attention in the class by following rather than breaking the rules. Consider that most children have a negative experience with rules, because most rules are taught when kids have broken them and are in trouble.

Question #5:

How should I communicate rules and expectations to parents?

Sometime during the first week of school, give each student a copy of the rules with room for them to write or draw a picture after each rule. Allow them time to fill in the blanks throughout the week with evidence of when and how they followed the rules. If they need help, take a few minutes before each class to recognize the students—and to allow the students to recognize each other and themselves—for rules that they are following. Have them write down their observations. At the end of the week, have the students take home their list to show their parents. This way, parents will also have a positive experience with your classroom rules, since they are being informed when their child is *following* the rules rather than *breaking* them.

Question #6:

Do we need a school-wide vocabulary for when a student breaks a rule? (i.e., “reset,” “time out,” “take a minute,” etc.)

It depends. Smaller elementary schools have more success with one common language for when a student breaks a rule, because any teacher—whether in the hallway, or at gym, music or recess—can address a student without knowing the student personally. Even more important is consistency within the building in approaching students when rules are broken. If one teacher tells a student to reset, while another reprimands her in front of her peers, and another just ignores her, the student is much more likely not to show consistent positive behavior across all settings: she might excel behaviorally in one class but misbehave in another. If each teacher follows the three tenets of the Nurtured Heart Approach (energizing success, not energizing problems, and setting clear limits and expectations), it is less important to have a common language for addressing rule-breaking.

Question #7:

What are the consequences for breaking the rules?

The general rule of thumb: when a student breaks a rule and is out of line, you tell them to **“Reset.”** What this means is that the student is going to be ignored until they stop breaking the rule. It is best, if possible, to have them reset right where they are and NOT in some other area of the room; if you have challenging children who thrive on power struggles, they will resist moving and try to create a bigger scene.



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The purpose of the reset is to teach self-management and self-control. You want to create a relationship with the student in which there is more to be gained by taking responsibility and correcting behavior than to be lost through punishment. If you have laid a solid foundation in the classroom by giving a lot of recognition and attention when students follow rules (tenet 1), completely ignoring students when they are in reset (tenet 2), and being consistent with your rules and limits (tenet 3), your students will have incentives to “reset” quickly because they are **motivated** to have time in rather than **fearing** time out. Also, you teach them that breaking a rule is not a big deal and doesn't define who they are. Rather, you are showing them how to recover and learn from from their mistakes, leading to a more positive relationship and strong self-esteem.

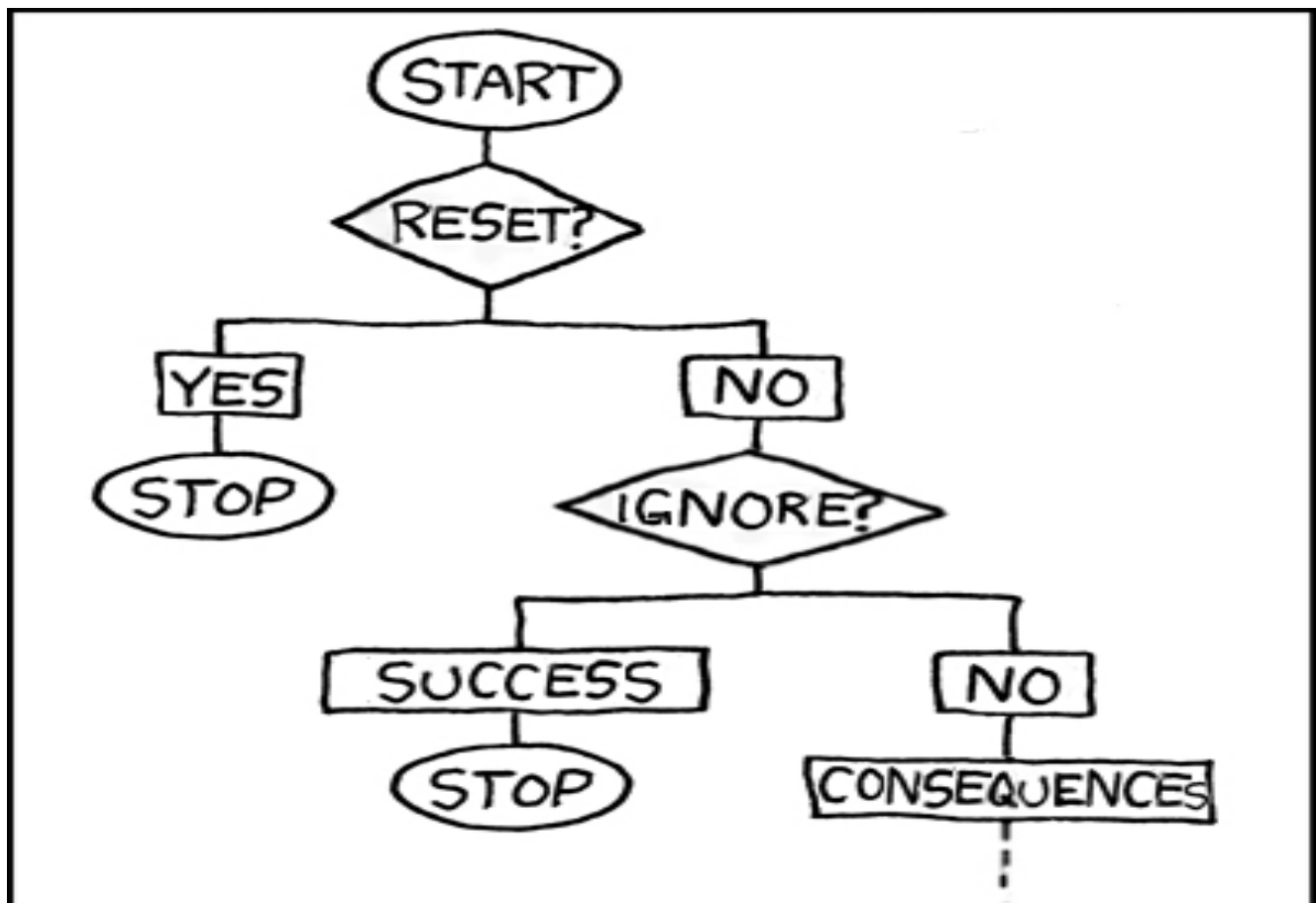
Question #8:

