

CONDUCT PROBLEMS IN A HISTORY CLASS

When the school year began, Mr. Davis told his American History classes that he had just one major rule for conduct--the Golden Rule. "If you'll treat others as you want to be treated, then we'll get along fine," he said. Then he added, "Just be sure to respect each other's rights, and that includes mine, and we'll all have a good year." Mr. Davis also told his students that he expected them to behave maturely because they were in high school and that if one of them got out of line he would be quite willing to send that student to the school office to be dealt with by the assistant principal.

The classes did indeed function without major disruptions for several weeks. Gradually, however, almost imperceptibly, Mr. Davis began having difficulty getting students settled down to start the daily lesson. And once begun, presentations and class discussions seemed to be conducted with an undercurrent of noise as students whispered, joked, and socialized. Mr. Davis found himself interrupting the lessons more and more often to call for quiet or to remind students of what they were supposed to be doing. Problems were occurring in each class period but were worst in the sixth, the last period of the day. By the end of the fourth week of classes, Mr. Davis had sent two students to the office for persistent talking during class, including talking back to him when he asked them to be quiet. Sixth-period behavior was better for a day or so afterward, but students were soon back to being noisy and inattentive. The following description of the sixth-period class a few days later is typical.

At the beginning of the period, Mr. Davis had written a discussion question on the chalkboard. While he checked roll and returned papers, students were supposed to write a paragraph answering the question in preparation for a class discussion. However, only about half the class actually did the work; other students talked, several sat doing nothing, and two students were out of their seats socializing. Mr. Davis asked one student to sit down, but he didn't. When he told a particularly noisy girl to "close your mouth," she responded, "I can't." During the discussion students who were talking at the beginning of the class complained that they did not understand the question on the board. A few students raised their hands to volunteer responses during the discussion, and Mr. Davis called on them; other students called out responses, sometimes silly ones. Later Mr. Davis assigned questions for the end of the chapter, to be turned in the next day. Most students worked on this assignment in class, although some read magazines or talked instead. Three students passed magazines back and forth until Mr. Davis told them to put the magazines away. The noise level built up and ten minutes before the end of the period, most students had stopped working and were conversing.

What are some things Mr. Davis might do to establish better behavior in his classes? If you were the teacher in this classroom, how might/should you respond?