Be Brief, Be Positive, Be Gone

www.bryan-harris.com

I don't recall where I first received this gem of classroom management advice. It might have been from a veteran teacher who had seen it all and figured it out on their own. Maybe I read it in a book somewhere. Regardless, this sage advice is both simple and powerful.

Be Brief

I am reminded that our directions and instructions to kids should be brief and one at a time. Some of our kids struggle with multi-part or layered directions. They are more likely to experience success and compliance when our directions are clear, to the point, and brief. I am also reminded of the admonition of Fred Jones (the Positive Classroom Discipline guy) who recognized that the most common classroom management strategy employed in American classrooms is *nagging*. I can just see the thought bubbles above the heads of our kids, "OK, I get it already. Too many words…arghhh."

Be Positive

I often wonder what some of our *hardest-to-handle* kids think of the classroom / learning environment. I wonder if they are thinking things like, "You say you believe in me. You say you believe I can do better, but all I hear about are the things I do wrong." For some kids it must be frustrating to have the negative constantly pointed out to them. But you say, "Bryan, that's because *they are* always doing something negative!" And the kids probably know that, too. However, in order to get kids to change their thinking and behavior, we need to help them start to see (and believe) that much of what they do **is** right and acceptable. It is exactly our most negative kids that need us to be positive and supportive.

Be Gone

After giving a direction, a task, or setting an expectation – be gone. That is, literally, we need to give students the space (and dignity) to accomplish tasks without having someone hover over them. Some students, as long as they are being watched (with the ever-present "teacher look") will play the *You Can't Make Me* game. It's almost as if they are saying, "Back off and give me some space and then maybe I'll do it."