

Critical Management Skills for Communicating with Students

INTASC Standard #3: Learning Environments

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- 11-1** Define and give examples of critical management skills.
- 11-2** Give examples of signals for gaining attention and how to teach students to respond to them.
- 11-3** Describe ways of effectively communicating behavior expectations to students.
- 11-4** Identify the important characteristics/attributes of acknowledgments of appropriate behavior.
- 11-5** Summarize guidelines to follow when using group management games.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

11-1 CRITICAL MANAGEMENT SKILLS IN LESSONS AND ACTIVITIES

- 11-1a** Responding to Diversity when Using Critical Management Skills
- 11-1b** The Challenging Class and Critical Management Skills
- 11-1c** Mrs. Bean and Critical Management Skills

11-2 GAINING ATTENTION

- 11-2a** Signals for Attention
- 11-2b** Student Responses to Signals
- 11-2c** Using the Gaining Attention Strategy
- 11-2d** Responding to Diversity when Gaining Attention
- 11-2e** The Challenging Class and Gaining Attention

11-3 COMMUNICATING BEHAVIOR EXPECTATIONS

- 11-3a** How to Choose Expectations
- 11-3b** How to Communicate Expectations
- 11-3c** Follow Through

11-3d Responding to Diversity when Communicating Behavior Expectations

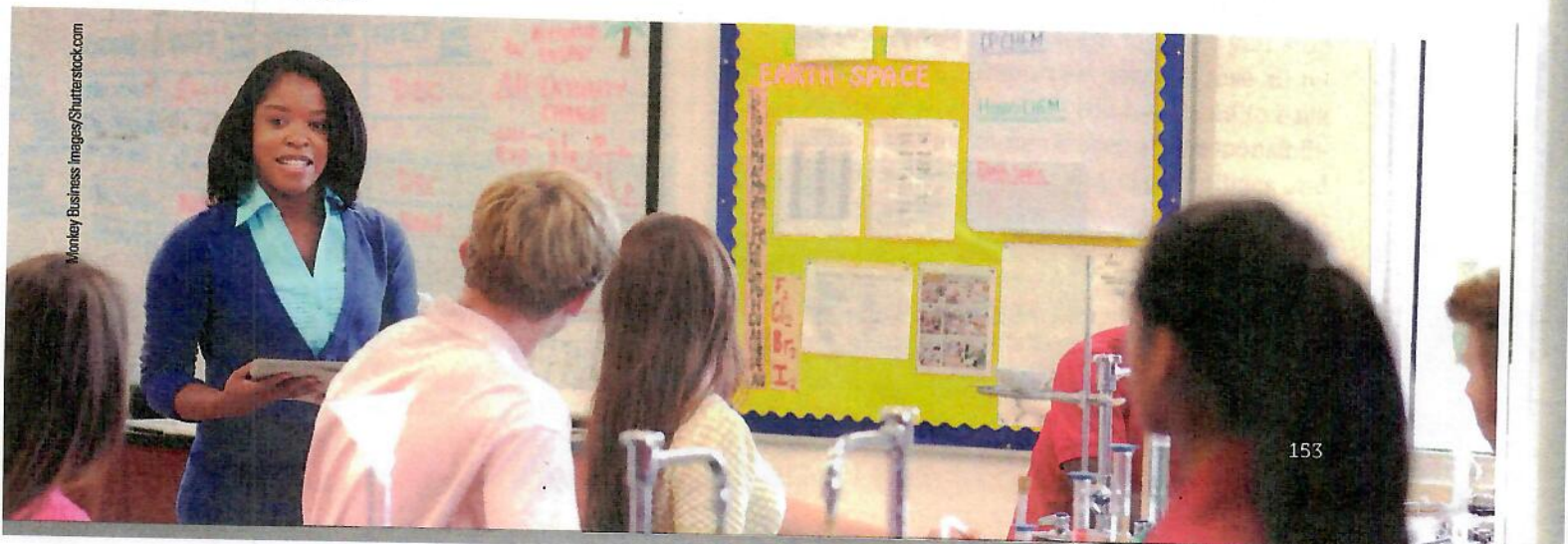
11-3e The Challenging Class and Communicating Behavior Expectations

