

Episode 373 –The 10 Commandments of Classroom Management

00:00 Introduction to Classroom Management Commandments

Linda Kardamis (00:00)

If student misbehavior has been driving you nuts, you need these 10 Commandments of Classroom Management. Well, welcome

the Teach 4 the Heart podcast where we tackle teaching challenges from a biblical perspective. This episode is brought to you in partnership with the Herzog Foundation. I'm here today with our podcast manager, Julie, to talk about the 10 Commandments of Classroom Management. This is a framework that we've put together to kind of...

put in one spot a lot of the key principles that we believe make for successful classroom management, especially as Christian teachers. And we're actually doing a related YouTube video series where we dive deeper into all of these. So if at any point you're like, that sounds interesting, I wish I knew more, hop on over, we'll link to it, or you can head to [teachfortheheart.com / playlist](https://teachfortheheart.com/playlist) to check out the full video series. But for now, we're gonna dive in and just talk about these together.

00:54 Commandment 1

So commandment number one is you must pray and depend on God as he is your source of wisdom and strength. I wanted to put this as number one, because I wanted to acknowledge right off the bat that we shouldn't be doing this on our own, right? God is with us and as Christian teachers often we think, okay, this is on me, right? But it's not, God should always be with us. We can always go to him in prayer and the more we depend on him, the better off we're going to be.

Julie (01:24)

Right, you're so right. We do put so much on ourselves and just to have that reminder of God's with you no matter where you are, if you're at work, if you're at school, if you're in the grocery store, God is with you and His ways are so much better than our own. And so taking that time to acknowledge Him in all things is only going to lead you to a better path.

Linda Kardamis (01:44)

Yeah, so I encourage you in all your classroom management questions, start with prayer. Say, God help me, help me know what to do, help me know what's gonna work, and he loves to answer those prayers. So that's number one, pray and rely on God. Commandment number two, you must clarify

your expectations and teach them explicitly. So I think a lot of times we are not as clear in our expectations, we don't even realize how unclear we are.

01:53 Commandment 2

Like we think we know what to expect, right? Take something as simple as talking. yeah, like I, you know, I don't want my students to talk when I'm talking, but is it, it's actually more complicated than that, right? We want them to talk sometimes, but we want certain voice levels and we don't want them to be too loud here and we don't want them to interrupt there. Like it's actually kind of complicated, right? And I remember another example. I remember when I first started teaching a kid put their head on my, down on their desk and I thought, is that okay?

02:58 The Importance of Prayer and Expectations

Am I gonna allow that? Do I need to say something? Like I hadn't thought about it. So a lot of that's when we work with teachers, one of our first steps is always actually sitting down and thinking through where is the line? What are you going to expect? You need to get clear in your own mind first and then you need to be explicit with your teachers. I'm sorry, with your students. A lot of times, particularly with older students, we think, they know how to behave. Well, maybe, but.

Honestly, I found it so helpful to be explicit with them. You need to be very clear where the line is. What do you expect? Even with older kids, it's very, very helpful to explicitly tell them, this is what I expect when we're doing this activity. This is what I expect when we're doing this assignment and be really, really clear with them.

Julie (03:16)

Mm-hmm. And then when you get into those upper grade levels, they have different teachers that they're rotating to. And each teacher is going to have a different set of expectations. So they might go from one class to yours and to remind them of, hey, that teacher might do it differently. This is how we do it in here. Reminding them of that is super important. Otherwise, they're just going to push the boundaries as we know they like to do. So yeah, having those expectations, stating them, making them clear from the get-go is so important.

03:54 Commandment 3

Linda Kardamis (03:46)

Yes, absolutely, yeah, and just even stating them just changes the tone because everyone knows exactly what you expect. So that's number two. Number three, you must establish clear procedures for everything and practice them until they stick. I think procedures are like an underrated area. think everyone knows, yeah, I need to have procedures, but I really believe procedures make or break your classroom.

