



What To Do When A Student Refused To Go To Time-Out

When a student refuses to go to time-out, he (or she) often has a good reason. This doesn't mean he isn't responsible for making such a decision. He is – completely and fully. For it's never okay to defy a teacher's direction.

But in his mind he feels like he must take a stand.

In other words, there is something about the situation or incident that doesn't sit right with him. Asking him to go to time-out, then, crosses the line of his brand of fairness.

So before answering *what* to do, it's important we unpack *why* a student would refuse to go to time-out. Because if a student feels strongly enough to challenge a teacher's directive, then it's a red flag that there are deeper problems in need of addressing.

You see, difficult students in particular have an acute sense of fairness. And so if the way you manage your classroom is unfair, or perceived to be unfair, then it isn't at all unusual to experience at times aggressive pushback.

In fact, defiant behavior would be *expected* in such a classroom.

What follows are four reasons why a student would refuse to go to time-out. Clean these up first. Get them fixed and squared away. And then, although a refusal to go to time-out could still happen, it would be as rare as a class set of encyclopedias.

1. Your students don't understand your classroom management plan.

If a student breaks a classroom rule, but doesn't believe he did anything wrong, then there is a good chance he'll become defiant. This is one of many reasons why it's so important to teach, model, role-play, and practice **your classroom management plan** thoroughly.

Your students need to know, and experience, your plan backwards and forwards – why it's important, why it's wrong to break rules, and exactly, step-by-step, what will happen if they do. There should never be any surprises, disagreements, or misunderstandings. Just it-is-what-it-is accountability.

2. You're inconsistent.

If ever you let misbehavior go without a consequence, you're asking for trouble. **Your most difficult students** will grow especially bitter if you look the other way when another student breaks a rule, because they know they're rarely afforded such luxury.

And so when you send them to time-out, it's only natural to get resistance. Teachers who have their rules and consequences on a sliding scale, open to their whims, biases, and interpretations, struggle mightily with classroom management – because it's unfair, and students know it.

3. There is friction between you and your students.

Students resent teachers who yell, scold, lecture, and otherwise take misbehavior personally. It makes them feel like they're being picked on and singled-out – which causes them to fight back by increasing their disruptive activities, particularly behind the teacher's back.

Worse yet, because the teacher doesn't let the agreed-upon consequences be the only consequences (i.e., adding lectures, sighs, eye-rolls, talking-tos, etc.), the students begin to view their teacher as spiteful, unfair, and unlikable.

4. There are uncertainties surrounding the incident of misbehavior.

Before sending a student to time-out, it's important to be sure a rule has been broken. If you're not positive, if you didn't personally witness the incident, then it's best to investigate until you know the truth. Getting it wrong can cause students to shut down, lash out, or sever their trust and belief in you.

By the same token, it's important to be clear with students why you're sending them to time-out. Tell them plainly what rule was broken and what the consequence will be. When caught red-handed and confronted directly, few students will disagree or make a fuss.

Now, What To Do

If, after eliminating the reasons above, the improbable happens and a student refuses to go to time-out, then handling it is easy.

Say, “Before you make that choice I’m going to give you two minutes to think about it. If after two minutes, you’re still sitting here, then I’m going to prepare **a letter for you to take home** to your parents.” (The third consequence.)

Then turn and go back to whatever you were doing.

It’s now out of your hands and completely the student’s decision. And as far as you’re concerned, because you’ve eliminated any valid reason why he’d refuse to go to time-out, **what he decides doesn’t affect you in the least.**

It’s his choice.

And when a student knows it’s his choice, and that he’s not going to get any coaxing or prodding from you, or get even the slightest rise out of you, then it’s a near certainty that he’s going to quietly stand and take himself to time-out.

And if he doesn’t?

Que será, será. Follow your classroom management plan. Do what you promised you’d do. After he cools down—perhaps even forgotten about the incident—approach casually, hand him his letter, and say...

“I want this signed and returned in morning.”

And then get on with your day.