11-4 ACKNOWLEDGING APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR

- 11-4a** Acknowledging Frequently
- 11-4b** Acknowledging Specifically
- 11-4c** Acknowledging Sincerely
- 11-4d** Acknowledging Fairly
- 11-4e** Acknowledging Important Behaviors
- 11-4f** Responding to Diversity when Acknowledging Appropriate Behavior
- 11-4g** The Challenging Class and Acknowledging Appropriate Behavior

11-5 GROUP MANAGEMENT GAMES

- 11-5a** Game Guidelines



Introduction

Teachers establish a solid foundation for classroom management by connecting with each student; creating a diversity responsive environment, and implementing universal and selected behavioral interventions. Once this foundation is built,

teachers are able to focus on the management issues that apply to the lessons and activities they plan throughout the school year.

11-1 Critical Management Skills in Lessons and Activities

Teachers must develop certain basic, essential management skills that they employ in each lesson and activity in order to support appropriate behavior, prevent behavior problems, preserve instructional time, and promote learning. In other words, they must develop a positive context for teaching and learning in *each* lesson and activity they teach. While there are many management tools available to teachers, we will present seven **critical management skills** in detail (see Figure 11.1). Gaining attention, communicating behavior expectations, and acknowledging appropriate behavior are the three critical management skills that are described in this chapter. Four additional critical management skills—monitoring student behavior, arranging the room, planning for logistics, and managing transitions—are described in the next chapter. We have also included suggestions for responding to diversity when using critical management skills and planning for a challenging class.

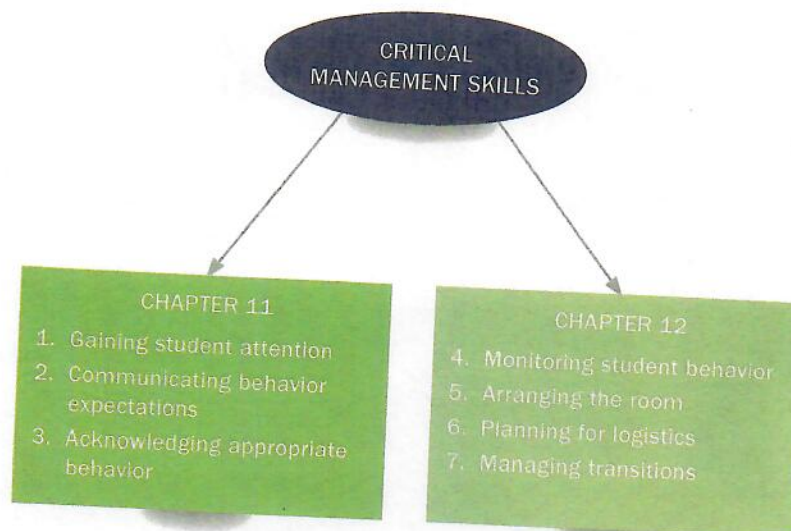
The management practices described are supported by research. Simonsen et al (2008), for example, conducted a literature search to identify evidence-based classroom management practices. They found 20 general practices that met their criteria. These included:

- High classroom structure
- Physical arrangement that minimizes distraction and crowding
- Posting, teaching, reviewing, and providing feedback on expectations
- Active supervision (monitoring)
- Using a continuum of strategies to acknowledge appropriate behavior

11-1a Responding to Diversity when Using Critical Management Skills

You will need to consider the diversity of your students as you plan for behavior management in a lesson or activity—just as you do when planning instruction. Perhaps you have students with cognitive,

Figure 11.1 Critical Management Skills



physical, emotional/behavioral, or learning disabilities in your class. Perhaps you have English language learners (ELLs) of various proficiency levels. Perhaps you have students from a variety of cultural (racial, ethnic, socioeconomic) backgrounds. We will suggest strategies for each critical management skill that are meant to meet the varied needs of your students, but we will try to avoid stereotyping and overgeneralizing. Remember that behavior interventions are not culture-, disability-, or otherwise label-specific. In other words, we can't say, "This student is ____; therefore, ____ strategy will work." We can, however, identify interventions that are worth trying and will help you differentiate your management strategies. If you are familiar with a variety of strategies and knowledgeable about diversity and your students, you will be more likely to find ways to support appropriate behavior for all students in your class.

