

Responsive Classroom Language in a Camp Setting

How language can increase your effectiveness

Don't look behind you

or

Keep your attention focused forward on me

Which direction is easier to follow?

What is responsive classroom?

Responsive classroom is a teaching philosophy that believes that teaching is most effective when educating the whole child -socially, emotionally, and intellectually- and believes that youth need to feel cared for and part of a community in order to learn.

Why responsive classroom?

Even though "classroom" is in the name, I believe responsive classroom is perfectly suited for a camp setting because we do more than teach bible study. We help children work through complex emotions like homesickness and independence and we teach students how to live in a community setting and how to deal with social interactions like bullying and inclusiveness.

Responsive classroom utilizes a *positive language* that guides participants to mutual goals, reduces the need for behavior redirection, and aligns counselors on the same side as campers like a counselor or coach instead of a "rule enforcing" principal or cop by offering positive reinforcement and clear directions.

What responsive classroom is not

Responsive classroom is not system where you, as a leader, give up control or compromise your values or objectives. It is simply a way to receive a bigger buy in from your audience by using a language that encourages students to be good, rather than discourages them from being bad. more on this later

Responsive classroom operates under two assumptions

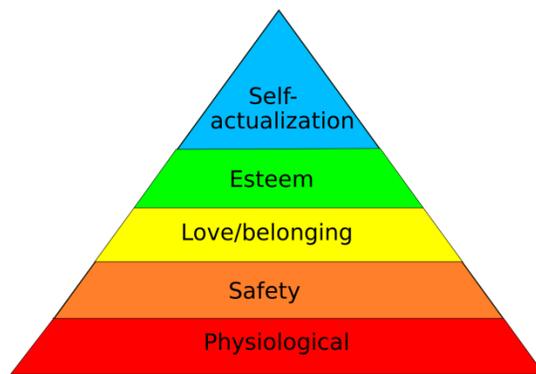
<p>Kids want to be good</p> <p>They seek approval from adults and their peers.</p> <p>Said a different way, kids seek attention, and would rather receive attention for being good than for being bad as long as kids believe they believe it is possible to receive good attention</p>	<p>Kids need to feel safe and cared for in order to learn and grow</p> <p>Maslows Hierarchy of needs</p>
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When kids “act bad” it’s generally because they forget (or don’t know how) to “be good” and often need a reminder or path to “get back to good”

Often, once you show the “bad kids” a path to receiving positive attention, they will be the most eager to please you because the good attention is not something they are used to receiving.

When you make the change in your mind that “kids are bad and need to be controlled” to “kids are good and need to be guided” you will gain more patience for your campers.

Easiest way to give campers a path to be good? use *positive language*, Clearly define your rules. Have a group discussion to outline bunk and group rules. Involve them in the discussion so they begin to think about why rules are in place. Encourage them to reframe their rules in a positive manner. If they say something like “Don’t be mean” ask them what they should do instead.



If a student is hungry, she will have a hard time focusing on multiplication tables

If a student does not feel safe around peers, he will not raise his hand to volunteer in front of the class

If a camper does not have a caring relationship with the counselor standing in front of her, how can she believe that God cares for her from far away?

Self actualization is where true learning takes place, either grasping core concepts. It is our job to facilitate the lower levels of the pyramid so that students are free to truly learn.

Once we understand that kids want to be good and that they need to feel safe and cared for in order to grow, we can adjust our interactions with students in order to satisfy both needs at once.

Positive Language

To me, this is really the foundation of responsive classroom and the main point of this workshop. Positive language is not “great job, you’re a star”. Positive language is framing the way you speak generally into things that you should do instead of things you shouldn’t do. If I say “Don’t look behind you” our brains have trouble registering the negative and instead we focus on the positive and wonder “what’s behind me”. Instead if you say “Face forward and focus your eyes on me” you accomplish the goal using a command that is easier to follow. Using positive language also helps speak to children, who still need direction from adults, in a way that is more respectful and ‘adult like’. Think, when’s the last time you scolded a peer in the same tone that you’ve scolded a child. Positive language consistently gives a path to being good and creates a caring relationship.

Examples of positive vs negative language

“stop playing with your food” “Remember to eat using your manners”

“Don’t mess around in the cabin, we’re late” “Thank you to those of you who are ready early.

Let’s move quickly to make sure we’re ready to leave”

“Justin, quit messing around!” “Justin, refocus on your worksheet”

This is going to sound different for elementary school, middle school, and high school

1. reinforcing language (thank you’s and notices)

“I notice that Jerry is quiet and ready to begin”

“Thank you to everyone who remembered dining hall exit procedure”

“Shoutout to Sarah and Megan who helped to take water jugs to the field”

Reinforcing language directs campers to the behavior you want by taking notice to the good things they are already doing or remembering to do. This can be public or private “Michael, you’re doing much better remembering to get your wet clothes to the line. I didn’t even have to remind you today”

Tips for better reinforcing language. Be specific. “great job” “great job speaking up today in class. you were insightful.”

Good reminding language is genuine. Kids are smart. They’ll know if you’re lying. Kids tend to improve upon their strengths, so if you give genuine feedback, they’ll take notice.

2. Reminding Language (before problems arise, or early as they are happening)

“Who can name 1 of the 3 rules we have for the bathrooms?”

“Remember our previous discussion about cafeteria noise?”

“Before we break for free time, go over the free time rules in your head. If you don’t remember them, ask a friend or ask me”

“Just a reminder, lights out is at 9. that’s in 5 minutes”

Frontload frontload frontload

Frontloading is the difference between

“hey, when we get to the road, everyone focus on getting across quickly without running, and then you can resume your conversations” and “hurry up hurry hurry, Michelle! you’re holding us up comeon!”

Use your Bunk/Group Contracts. If you’re only using them mid to late week when behavior starts to break down, you’re missing out. If your contract says something about including everyone, on tuesday you can say “Hey, our contract says to include everyone. It’s Tuesday, do you know everyone’s name yet?”

3. Redirection

Typically, before you get to this step, you should have gone through a couple reminders and reinforcers. If you find yourself redirecting constantly, you're doing it wrong. The other two steps are steps to avoid redirection. Remember, kids want to be good, so we have to remember we're not condemning the child, but we can condemn an action.

Effective redirection 1. names the action that needs to be stopped, and 2. offers the correct direction to move towards.

"Sarah, you're knocking into people in the gaga pit. Slow down and be aware of the people around you"

"Aaron, it's hard for me to take you seriously if you're whining. If you have concerns, please speak to me in a respectful manner."

Mike, stop whispering. Close your eyes and get to sleep.

Bits & Pieces

Remember, the way we speak can build people up or break them down. Choose to give people tools and build them up.

Children are always watching. They are learning how to interact with their peers by watching how you interact with yours. Also, to them, your teenage jr counselor is your peer. Be mindful of how you speak to everybody. Sometimes, minor disagreements with peers can be resolved within earshot to demonstrate how adults resolve conflict.