And there's the practical reason that, you know, obviously the whole point of them is to make things run smoothly. But there's this other intangible reason where if we say some things to the procedure, but we don't actually make students do that, you know, we say, you you need to clear your desk, but then they don't. What we're doing is telegraphing really bad signals. We're telegraphing to students, I don't mean what I say. You don't actually have to follow what I say. I'm not really gonna hold you accountable. I don't actually take things that seriously. And that spirals.

On the other hand though, when we are really clear, we practice procedures and then we like insist students actually follow them, we telegraph all the right things. We say, I mean what I say, I'm going to hold you accountable. We're going to take learning seriously. And that creates an entirely different classroom environment. So when there's classroom management issues, looking at your procedures and how well you stick to them is actually a really great place that's worth your time.

Julie (05:08)

Mm-hmm and also too to keep in mind like they meant they may not follow it from the get-go like it's gonna take a time or two for them to get into those routines just like it's gonna take you time to get into the routines of reminding them of the expectations and so I would say don't give up either if it doesn't work the first time or two don't think okay well now I'm gonna change my plan and come up with something else cuz that didn't work give it time just Be consistent and then you might be surprised the next week

the kids are picking up on this and now they're following these expectations. So give yourself a little bit of grace and some time to like let it marinate and actually become a part of your classroom.

05:47 Establishing Procedures and Consistency

Linda Kardamis (05:47)

Yes, very important not to give up if kids don't respond to something immediately, right? And that's also why when we teach teachers to teach procedures, that's a tongue twister, ~ we recommend having students redo it when they're not doing it well, right? Like if you try it and it's like, that did not go well, it's like, we're gonna do it again. But sometimes I get this question from teachers, how many times do I make them redo? And I say only once.

So you don't want to get in this battle of the wills where you make them redo it like five times and that can, no. So it's like you said, if they're not doing it, I would have them do it again, but then just give them feedback and say, we'll try it again tomorrow. So that way you're showing them, am going to continue to be consistent. But as you said, sometimes it just, sometimes it takes a few attempts before it finally sinks in. Great advice.

Julie (06:16)

Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm.

07:32 Commandment 4

Linda Kardamis (07:31)

So that's number three. Number four, you must write down your planned responses as that is how you gain clarity and confidence. So let me explain what I mean by this one. When we work with teachers in Classroom Management 101, we have them write out a classroom management plan. And part of that is writing down how I am going to respond to all kinds of classroom issues. What am I gonna do when students are wandering around the room? What am I gonna do when they're blurting answers? What am I gonna do when they're disrespectful?

all these things we think through as many as we have a whole list of them that we help teachers think through. And what we found is there is magic in having to write it down. If I ask you, hey, do know what to do when students are disrespectful? In your mind, you're probably like, yeah, yeah, I know what to do. But actually, if I were to tell you now write it down, you would realize, ~ what's in my head is a whole lot fuzzier. When you actually have to write it down, you realize, I actually am not sure.

what, not sure what would be best, what, oh, what am I actually gonna say? You have to be so much more clear when you write it down. And it takes away that wiggle room that we often give ourselves in our mind where it's like, oh yeah, I think I know what to do. So that's really, really a powerful thing. So if you've never done that, I encourage you to do that. Or in Classroom Management 101, we help you. We give you the templates, the idea banks to kind of help make it easier and faster. But writing it down is just really powerful.

Julie (08:50)

That is so true because I had in my mind, I'll do these things. Sure. And then when it came time to that moment where that student pushed back, my blood pressure starts to creep up a little bit and I start to get a little anxious and flustered. so then whatever I had in my mind is just poof, it's gone. And so like this past year, I had taped to my desk the steps of if a student refuses to do something.

It's like, let me tape these steps. And so I would just kind of glance over at my steps and remind myself, this is what I said I'm going to do. And it was just such a nice calming reminder. Like I have this taped right here. So in the moment when I start to get flustered and go, gosh, what am I supposed to do? And say now all the kids are looking at me. I had that taped to my desk. I was like, okay, let me go through my steps. And my gosh, it was such a game changer. And I wish I had started doing that earlier. ~ But.

I learned that later on in the game. So hopefully you're listening to this and can implement it right away because it definitely, definitely helps.