11-1b The Challenging Class and Critical Management Skills

A class or group of students is made up of individuals, but it also has a character or dynamic of its own. We've all heard teachers say something like, "This is the toughest group I've ever had!" We use the term *challenging class* to refer to a group of students who really keep their teacher on his toes. A challenging class may be more active, more talkative, or more demanding. It may be less compliant, less attentive, less self-controlled, or less skilled. It might be more impulsive, more distractible, more irritable, more competitive, or more argumentative. Perhaps, overall, it is a group with a great deal of energy that needs to be channeled positively. However it is described, this is a class whose behavior interferes with learning even when your usual universal interventions and critical management skills are used.

If you are a practicum student, intern, or substitute teacher—that is, if it's not your class—it may be best to plan for each class as if it is a challenging class. When students don't have their "real" teacher, behavior problems can increase because students are anxious or need to test to find limits. Also, any class can be a challenging class on early release days, picture day, and so on.

What can you do to be successful with a challenging class? Here are some ideas.

- Often, providing more structure will help. This might mean tightening up the class rules and routines or teaching more social skills.
- It may be that students need to be more thoroughly involved in developing class rules, in problem solving, and in making choices.
- Spending additional time building connections with students and fostering a sense of community among students will be time well spent.
- Finally, a challenging class will require that you strengthen the critical management strategies you use. Try planning for more predictability, consistency, supervision, encouragement, and prompts as you develop your lesson or activity.

In the response to intervention (RTI) and positive behavior support (PBS) approaches, these strengthened or intensified critical management strategies are sometimes used as part of secondary prevention for small groups or individuals who do not respond to interventions at the primary prevention level (see Chapter 10 for more information).

In this chapter, specific suggestions for the challenging class for each of the critical management skills will be provided. In addition, several group management games will be described. Making behavior management fun whenever possible—for both the teacher and the students—is helpful in the same way that making instruction fun is important for academic learning and motivation.

An important note: It is also possible that a class develops challenging behaviors because students are reacting to *too* much structure. Be careful that you are not falling into the trap of enacting increasingly restrictive rules ("Stand in line with your hands at your sides at all times, looking straight ahead, and leaving 10 inches between you and the person in front of you.") and increasingly severe punishments ("Losing one recess didn't seem to make you stop what you are doing. Tomorrow you will lose all recesses for the day."). Instead, you may need to back off and give students more choices and responsibilities, involve them in developing class policies and procedures, and so on.

The IES Practice Guide *Reducing Behavior Problems in the Elementary School Classroom* describes strong evidence for its Recommendation 2: Modify the classroom learning environment to decrease problem behavior. The panel states that "many effective classroom-focused interventions to decrease

students' problematic behavior alter or remove factors that trigger them. These triggers can result from a mismatch between the classroom setting or academic demands and students' strengths, preferences, or skills. Teachers can reduce the occurrence of inappropriate behavior by revisiting and reinforcing classroom behavior expectations; rearranging the classroom environment, schedule, or learning activities to meet students' needs; and/or individually adapting instruction to promote high rates of student engagement and on-task behavior." (Epstein et al. 2008)

11-1c Mrs. Bean and Critical Management Skills

Read about Mrs. Bean and the activity she is planning for her class in Teachers in Action 11.1. Then, as you read this chapter and Chapter 12, think about how Mrs. Bean could use the critical management skills to support appropriate behavior during her planned activity. You may imagine that Mrs. Bean is teaching any grade level.

