

### **Sub Suggestion: Avoiding Sarcasm**

One of the fundamental principles of human behavior is that people ultimately respond better to positive consequences than to negative consequences. Using negative and coercive methods, including sarcasm, to manage student behavior might result in immediate compliance, but that compliance will usually be short lived. These short-term gains will ultimately be wiped out by long-term losses in the form of recurring and escalating inappropriate student behaviors.

It should be the goal of every teacher to interact in a positive way with students and foster mutual respect. Probably nothing lowers a student's respect for a teacher more quickly than does the use of sarcasm. Whether you speak sarcastically about an individual or the class as a whole, belittling and/or ridiculing students destroys a positive classroom environment and may prompt students to lash out with inappropriate comments of their own. The use of sarcasm suggests that you, as the teacher, do not know any better way of interacting and sets the stage for similar negative interactions between students themselves.

The following examples illustrate how the same point can be made both with and without using sarcasm:

Communicating With Sarcasm Teacher: "My, my, my. Aren't you a smart class. It looks like by age 12 you've all finally learned to find your seat and sit down after the bell. And to think it only took you half of the morning to do it. I don't know if there is another class in the entire school as smart or quick as you guys."

Communicating Without Sarcasm Teacher: "One of the expectations of this class is to be seated and ready to go to work when the bell rings. I appreciate those of you who were quietly seated when the bell rang today."

In both of the previous examples the teacher is telling students that they are expected to be seated and ready to work when the bell rings, and that on this day most of them were not. The difference is that when sarcasm is used the whole class is belittled and put on the defensive. When the teacher talks without sarcasm, expectations are taught/re-taught without pointing fingers and students who did behave appropriately are reinforced.

Though on the surface sarcasm may seem witty and even humorous, in reality it is usually cruel and demeaning. Sarcasm has no place in the classroom. Strive instead for positive interactions with students. Reinforce what students are doing "right" whenever possible and communicate expectations in a straightforward matter-of-fact manner.