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SPEAKERS

Chris

Welcome to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast, the podcast for special educators who are looking for personal and professional development. I'm your host Dr. Christine Reeve. For more than 20 years, I've worn lots of hats in special education. But my real love is helping special educators like you. This podcast will give you tips and ways to implement research based practices in a practical way in your classroom, to make your job easier and more effective.

Welcome back to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast. I'm Chris Reeve, and I'm your host, and I hope that your year is getting off to an incredible start.

We here at the podcast are in the midst of finishing up our series of five tips to start your year off right in different areas. I've talked about five tips for starting the year, five tips for using visuals to the max, and five tips for using reinforcement effectively. And I'll make sure that those are all linked in the show notes.

Today, I'm going to focus on my five best tips for behavior and classroom management best practices. So if you're wondering how to get the classroom chaos under control a bit, I probably have a tip that will help. I also have some free downloads for you that I think can help with classroom management that I will share later in the episode. So let's get started.

Tip number one is that you need a classroom management system. Classroom management best practices would be you need a classroom management system. While that may seem obvious to some, it isn't always obvious. If you teach in a special ed classroom, or your classroom is providing support to other's classrooms.

if you're looking for more information on this topic, please visit the website at <https://www.acr179.com>

If you're teaching in your own classroom, whether it's a resource classroom or self contained classroom, your classroom still needs some system of classroom management.

If you support students in other's classrooms, then you need a way to adapt their classroom management system to meet your students' needs. All having a classroom management system means, because it does not necessarily mean that you need to have a stoplight or clip chart, all it means is that you need to have routines and clear expectations that are linked to expected outcomes like reinforcers for following the rules.

Often in special education classrooms, I do this with visuals, meaning pictures and words, or just written classroom rules. I believe strongly that all classrooms, even graduate classes, need to have clearly defined routines that everyone knows.

When I taught graduate school, all of my students knew when something would be due, how it was going to be graded, they had a rubric that showed them how it was going to be graded. They had very clearly defined expectations. And I have a free set of classroom rules in the free resource library. And you can sign up or join or if you're already a member, grab them in the library. And you can find them at autismclassroomresources.com/rules.

I put the rules on every table and in every work area and we review them at the beginning of the year after every activity. I do this regardless of what age I'm working with. Now it might look different the way that I review them and the way the rules are presented, depending on the level of your students' skills, language skills, cognitive skills, all those kinds of things.

But I tie thumbs up, working for token systems, point systems, whatever you have and whatever you call them, I tie those to the classroom rules so that students receive reinforcement for appropriate behavior.

I tend to avoid penalty systems because they frustrate most students. And I find that reinforcement in general works better. But I have had students for whom a penalty needed to be put in place. I just made those decisions on an individual basis. Students are more likely to buy into a reinforcement system type of program.

So in each transition, we review the rules. If the rules were followed, then the student gets some type of reinforcer. It might be something that they access right away, or it might be a token or a point into point system, but they get something for following the rules.

And that leads me to number two, which is in addition to the rules, we need to teach our routines explicitly. Most of our students in special ed whether they are in a general ed class or special ed class, are the kinds of students that need explicit instruction. What I mean by that is that we have to

are the kinds of students that need explicit instruction. What I mean by that is that we have to deliberately make time to teach things like the classroom expectations and routines.

So if you're in elementary, for instance, or even some secondary classrooms, you want to have specific steps of routines about how and where the students are expected to line up. How are they supposed to contribute in class? What behavior is expected when they are walking in the hallway? These are all things that I've even seen high school students who are in gifted classes struggle with when they have social skills and communication disabilities. So they don't understand that in this classroom, I raise my hand, but in this classroom, I can call out.

I use social stories and visual rules to convey these expectations to students in a way that most of them can understand. I actually have a whole set of classroom routine social stories that I just updated, and you can grab it on TPT if you want at [autismclassroomresources.com/routines](https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Autism-Classroom-Routines-Social-Stories-11111111). I use these at the beginning of the year to help students know what is expected in different situations.

As expectations shift, I shift the stories or as they become more familiar, we stop reading them. I will read them at the beginning of the year, perhaps at morning meeting, or I'll pull them out during a reading time. I'll pull them out when students are struggling with one of the issues like waiting to be called on when they raise their hand, that's an opportunity to review it one to one and do some more explicit instruction.

The third tip is that classroom management best practice strategies can be individualized. Let's face it, you wouldn't be teaching special education if students didn't need individualized strategies. That's what we do. So, I worked very early on the concept of what is fair and what it means that it doesn't mean that everyone gets the same thing. It means that everyone is on equal footing.

