

PART ONE

# Challenges with Students

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# 1

## THE CLASS CLOWN IS NOT HUMORING YOU

### **IF THIS HAPPENS**

There's one in every class. He's known, not always affectionately, as the class clown. He loves the limelight and he seeks it out at all costs. He takes any situation, even serious ones, and tries to insinuate his humor. Though his antics can be annoying, he's often clever, and his jokes are sometimes funny. You can't dispute his creativity. He has a loyal following, his very own "groupies" who love to egg him on. Other students roll their eyes, finding him a nuisance. When he's in your classroom you often find yourself on edge, trying to anticipate his next wisecrack and prepare for how you'll handle it.

The bottom line is that the class clown is seeking attention. And he's getting it. (Research has shown that the vast majority of student misbehavior stems from attention seeking.) You, as the professional in the classroom, realize that there's a reason this student is craving attention. Maybe he is struggling with issues at home; maybe he's struggling with issues at school; and almost always he lacks maturity and/or self-respect.

So what can you do? First, realize that the class clown is not out to get you, so take care not to take his antics personally. Rather, he's attempting to feel important and to get attention. Knowing this will help you deal with the situation more mindfully and effectively, and less emotionally.

## TRY THIS



The following are several ways to deal appropriately with a class clown:

- Occasionally, when it is appropriate, it's okay to laugh when the class clown says something funny. You never want to send the message that humor is not acceptable in your classroom. On the contrary, humor is an important part of any classroom—appropriate humor, that is.
- Make sure that you discuss with your entire class the difference between appropriate and inappropriate humor. Tell them that there is a time for work and a time for play. Give examples of appropriate and inappropriate humor.
- Be careful never to appear angry with or personally offended by the class clown. This will only serve to worsen an already tenuous situation. It will tell him that he is controlling your emotions, and that's the last message you want to send. No one repeats a behavior unless he's receiving some kind of "reward" for that behavior. Sometimes that reward is inadvertently coming from the teacher.
- Speak with the class clown privately. Explain that you appreciate his intellect, his creativity, and his quick wit. Add, however, that sometimes his humor is not appropriate. Give him specific examples of when his humor has been both appropriate and inappropriate. Tell him that you would like to help him act in a more responsible and mature way. Express your concern about the idea that something is bothering him and offer the opportunity for him to share what's bothering him. (Don't be surprised, however, if he denies that anything is bothering him. Don't push. Just let him know that you care and that you are always available if he needs to talk to someone.)
- Establish some kind of signal with the class clown. When his humor is inappropriate, simply use the signal to let him know that the behavior needs to stop. Try to make the signal as subtle as possible.
- Begin giving the class clown more and more positive attention when he is *not* clowning around. As often as possible, recognize any evidence of appropriate behavior on his part and comment on it.

- When you begin to notice a turnaround, small as it may be, speak with the class clown privately and say, “I’ve noticed you’re really making an effort to use your humor more appropriately. That takes maturity, and I’m proud of you. Keep up the good work!”

Using these techniques almost always yields immediate and positive results.

## **DON’T FORGET**

- A class clown is seeking attention—and always for a reason. If possible, try to determine the reason.
- Never take the class clown’s inappropriate behavior personally.
- Laughter is a good thing—when it is appropriate. Make sure your students know this, and make sure that you share your humorous side with them also.
- Teach the class clown the difference between appropriate and inappropriate humor. Help him to use his humor more appropriately.
- Give the class clown positive attention when he is not clowning around.
- Be patient. Bad habits are never broken overnight.

