



“Ask Lynn” features helpful answers from Lynn Marris to volunteers’ questions about how best to address student behavior. Lynn has a Masters in Social Work from the University of Minnesota and has been a licensed social worker for over 20 years. She is a Certified Positive Discipline Associate and completed training as a life coach. Currently, Lynn is a social worker with Robbinsdale Area Schools, as well as having her own private practice. She collaborates with Volunteers In Partnership (VIP) as a valued instructor for the VIP volunteer workshop, *“Behavior Management Strategies for Volunteers”*.

Here are Lynn’s answers to volunteers’ questions:

Q: What are ways a volunteer can respond when a student refuses to do what they are asked? Do we let it go at the time and notify the teacher, or is it best to address the issue ourselves?

A: First, volunteers need to be assured that the teacher is the best resource to help them regarding behavior management and expectations in the classroom. If a volunteer feels uncomfortable with a student’s behavior for any reason, it’s recommended that the volunteer calmly tell the student, “Let’s take a break.”, and then check in with the teacher to determine next steps. Decisions about consequences are made by the teacher. Please know volunteers are not expected to be assigned to students who typically exhibit behavior that warrants a teacher’s attention.

It is important for the volunteer to suspend judgment and to recognize that there is a belief held by the child behind every behavior. A misbehaving child often adopts a mistaken belief about how to achieve **belonging** and **significance**; basic needs for all of us. This mistaken belief can lead to inappropriate goals to achieve these.

➤ **The four mistaken goals** identified by Psychiatrist Rudolph Dreikurs include:

1) **Undue Attention** 2) **Misguided Power** 3) **Revenge** 4) **Assumed Inadequacy** (giving up).

Once the child's mistaken goal is understood, the student can be encouraged in various ways that help challenge their mistaken belief about what they have to do in order to belong and be significant. **The clues** to which mistaken goal the child is acting out of are **your feelings, your reaction, and the student's response to your reaction**.

➤ **Volunteers’ Feelings In Response to Student Behavior:** *Volunteers may find themselves having the feelings identified next to the mistaken goal listed.*

Undue Attention: annoyed, irritated, worried, guilty
Misguided Power: provoked, challenged, angry, threatened, defeated
Revenge: hurt, disappointment, disbelief, disgust
Assumed Inadequacy: despair, hopelessness, helplessness, sense of inadequacy

➤ **Suggestions**

Undue Attention: Recognize that everyone wants attention but there is a difference between wanting and needing attention. Help students receive attention through constructive activities. Give them jobs, let them teach you something, invite them to tutor you. Make time for the student to share h/her feelings, thoughts and ideas. Ignore misbehavior when it occurs but not the student. Kindness AND firmness are an effective combination.

- Kindness says- "I care about you and will give you respectful attention."
- Firmness says- "I don't buy into your belief that you need undue attention."

Misguided Power: Imagine the child telling you "Let me help! Give me choices!" Everyone wants power and children can learn to use power constructively. One way to encourage students who seek power is to ask for their help. This helps engage them. Offer choices to the student. Invite h/her to join you in setting up limits, rules and routines for your time together. Encourage the student to bring up h/her concerns.

- Kindness says- "I care about you and appreciate respectful power".
- Firmness says- "I won't let you use power to dominate others."

Continued ▼

Revenge: The student's belief is that "I don't belong and that hurts, but at least I can get even." Try to deal with this by breaking the revenge cycle and not retaliating. Students who engage in this cycle are used to being treated disrespectfully and have learned to expect retaliation in any form. By not retaliating we can begin to change a pattern. Deal with the hurt feelings. One way to do this is to guess as to the source of their pain. You may want to say, "I feel hurt by what happened, so I'm guessing you may feel hurt, too. Would you be willing to tell me what hurt you?" Students may not admit they are hurt, they may say they're mad. Ask them to tell you what they are angry about. Listen carefully, state the students' feelings/explanations back to them and ask whether you've understood correctly. Make amends if you've caused or contributed to the hurt and show you care. Share some times when you have felt hurt by others. Give the students compliments and encourage peers to give each other compliments.

- Kindness says- "I don't want to hurt you or for others to hurt you."
- Firmness says- "I don't want to let you hurt me or anyone else."

Assumed Inadequacy: This belief may be present when students do not feel capable of accomplishing or behaving as other students do. Some students are very quiet and try not to draw any attention to themselves; others become the class clown or use other side-tracking tactics to draw attention away from their feelings of inadequacy. This discouraging belief motivates the student to stop trying. The message to the adult is "Don't give up on me; show me a small step." Try breaking the task into smaller steps or start from a point of understanding and slowly add another step to build the student's confidence. Be persistent. Teach and reteach. AVOID CRITICISM and PITY. FOCUS ON ASSETS. Build on the student's interests. Incorporate the interests into the lesson plans to motivate h/her. When dealing with students who feel inadequate, it can bring out our own feelings of inadequacy. Seek support and consultation.

- Kindness says- "I understand your discouragement."
- Firmness says- "I am not going to feel sorry for you or do your work for you because I know you can do it yourself. I will help you until you experience success in small steps."

Source: *Positive Discipline: A Teacher's A-Z Guide* by Jane Nelsen, Ed.D, Linda Escobar, MA, MFT, Kate Ortalano, Roslyn Duffy and Deborah Owen-Sohocky, MS