

# Responsive Classroom<sup>®</sup>

## *Creating Safe, Challenging, and Joyful Elementary Classrooms and Schools*

The *Responsive Classroom* approach is a nationally used, research-backed way of teaching that improves students' social and academic skills and raises teachers' instructional quality. Developed by classroom teachers in 1981 and continually refined to meet schools' needs, the approach consists of practical strategies for helping children build academic and social-emotional competencies day in and day out. In urban, suburban, and rural settings nationwide, educators using these strategies report increased student engagement, academic gains, and fewer discipline problems.

### **Guiding Principles**

The *Responsive Classroom* approach is informed by the work of educational theorists and the experiences of exemplary classroom teachers. Seven principles guide this approach:

- The social curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum.
- How children learn is as important as what they learn: Process and content go hand in hand.
- The greatest cognitive growth occurs through social interaction.
- To be successful academically and socially, children need a set of social skills: cooperation, assertiveness, responsibility, empathy, and self-control.
- Knowing the children we teach—individually, culturally, and developmentally—is as important as knowing the content we teach.
- Knowing the families of the children we teach and working with them as partners is essential to children's education.
- How the adults at school work together is as important as individual competence: Lasting change begins with the adult community.

### **Classroom Practices**

At the heart of the *Responsive Classroom* approach are ten classroom practices:

*Morning Meeting*—gathering as a whole class each morning to greet one another, share news, and warm up for the day ahead

*Rule Creation*—helping students create classroom rules that allow all class members to meet their learning goals

*Interactive Modeling*—teaching children to notice and internalize expected behaviors through a unique modeling technique

*Positive Teacher Language*—using words and tone to promote children's active learning and self-discipline

*Logical Consequences*—responding to misbehavior in a way that respects children, guides them to recognize the effects of their actions, and helps them develop internal controls

*Guided Discovery*—introducing materials using a format that encourages creativity and responsibility

*Academic Choice*—increasing student motivation and learning by allowing students teacher-structured choices in their work

*Classroom Organization*—setting up the physical room in ways that encourage independence, cooperation, and productivity

*Working With Families*—inviting families' insights and helping them understand the school's teaching approaches

*Collaborative Problem-Solving*—using conferencing, role-playing, and other strategies to resolve problems with students

## Schoolwide Implementation

In addition to incorporating *Responsive Classroom* practices into classroom teaching, many schools extend the principles of the approach to areas outside the classroom.

They plan lunchroom and playground procedures, all-school events, and other aspects of whole-school life to ensure consistency in climate and expectations between the classroom and the larger school.

They also align school policies and procedures with *Responsive Classroom* philosophy and allocate resources to support *Responsive Classroom* implementation.

## Research on Effectiveness

Research by the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education has found that schools using *Responsive Classroom* practices see:

1. Improved teacher-student interactions
2. Higher-quality teaching
3. Improved social skills in children
4. Greater student achievement in math and reading
5. More positive feelings toward school among children and teachers

Findings are from the Social and Academic Learning Study (2001–2004) or the *Responsive Classroom* Efficacy Study (2008–2011), or both. For more information, go to [www.responsiveclassroom.org/research](http://www.responsiveclassroom.org/research).

## Ways to Learn About the *Responsive Classroom* Approach

### *Professional Development Services*

Introductory one-day workshops for teachers and administrators

Week-long institutes offered nationwide each summer and on-site at schools

Follow-up workshops and on-site consulting services to support implementation

Resources for site-based study

National conference for administrators and teacher leaders

### *Publications and Other Resources*

Books, DVDs, and CDs for teachers and school leaders

Professional development kits for school-based study

Website with extensive library of free articles: [www.responsiveclassroom.org](http://www.responsiveclassroom.org)

Free newsletter for elementary educators

The *Responsive*® blog, with news, ideas, and advice from and for elementary educators

## About NEFC

Northeast Foundation for Children, Inc. (NEFC) is a nonprofit organization and the developer and sole source provider of the *Responsive Classroom* approach. NEFC was founded in 1981 by four public school educators who had a vision of bringing together social and academic learning throughout the school day. Today NEFC continues to refine the *Responsive Classroom* approach to meet the evolving needs of students, teachers, and schools.



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**Sarcasm**  
Clueless is more than the name of a movie.

**Praise**  
Good Job!

**Verbosity**  
What I need you to do now is, I need you to do...

**Blaming**  
How many times do I need to...

**Manipulation**  
I like the way...

*verbal crutch*  
Like you know

**Guilt**  
The last class was able to do it.

**Voiceovers**  
S: 22  
T: 22  
S: Right angle  
T: Right angle

## EMPOWERING TEACHER LANGUAGE

### REINFORCING

- Descriptive, specific
- Stresses deed, not doer
- Builds competence and confidence

*Grow No Glow*  
You came to the circle on time; now you will have time to enjoy the whole game.

### DIRECTING

- Spoken into silence and attention
- Is precise and concise
- Is concluded with a check for understanding
- Teacher afterthoughts delivered after another signal for silence

Bring your chair and your history project plan sheet to circle. Sit next to your history project partner.

Who can tell us what 3 things are that you must finish before the end of class today?

Those who still have questions, stay with me. The rest of you can begin selecting your books.