What if students don't reset?

Put them in the sleeper hold until they pass out. When they wake up recognize them for resetting so quietly. 😊 Obviously, I'm kidding.

Visualize a flow chart: If students break a rule, tell them to reset. If they reset appropriately, welcome them back. If they do not reset and you can still teach, energize the other students, ignore the disruption, and wait it out as long the other students are still learning. Students benefit from realizing that they cannot get attention from the class through misbehavior and that they are missing out on the class. However, if a student is so disruptive that others are joining in and the problem is escalating, consider enacting another consequence. Set clear rules about what you expect from students in reset, and if they refuse, let the established consequences play out. You have the freedom to decide what those consequences are: One teacher decided to have

students fill out detention sheets if they would not reset. If they filled out the sheet, they had only a 15-minute detention. If they refuse, however, the teacher would fill it out, and the detention became 30 minutes long. Another teacher set a rule that any student who was reset more than 3 times in the day missed recess. If you follow a hypothetical yes/no flow chart with clear limits and consequences, you will successfully be following leg three of the approach.



Question #9:

When do I have students do community service?

Community service is indicated if a student violates the rights of another, by stealing, verbal or physical aggression, etc. After the student resets, he is timed back in by the teacher; however, he needs to perform an act of community service for the person he offended. This is more than just a verbal apology and needs to be done before the student can have any privileges. It follows the model of restorative justice, focusing on the needs of the victim and how the perpetrator can better understand his or her needs. By performing an act of community service and focusing on how to help the victim feel safe, the relationship between the two students can be restored.

Question #10:

When do I involve administration?

This varies from school to school. One commonality is safety issues and issues that warrant administrative discipline. Each school should establish which behaviors should be dealt with in the classroom versus the principal's office. Classroom teachers who utilize the Nurtured Heart Approach have significantly fewer discipline referrals to the office because they are better equipped to defuse and de-escalate problems.



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One last key element to consider: If you have a challenging child who frequently visits the principal's office, you might want to ask yourself why the student would rather be in the principal's office than in your class. Even if the consequence is aversive, spending time with the CEO of the school can be inadvertently rewarding for some students craving adult attention. Beef up your recognitions of these students and honor them for following the rules in your class. Encourage the principal to make visits to your class to do the same, so that students will have less need to act out to receive attention.





About the Founder

Dan Peterson, MS, LCPC (Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor), and Advanced Trainer for The Nurtured Heart Approach™, has over a decade of experience working with challenging children in residential and therapeutic day schools, as well as outpatient and community mental health settings. More recently, he has started his own business as a school consultant, parent coach and workshop speaker with the intent of training others in The Nurtured Heart Approach™. He has developed many programs to fit the needs of families, parents and school systems. He especially enjoys designing programs to help adults who work with or have children with behavioral difficulties.

Philosophy

I believe that intense and challenging children use their behavior to communicate their needs and to solve their problems. Unfortunately for them, they often go about doing this in a disruptive way, drawing extra attention to their deficits. The more attention they get, the more likely their behavior will continue, despite the best intentions and interventions of the adults in their lives. My goal is to use the proven techniques of The Nurtured Heart Approach™ to show you how to break this cycle. By tapping into the strengths of the child, you will create successes that might not otherwise exist, instead of suffering through power struggles and frustration. When children begin to experience this new relationship, their behavior, self-esteem and trust immediately improve. This change makes them much more receptive to learning in school and at home. My goal is to help parents, teachers and professionals transform their relationship with children from one that focuses on weakness to one that thrives on success, strength and power.

Mission

The mission of the Compass Program is to provide support for adults who work with or are raising challenging children. Through counseling, consultation and coaching, I provide a variety of different options to give you the tools and guidance you need to create an environment of success. I specialize in working with challenging children and the adults in their lives. Many of these kids have been diagnosed with ADHD, ODD, PDD and other mental health and educational diagnoses. My goal is to introduce an approach that will have a lasting and profound effect on the relationship between you and your child.

Typical Descriptions and Behaviors of Challenging and Intense Children:

- Strong-willed
- Difficulty focusing
- Angry, defiant
- Poor impulse control
- Poor social skills
- Challenges authority
- Sibling rivalry
- Tantrums
- Mood instability
- “No” is never the end
- Stubborn
- Disrespectful
- Struggles at school
- Low self-esteem
- Anxious



Typical Concerns of Teachers:

- Too much time spent on discipline and not enough on instruction
- Same students always disrupting
- Not enough attention given to "good" students
- Stressed and exhausted at the end of the day
- Escalating punishments and consequences not working
- Frustrated with the amount of time spent on individualized behavior plans

***For more information on The Nurtured
Heart Approach™ visit:
www.thecompass4life.com***