TEACHERS IN ACTION 11.1: A LOOK AT MRS. BEAN'S PLANNING

Mrs. Bean is planning an activity that's part of her emphasis on social justice themes. The students have been learning about the importance of taking action when they encounter injustice. Recently, there have been incidents of kids being physically bullied at school and in the community because of differences in what they wear for religious reasons (e.g., head scarves, turbans). The students have chosen to begin acting for social justice by making posters to put up around the school and community that send a message against hate and intolerance of religious diversity. They have already brainstormed specific ideas that they want to communicate on the posters. Today, they will be making the posters, which are intended to be creative and eye-catching and will be made from a wide variety of materials. Mrs. Bean wants to support her students in completing the posters in the allotted time; using materials and equipment wisely and safely; sharing and taking turns; encouraging each other; cleaning up; and generally channeling their energy, excitement, and passion for social justice into a successful, completed project.

11-2 Gaining Attention

The first critical management skill is **gaining attention**. It is critical to be able to gain students' attention whenever you need it. One time you'll need it is at the beginning of lessons and activities. You'll also need to regain attention at various other points during your lessons and activities—for example, when you need to give additional directions. A great deal of instructional time can be wasted when teachers have to repeat instruction or directions because they didn't have the students' attention. In addition, students may learn that they don't need to listen to the teacher because everything will be repeated to them. It's important that you plan how to ask for attention and how you want the class to respond.

11-2a Signals for Attention

Teachers can ask for attention through various types of signals. **Signals for attention** can be verbal, visual, sounds, or combinations of the three (see Example 11.1). Signals can also be interactive or contagious. Examples of *verbal* signals are "Attention, please," and "Eyes up here." Raising your arm or making mime movements are *visual* signals. Examples of signaling for attention by using *sounds* are clapping your hands and playing music. You can also use *combination* signals—for example, sound the clicker and then say "Attention, please." **Interactive signals** can be effective as well. For example, the teacher chants, "One, two, three, eyes on me," and the students reply, "One, two, eyes on you," or the teacher claps a rhythm and the students clap back. **Contagious signals** (see Photo 11.1) can be useful, too. For example, the teacher can use a visual signal, such as hands on head, that the students are expected to imitate when they see it. It spreads gradually as students notice; in other words, the signal is contagious.

EXAMPLE 11.1: SIGNALS FOR ATTENTION

Verbal	Visual	Sounds
• Say "I need your attention"	• Raising hand	• Clapping
• Say "Listen, please"	• Arm movements	• Bell
• Say "Give me 5"	• Clock on screen	• Echo clapping

(Continued from previous page)

Verbal	Visual	Sounds
• Tell a knock-knock joke	• Turn off lights	• Music
• Use Simon Says	• Project a visual related to instruction	• Whistle
• Say "Eyes up here"	• Pop question on the board	• Knock on desk
• Change the level and tone of voice	• Project a cartoon or joke	• Gavel or Gong

than it would to stand in front of the room with your arms folded or to say "I need your attention" (without shouting).

The signal you choose also depends on how quickly you want attention. You may want something noticeable enough that you can get everyone to pay attention immediately. Or, you may prefer that they finish what they are saying before they turn to you; in that case, use a gradual, contagious signal. If you want them to make a transition (such as going back to their desks or putting their materials away) and then give you their attention, use a signal that incorporates time limits, such as counting backwards or singing a song of a familiar length.

11-2b Student Responses to Signals

Once you have decided on the signal you will use, you need to decide what you want the students to do in response to your signal. You want them to give you their attention, but what exactly will that look like? Do you want them to stop where they are? Sit down? Look at you? Listen? Should they put down any materials they are using? Stop talking? Freeze? You'll need to specify how you want them to respond.

You'll also need to *teach* the students the signal/response routine at the beginning of the year (see Chapters 10 and 18 for additional information on teaching classroom routines). Teach the signals you'll be using as well as how to respond to the signal. See Mini-Lesson 11.1 as an example.

