



Using Verbal Reprimands Effectively

Your staff's first reaction when dealing with bullying students will probably be a verbal rebuke or reprimand. To make a verbal rebuke as effective as possible, keep in mind the following suggestions:

- Intervene as early as possible. It is more difficult to stop a behavior that has “gone too far.”
- Approach the students who will be rebuked. Staff members often reprimand students from too far away. If your personal safety is not in danger, then you should be one or two arm lengths away from the students.
- Look the students in the eyes. Tell them to look you in the eyes, if this is culturally appropriate.
- Be brief, clear, and behavior specific. Being specific makes it easier for the students to comply with your request to stop doing what they are doing. For example, saying, “John, you are saying mean things to Emma again. Stop it right now!” is more direct than saying, “Are you making trouble again today, John? How many times have I told you that you have to stop being mean and making trouble?”
- Be firm and determined, but not overly emotional. Your request to stop the behavior should be said in a firm, steady voice with a clear expectation of being obeyed. It is important that you make the students know this is a serious issue without getting too upset or losing control by shouting or making derogatory comments about the students.
- Do not make “empty threats.” If the students do not obey you and stop the behavior, be prepared to tell them what negative consequences will occur if they don't stop immediately. Think about what kinds of consequences you would apply and make sure you can follow through on them, if necessary.
- Do not tell the students they will have a negative consequence that you would not actually be willing to give. It is important that the students trust that you will do what you say you will do.
- If the students involved are not in your classroom or homeroom, follow up with their classroom or homeroom teachers (or the teacher who has the closest relationship to the students) and possibly the staff member responsible for handling discipline issues at your school, so they are aware of the situation and can help enforce the consequences.