09:46 Planning Responses and Consequences

Linda Kardamis (09:46)

I love that idea of just taping kind of one of those steps that you need the most right there. And I think that it helps with clarity. And as you said, it helps with confidence too. I'm hearing in you, I remember the first time I had to give a kid a detention, I literally called my husband to help me get up the courage. Like I just hated confronting things. So kind of seeing that, okay, this is what I decided. I just gotta ~ freaking do it. ~ It can be helpful. That's part of it, right? You're gaining that confidence to actually follow.

Julie (10:03)

and

Mm-hmm.

10:13 Commandment 5

Linda Kardamis (10:13)

Which brings us to number five, you must deal with problems consistently, giving consequences when needed, right? So this is where, okay, I made a plan, I wrote it down, I have to actually follow through, I have to be as consistent as I can, and I can't be afraid to give consequences. Now I know consequences are out of vogue these days, but we completely disagree. Consequences are good for students. But now they're not, if your entire classroom management plan is consequences, that's not gonna work.

but they are a piece and they are an important piece. So you need to be prepared to deal with things and when needed, you need to be prepared to give consequences. You might get pushback, people might not like it, but it is important. It's good for the students, it's good to help them learn, it helps them grow in responsibility and it's just an important piece.

Julie (11:03)

Mm-hmm and and talking with a lot of teacher friends too over the years

are kind of on the same page of thinking the kids do need these consequences because we always are thinking about especially with our older kids Well, these guys are gonna be working jobs in a few years They're gonna be driving in a few years. And so teaching them now here at this level if you don't

follow these expectations or these rules or guidelines, there are natural consequences that happen. So that way when they get to that job and they show up late or they aren't turning in their assignments to their boss on time, yeah, there's natural consequences. You might get fired, or have to do some extra training. And that is just a natural part of life. And so teaching them now, it really is so essential. And like I say, most of us teachers are kind of on that same page, but we might get in that moment.

and think, I'll just push that consequence off to later or whatever. It was a first time offense, but stick to your guns. Like that's how they're gonna learn.

11:58 Commandment 6

Linda Kardamis (11:58)

Yes, you're so, right. Which brings us to number six. You must not let small issues slide or little problems quickly grow into big ones. So this is another thing that sometimes I hear said, you know, don't sweat the small stuff. Great life advice, horrible teaching advice. Because we know, those of us that have done this for any length of time know, if I don't deal with it while it's small, it doesn't magically go away. It grows, it becomes bigger, it spreads.

And so it's much better to deal with the issues while they're still small before they grow, right? Remember we talked, and these things flow together. We talked about establishing what is my expectation, where is the line. I'm not talking about, you know, getting kids in trouble for things that aren't over the line, right? I'm not saying that. That's fine. They didn't cross the line. But once they do,

It doesn't matter if it's a tow or a mile. It's like they cross the line. I need to deal with it. And if you deal with those minor things, especially at the beginning of the year, if you deal with those minor crossovers first, it actually prevents a lot of those bigger issues from happening. Because students realize, once again, those signals, OK, they're going to deal with problems. I can't get away with a lot. And I'd much rather deal with those little fires than let them grow. And either way, I totally made this mistake my first year. I let stuff go because I didn't really know how to deal with it. And yeah, it snowballed.

So I was like, never again. And it makes such a big difference.

Julie (13:21)

Mm-hmm. Yeah, we've all heard the saying, you give them an inch, they'll take what? They'll take a mile. And it's so true. I mean, they really will. No matter the age, they will. And so, yeah, deal with those small fires while they're small. Don't let it become a big, bonfire. Like, don't do that. You have the authority to shut things down, and it doesn't make you mean. It just means that you have high expectations and you expect your kids to follow them. And that's how you're going to have a smooth class.

Linda Kardamis (13:25)

A mile.

Yeah, absolutely. So those are a lot of our commandments that deal kind of more with planning and what to do. So now we're kind of going into some of these other commandments dealing with our demeanor and how we interact with students. So commandment number seven, you must be both kind and firm in your interactions, seeing yourself as a mentor, not a friend. So this one's really about our demeanor, recognizing that ~ we can be both kind and firm.