### REMINDING

- Before an action or after, to correct
- Often posed as a question
- Ask students to remind each other

Who can remind us/show us how to...

### REDIRECTING

- Response to rule-breaking
- Neutral tone—no sarcasm
- Posed as a statement, not a question
- Changing voices of authority—name the positive action sought
- Specific—name what went wrong

You need to clean up the mess you made.

Ann, take a break.

Claire, change seats with Carl.

### REFLECTING

- Stimulates careful thinking about a product or process
- Is open-ended
- Invites analysis and judgment
- Builds the understanding needed for growth

What's happening right now? What's working, and what's not?

What were the positives of today's transition to lunch?

On a scale of 1-10, how well are our small groups working together? What is your evidence?

What is something you would do differently next time?

# Sample Teacher Language

## Directing

Spoken into silence and attention; precise and concise; often supported by visuals; includes a check for understanding and a clear signal for action

*In five minutes I will ask you to stop work, put your materials away, and replace classroom materials on the supply shelf. (In five minutes repeat the directions.)*

*Bring your chair and your history project planning sheet to circle. Sit next to your history project partner.*

*Lab groups need to gather around their tables first and then send one person to me to get your materials. On the board are five steps you need to take during your lab today. Begin.*

*The beaker is the glass container with measurement markings. Leave your temperature gauge and beaker at the lab table and come to the circle with your lab notebook only.*

*Who can tell us what three things you must finish before the end of class today?*

*Those who still have questions, stay with me. The rest of you can begin selecting your books.*

## Reinforcing

Descriptive, specific, encouraging, non-judgmental; stresses deed, not doer

*You were able to \_\_\_\_\_ and now (state the result)*

*I notice that you ....*

*What do you think helped you?*

*What strategies did you use?*

*I see that ....*

*Tell me about your...*

*I notice that.... How does that make you feel?*

*It helps everyone when you remember to...*

*You did it!*

*That worked. We did it just as we practiced.*

*What was the best thing you learned in the project? What would you change?*

*All of you helped our class by ....*

## Reminding

Encourages planning and reflection

*Tell me how you are going to ...*

*Show us how you did that.*

*Remind us of what we need to do.*

*Who remembers ....?*

*How will that look?*

*Who can tell us...?*

*Remind me what you could say....*

*Think about where you will sit in order to get your best attention.*

*I hear talking. This is quiet time.*

*What strategies can we use to get it right next time?*

*Cleanup has begun.*

*Think about the last time we did this—what worked and what did we say we wanted to change?*

*What strategies did you use to solve that problem successfully?*

*What was hard about ...?*

## Responsive Classroom Language<sup>1</sup>

### “The Power of Teacher Language: Ten Language Tips”

#### 1. Be direct.

Be direct when you want students to do something. Speak into silence and make sure you have the students' attention. Include a check for understanding and a clear signal for action. Ex. “Time to finish cleaning up and get in line. One minute to go.” Or “In five minutes, I will ask you to stop work and put your materials away.”

#### 2. Pay attention to the small things.

A teacher's language is generally most effective when the classroom feels calm and orderly. When you notice the noise just *beginning* to rise above a productive level, that's the time to remind students to use softer voices.

#### 3. Keep it simple and clear.

Don't talk too much. Often a single phrase or directive is all that is needed. Instead of “Class, remember how we talked about how hard it is to hear each other when everyone is calling out at once. It's really important that you raise your hand if you have something to say....” SAY: “Raise your hand to speak” or “Meeting rules”.

#### 4. Be firm when needed.

A simple guideline to keep in mind is: “If you mean no, then say no.” No hedging, no beating around the bush. “No, you may not use the materials in that closet” rather than “I'd rather you didn't use the materials in that closet, okay?”

#### 5. Don't ask a question when you mean to give a command.

When you want children to put their brushes down and look at you, don't say: “Could you please put your brushes down and look at me?” Say: “Put your brushes down and look at me.”

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<sup>1</sup> Brady, Kathryn, Mary Beth Forton, Deborah Porter, and Chip Wood. Rules in School (Greenfield: Northeast Foundation for Children, 2003) 71.

6. Expect the best.

Most children will try to live up to adult expectations. Language is one key way through which we communicate our expectations to children. Ex. “I know the two of you can figure out a fair way to solve this problem. I will give you two minutes. I will come back in two minutes. I will ask you then what you decide.”

7. Invite cooperation.

Teachers can invite cooperation by creating group challenges, offering choices, or just bringing a playful spirit to the task at hand. Ex. It’s writing time and many students are having a hard time focusing on their work. There are lots of side conversations. Get students’ attention and say: “I see lots of people having a hard time concentrating. Your writing work needs to get done. You can choose to focus on it for the next twenty minutes or you can do it this afternoon instead of choice time. Your decision.”

8. Be sincere.

Students know when our language is coming from a genuine place. We’re most effective when we’re being authentic.

9. Pay attention to tone, volume, and body language.

Strive to match your tone, volume, and body language to the message you want to send. Students are keenly aware of the subtle and not-so-subtle alterations in meaning caused by tone and volume. Often times, the quieter you are, the better.

10. Keep your sense of humor.

Remember to never take yourself too, too seriously. Be playful, have fun!