

## **HLP 7: ESTABLISH A CONSISTENT, ORGANIZED, AND RESPECTFUL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT VIDEO TRANSCRIPT**

Welcome to our video for HLP #7, Establish a consistent, organized, and respectful learning environment.

There are 22 High-Leverage Practices for special education spread across four domains. Establish a consistent, organized, and respectful learning environment falls under the social/emotional/behavioral domain.

The major sources for content in this video are the HLP in Special Education book published by CEC and the CEEDAR Center, and Supporting and Responding to Behavior: Evidence-Based Classroom Strategies for Teachers document written by Brandi Simonsen and her colleagues for the National PBIS Technical Assistance Center funded by the Office of Special Education Programs.

This video is split into two parts. In part 1, we provide a definition and rationale for this HLP. In part 2, we demonstrate three key components featuring general and special education teachers.

### **Part 1: Definition and Rationale**

Establishing a consistent, organized, and respectful learning environment means the teacher is planful and deliberate in how they set up their classroom space to provide students with clear directions, procedures, and expectations to support their learning and behavioral success.

Establishing a clear, consistent, and positive learning environment serves as a foundational element for many other HLPs. It increases the likelihood of student academic and social behavior success, it increases educator opportunities to engage in effective instructional practices, and it fosters caring and respectful interactions between educators and students.

Special and general educators cannot “make” students learn or behave; they can however proactively create environments to increase the likelihood they do both (Lewis, 2009).

A hallmark of classrooms that are consistent, organized and respectful is the teacher builds strong and mutually respectful relationships with students. Ways to do this include engaging students in setting the classroom rules and routines; showing students respect at all times; and valuing their ethnic, cultural, contextual, and linguistic diversity.

Another hallmark is teachers set clear and consistent rules, routines, and procedures that keep students engaged and on-track across the school day. However, not all students implicitly understand school rules.



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# High-Leverage Practices in Special Education

Effective teachers take deliberate time to explicitly teach students all school and class expectations and procedures using examples, non-examples, modeling, and providing opportunities to practice including feedback on their performance.

Effective teachers employ a continuum of strategies to recognize appropriate behavior. A key is to provide behavior-specific feedback to students that is age and context appropriate.

Effective teachers also actively engage their students by delivering high rates of opportunities to respond or OTRs. OTRs are teacher behaviors that solicit a response from a student. These include individual and choral responding as well gestures and response cards. OTRs help teachers optimize time for instruction.

When students misbehave, effective teachers do not immediately turn to punishment to try and eliminate the unwanted behavior. Instead, they treat behavioral issues as learning errors – which are remediated by re-teaching, not punishment or other criticism.

## **In summary for Part 1:**

Teachers who are deliberate in setting up an environment where students have clear and ongoing information about what is expected and how well they are meeting expectations often achieve tremendous success in terms of students' academic and behavioral performance.

It is also key for teachers to go out of their way to ensure all students are welcome in their classroom. This can be accomplished by setting out to understand students' unique cultural backgrounds, and finding ways to honor and celebrate differences in the classroom. A teacher who demonstrates respect towards all students at all times is in a position to expect her students will do the same. When paired with clear expectations and an organized learning environment, a positive, respectful teacher is well positioned to help all students succeed.



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## **Part 2: Components of this HLP**

There are three key components of this HLP. They are: 1) Classroom expectations and rules should be defined and taught; 2) Use a continuum of strategies to acknowledge appropriate behavior with high frequency; and 3) Optimize instructional time.

### **Component 1: Classroom expectations and rules should be defined and taught.**

Procedures and routines should be clearly defined and explicitly taught. This cannot be accomplished merely in one or two lessons at the start of the year. Instead, teachers should review and reteach expectations regularly throughout the year. Class expectations should be few in number and stated positively such as “be responsible”. Research recommends between three and five expectations. The expectations should also be age appropriate and context specific.

Once expectations are established and defined, they should be taught in the appropriate school setting using examples and non-examples, and modeling. Students need opportunities to practice implementing the expectations, and should receive specific feedback on their performance.

In addition to school and class expectations, classroom routines such as entering and exiting the classroom, how to respond to the teacher’s attention signals, how to seek assistance, and the expectations during activity transitions should also be explicitly taught within the appropriate context.