14:01 Commandment 7

It's not an either or. I've had some people be like, do I have to be mean? Like, feel like they have to be mean in order to get their students to listen, and I don't believe that. You can be kind, but you have to also be firm. You can't let things go. ~ And finding that demeanor sometimes takes a little bit of practice, where when you're interacting, you are kind, but you're also sticking to what you said you would do. And then going along with that, I think that...

that phrase of I'm a mentor, not a friend can be helpful, particularly if you teach other grades. I don't know how many teachers are tempted to be friends with their kindergartners, but when you're teaching high school, middle school, sometimes you kind of have that more of a buddy-buddy, like I wanna be your buddy, I wanna be here for you. And that's not the right demeanor for a teacher. You do wanna be there to support them and be their confidant and help them and guide them, but thinking of yourself as a mentor, they do all those things.

But it's not a peer relationship. That's going to have you in a better frame of mind in your interactions.

Julie (15:15)

Mm-hmm. Yeah, it's true and it is not impossible to be both I really thought that from the beginning because I'm a more laid-back personality I'm just a lot more calm and not super authoritative and so I was like I'll just be myself and I'll just be you know Kind and sweet and calm and then boy did I learn real quick that first year? I'm like, no you really can be both and this last year I had the what I felt like was the ultimate compliment on

eighth grade graduation day, one of the principals came up to me and she's like, hey, you know that kid that everybody has trouble with? I was like, yeah, he's great in my class. She said, well, I have to give you props because I asked him what your class was like. And he's like, oh yeah, we have a lot of fun. We learn a lot, but she won't let us get away with anything. And I was like, yes, yes. Even though I'm this more laid back personality, I'm like, thank goodness my kids knew what the expectations were and not to cross those lines. And so I was like,

Thanks kid for making me look good in front of the principal

Linda Kardamis (16:10)

I love that is exactly what we're striving for. It's a lot of fun, but you're not gonna get away with anything. That is great. I love when students, it's like, they get it. It encapsulates it, that's awesome. So number, that brings us to number eight, which is you must love your students and display the fruit of the spirit in your interaction. So this commandment is really about how we interact.

Julie (16:15)

Okay.

Heh.

16:22 Commandment 8

Linda Kardamis (16:34)

Obviously, we are called to love everyone as Christians and definitely our students. Sometimes that's easier said than done, but God can help us when we're struggling with that. And then I think the fruit of the Spirit is just such an important guide, right? If I just list them real quick, right? The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, ~ goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.

Right, the more of these qualities we have, the more patience, the more self-control, the more kindness, gentleness, these help us know how we should interact with our students, right? And once again, these are not in contrast with being firm, but displaying those fruits of the spirit are always good. And if you're anything like me, just listing that list, I'm like, my goodness, I fall so short in so many of these areas. And it's helpful to remember that fruit of the spirit, I think is fruit of the spirit.

It's not something we can muster up in ourselves. It's his fruit, his result, right? Just like an apple is the fruit of an apple tree, the fruit of the spirit comes from the spirit. So it's about asking him to produce that in us and then yielding to him in those moments when like, I wanna be angry, but he's saying to be gentle, it's yielding to him and have allowing him to work that fruit out in our lives.

Julie (17:53)

I love that. Yeah, it all comes from him because the stuff that comes from us is not good. That's not good fruit for sure. And then thinking about love, what came to mind for me was first Corinthians 13 where it's, you know, if you have all of these things, you have all these gifts, you're the greatest teacher, but you don't have love. What do you have? And we know most teachers go into this profession not for the money or for the fame.

Linda Kardamis (18:12)

Mm-hmm.

Julie (18:19)

but it's because we have that heart for kids and that love for learning. And so looking at our students, viewing them as God views them will lend itself to all of those fruits being produced within us through Him.