Once you have taught the gaining attention routine to your students, at the beginning of each lesson or activity tell the students which signal you'll use and which response you'll expect. Periodically, you may decide that students need a review or that a new signal/response routine is necessary for a particular lesson/activity.

11-2c Using the Gaining Attention Strategy

It's important that you *implement* the signal/response strategy correctly and consistently. Consider the following recommendations:

- When you give the signal, position yourself so you can see the faces of all your

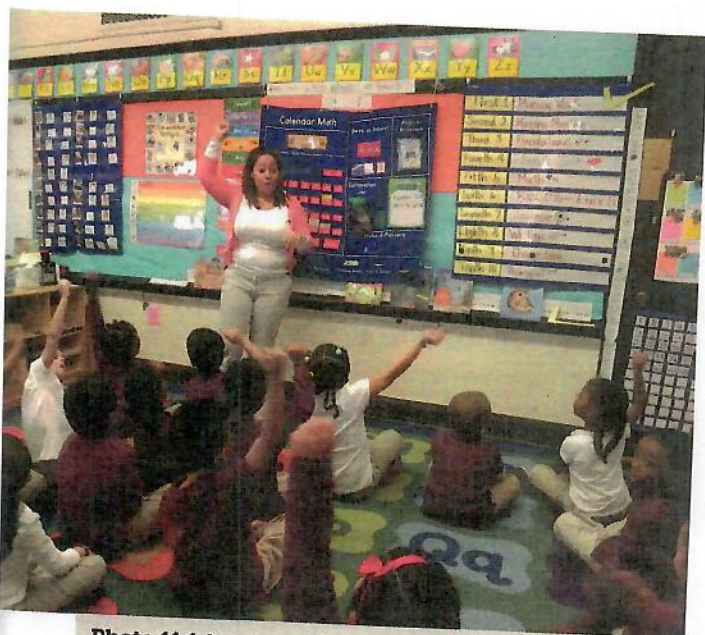


Photo 11.1 A teacher raising her hand is one example of a contagious signal.

The signal you choose will depend on how difficult you believe it will be to gain your students' attention in a given situation. If students are close to you, are quiet, and are facing you, it's very easy to gain attention. If students are talking, making noise, moving around, or intensely focused on an activity, it's more difficult to gain their attention. For example, if students are working in labs with partners, it would work better to clap your hands or turn the lights off and on

Summary

In this chapter, we have discussed three critical management skills—gaining attention, communicating behavior expectations, and acknowledging appropriate behavior—for teachers to build in to every lesson and activity. In addition, we have provided recommendations that will help teachers increase their

diversity responsive management skills and suggestions for the challenging class. Making classroom management planning an integral part of lesson and activity planning will prevent behavior problems and enhance learning. In the next chapter, four more critical management skills will be described.

Key Terms & Definitions

Acknowledging appropriate behavior: Noticing, and letting students know you noticed, when they are doing the right thing.

Behavior expectations: Specific rules, routines, and social skills that apply during a particular lesson or activity.

Contagious signal: Where the teacher uses a visual signal, such as hands on head, that the students are expected to imitate when they see it; it spreads gradually as students notice.

Critical management skills: Basic, essential management skills that are used in each lesson or activity in order to support appropriate behavior, prevent behavior problems, preserve instructional time, and promote learning.

Gaining attention: Means a teacher has strategies for making sure he/she has the attention of all students before teaching and can regain attention as needed.

Group management games: Techniques for making classroom management fun and motivating where verbal acknowledgments are paired with rewards for the whole class.

Important behaviors: Behaviors that are important in life and at work as well as in school.

Interactive signals: Signals that involve an action on the part of the students as well as the teacher.

Signals for attention: Strategies that are used to gain student attention, including verbal, visual, sound, or a combination of these.

Portfolio Pointers

- In classroom management documents, highlight planning of behavior expectations for various class activities such as discussions, group work, teacher and student presentations. (InTASC Standard 3: Learning Environments)
- In video clips, show communication with students for attention, expectations, and acknowledgments that are respectful and responsive to diversity. (InTASC Standard 3: Learning Environments)