In sum, critical steps to comply with expectations, procedures and routines should be task analyzed and explicitly taught and practiced with students throughout the school year.

In this first clip, watch as Ms. Bree Barns engages her inclusive 4<sup>th</sup> grade class in a discussion and review of class expectations. She has her students model, and leads them through examples, and non-examples of the expected behavior.

### **Component 2: Use a continuum of strategies to acknowledge appropriate behavior with high frequency.**

The conventional recommended ratio found in the professional literature is for every corrective statement a teacher makes, educators should look for at least 4 opportunities to acknowledge appropriate behavior. The goal is to acknowledge student mastery of social behavioral expectations and compliance with procedures, not point out frequent errors. Teachers can use a variety of methods to acknowledge appropriate behavior. For example, feedback can be oral, gestural, or written.

Many experts argue that praise and other feedback to students should be more specific than saying “yes” or “good job.” It is important to provide specific and contingent feedback statements so students know exactly how they are meeting (or falling short) of expectations. A

specific and contingent statement describes the behavior being praised immediately after the behavior occurs. This is relevant to academic skills as well as behavioral ones. Teachers can provide behavior specific praise as it relates to the classroom expectations. For example, “Maria, I appreciate how your workspace is very neat. You are demonstrating being responsible in the classroom.” Teachers can and should provide these types of statements to individuals, groups of students, or the entire class.

It is not always possible or practical to provide a lengthy, specific feedback statement, so a well-timed gesture such as a thumbs up or smile can also help the student get feedback that they are meeting or exceeding your expectations. Taking time to explicitly explain what your various gestures and facial expressions mean can be helpful for students who may not have the capacity to correctly interpret your non-verbal cues.

Within school-wide initiatives to support behavior, such as positive behavioral interventions and supports, teachers are encouraged to respond to appropriate behavior with tickets or other tokens that let the student know they are meeting or exceeding expectations. Tickets can be exchanged for various reinforcers as established by the teacher or school. Any teacher can use this practice, it is not limited to those working within schools implementing PBIS.

In this clip, Ms. Elisheba Cornelius is wrapping up a lesson on contractions. She provides her students with specific and contingent oral praise and uses her school-wide PBIS ticket reinforcement system to provide further feedback to her students that she is pleased with their performance. In the second part, she meets after the lesson with two target students to provide additional reinforcement.

*(Play Clip)*

### **Component 3: Optimize Instructional Time.**

Teachers who establish and maintain a consistent, respectful and organized learning environment are in excellent shape to ensure students are not losing any time unnecessarily to behavior problems or other related disruptions. Students win when their chances to learn is maximized.

Special educators should strive for a balance of direct instruction, multiple opportunities for students to respond with high rates of feedback, and high rates of success (defined as 80% or better proficiency on tasks).

A key practice within the need to optimize instructional time is to provide lots of opportunities to respond or OTRs. OTRs can be social and academic requests and should be given throughout the day. These opportunities should vary on the specifics of the lesson and capacity of the student. That said, providing students with lots of chances to show their learning and understanding of procedures helps build fluency and long-term memory.



# High-Leverage Practices in Special Education

In addition to actively engaging students during instruction, OTRs help teachers gauge student understanding of a concept. Instructional choices can therefore be made and adjusted based off of students' responses.

A variety of OTRs can be embedded directly into teacher-directed instruction. For example, in addition to the traditional individual responding, a teacher could use unison responding, premade response cards, and wipe off boards.

In sum, this component of establishing a consistent, respectful, organized learning environment is part of several HLPs, and is thus one of the most important practices in a teachers' repertoire.

In this clip, Ms. Vina Nguyen is providing small group instruction in a middle school science class. Because students are rotating between several groups, she works quickly with her students during a demonstration to keep them on task and engaged by providing lots of OTRs at varying levels of difficulty.

*(Play Clip)*

In summary, teachers are responsible for creating a positive, proactive, and organized learning environment for all students. To do so requires time be taken at the beginning of the year, and at regular intervals throughout the year. Teachers should not assume students arrive at school knowing how to behave. Instead, providing clear expectations, and explaining or modeling what those expectations look like in specific settings is essential.

Thanks for watching, and please continue to use resources from this series on high-leverage practices.



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