And one way that I do this with a lot of our students to help them understand is that, I wear glasses, you don't wear glasses, well, if we're going to be fair, you need to wear glasses, and I give them my glasses. And trust me, no one can see through my glasses. And that's a good indication of how doing the same accommodation for me makes your life more difficult. And you know, when I do it for this student is going to make it harder for him to do it rather than easier. So one student might be able to earn 10 points before he gets access to the reinforcer. And another may need to get a reinforcer for two things, or two points.

And we talk about you know, you have a bandaid on your arm. Okay, well, I guess everybody has to have a bandaid. And they'll say that's silly. Well, that's what you're saying. It's not a matter of everybody, we have the same expectations for everybody, we vary how we reinforce them, in the same way that we vary the kinds of math problems that we give them, which no one seems to object to.

So I really work on that. I actually have a set of social stories about that as well. I'll make sure there's

a link in the show notes. I just remembered it on what is fair and what does it mean? Because I know it's a huge issue for you. It may also be a huge issue for some of the staff that you work with as well.

That leads me to number four, which is that in a classroom management system, students need to win. If they only constantly lose, and they dig themselves into a hole that they can't climb out of, they aren't going to buy into the system. I know I wouldn't.

Many of our students are smart enough to see whether or not they're going to get to the reinforcer or not. And if they see that they're not, and that's the case most of the time, they're going to stop trying. You know, if they don't feel like they ever reach the prize in the system, then they will default to using negative behaviors that much more consistently result in a predictable outcome.

I noted in Episode 28 when I talked about classroom management systems, that because, as people, we tend to abhor a vacuum. And if we can't figure out what makes things run, we'd rather have things be predictable, but not always be positive than unpredictable and positive. And the same thing is true if a student can't figure out how to get to the prize of the system or how to win. They will give up and go for predictability. And there negative behavior typically has a long history of getting predictable outcomes. And so that prediction makes a person feel more comfortable. And that's where we see a lot of that shift.

And finally, number five, I highly recommend choosing a classroom management system that allows you to praise appropriate behavior publicly. This is one of the reasons that I use reinforcement systems and typically don't use penalties. I want to call out people who are doing the right thing, and attend to them and recognize them for that, rather than holding up as an example, the person who's doing the wrong thing.

So this means a system in which a student is getting attention and recognition for the things that they did, right. And we're addressing negative behavior as privately as possible. Holding a student's problem behavior up for the class to see by calling them out, or attending them to them loudly to get them back on track, holds up an example that misbehaving is what gets the focus of attention. Whereas when I do the right thing, nobody notices or the teacher says, Hey, good job at my desk, which is not nearly as powerful as that.

So if you have a penalty only system, you don't have the opportunity built into the system to recognize and reinforce the appropriate behavior regularly. And it's important to recognize that you are creating a classroom system not just for yourself to implement, but to be implemented across environments with all the different staff that work with this individual. And that means your paras in your classroom. And that means that needs to be something that puts what you see as important forward, like praising the positive.

So you may have no problem giving attention to the positive things all the time, and the penalty

So you may have no problem giving attention to the positive things all the time, and the penalty system might work fine for you. But it's going to be harder for the staff to remember to do that if it's not a piece of the system.

So those are my five tips for best practices in classroom management. First, you need a classroom management system, something that has structured routines, structured rules, and possibly incentives of some kind to go with them. Number two, we need to teach our systems and our expectations explicitly. We need to build it into the activities at the beginning of the year and go over what you expect. And number three is you need a system that can be individualized because our students are not one size fits all at all. Number four, the students need to win on a regular basis in the system so they buy into it and it's meaningful for them. And number five, classroom management best practice is to choose a management system that you can publicly call out students for positive behavior and holds that up as the model that gets attention and focus rather than the negative behavior.

Don't forget to grab your free classroom rules at autismclassroomresources.com/rules. And if you're looking for the classroom routines social stories I mentioned, you can find them at autismclassroomresources.com/routines.

I hope to see you again next week. If you listen to the podcast, please go leave a review. I would really appreciate it. I would love to know your thoughts. And I'll talk to you soon.

Thanks so much for listening to today's episode of the Autism Classroom Resources podcast. For even more support, you can access free materials, webinars and Video Tips inside my free resource library. Sign up at autismclassroomresources.com/free. That's F-R-E-E or click the link in the show notes to join the free library today. I'll catch you again next week.