18:33 Commandment 9

Linda Kardamis (18:33)

Yeah, amen. That brings us to commandment number nine, which is you must know your students and do what is best for them, not what is easiest for you. So this is where the building relationships comes in, right? Knowing your students, knowing what they need, knowing how they tick. And then

when I think about doing what is best for them, not what's easiest for you, what I had in my mind when I wrote this was those scenarios where I...

wanted to give grace to a student, not because it was actually best for the student, but because I didn't want to deal with the problem. ~ And I think that idea of knowing when to give grace and when not to, and particularly ~ caring more for the student than what I feel like doing in a situation is helpful, right? So ~ we talk a lot about classroom management and having plans and all these things, but there are times when we should absolutely deviate from the plan.

where what's best for a certain student is not the plan. It's not what I was going to do and I'm gonna do something differently. And we absolutely should feel the freedom and listen to the spirit when he puts that on our heart and do that. But I think at least for me, and if anyone else is like me, ~ that check of asking myself, okay, is it actually best for my student to handle this differently or am I just trying to avoid a confrontation? Am I just trying to not have to call home or whatever it is? That's kind of a helpful question for me to ask.

Julie (20:02)

Mm-hmm. And I think as teachers, we are naturally good at doing what is best for other people and sometimes not doing what is best for ourselves. But in this case, you're talking about doing what is going to be the most effective for the student, not just what is easy for us in the meantime. I totally understand that because we can get caught up with, ~ man, do I really want to deal with that today?

20:39 Commandment 10

Yeah. So just.

keeping the student at the forefront of our mind, which I think we do a pretty good job of as teachers and doing what's going to be beneficial and helpful for them. Yeah, that's a good reminder. I like that one.

Linda Kardamis (20:39)

Very good, and our final commandment, commandment number 10, you must seek to understand the root cause of misbehavior and address them at the heart level when possible. So this is one we actually just added in, because I was thinking about how important it is to, you know, have, classroom management is so interesting because you're dealing with multiple students at once, so you really need a lot of structure. ~ You know, you can't afford to just

do everything one-on-one because you have to be able to manage this large group. But at the same time, there's so many situations where there's this root cause of this certain student's misbehavior and it has nothing to do often with the classroom, right? It might be something going on at home. It might be something health related. It might be related to a challenge they have personally. It might be because of a friend interaction. I mean, there's a million different things that can be going on that caused, that's kind of at the root of this misbehavior.

Julie (21:32)

Mm-hmm.

Linda Kardamis (21:37)

And so while all that structure and plan and consequences is very, very important, it's like a parallel track. We need to be seeking to understand, particularly things that are either chronic issues, bigger issues, or something uncharacteristic for a student. Like, wow, they're not normally like that. Seeking to understand what is going on by having conversations with them, by asking around and talking to other adults that might have insights, and really trying to understand what is really going on.

Is there a cause underneath this cause? And then when possible, addressing it on a heart level. That's actually why this is called Teach 4 the Heart, because it's that idea of like, when we get to the heart of the issue and actually address their hearts and speak to their hearts, not just to their surface behavior, that's when real change can happen. And that can't happen all the time when you're dealing with, you know, a million things, but there's those opportunities. And so when we have that opportunity to go to the root cause,

to speak to the heart and really address things on a heart level, that is always really, really powerful. Even if we don't see the results right away, you never know where those seeds, what God will do with those seeds.

Julie (22:46)

Mm-hmm. And I think reminding ourselves of that before you get caught up in those situations where they are acting out of character or something seems amiss is important because you tend to get reactive sometimes just when something catches you off guard like that's not like that kid to do that and so thinking about these things ahead of time and then of course following up like you say with those conversations with that kid or a counselor or a parent ~ is important as well. like try trying to steer away from

being reactive in the moment and thinking this could be deeper and then being prayerful about it like, God, how can I help this kid? Because clearly something is not right.

Linda Kardamis (23:27)

Yeah, and I think one thing you can do in your classroom, like when something happens that you're like, my goodness, like this is off. I don't really know what to do, is you can say something like, okay, Isaiah, we're gonna have to talk about that later. And that, if you say that out loud to the whole class, they know then you're not just letting what happened go, but you're gonna deal with it privately. And that gives you time to pray, to think, and also to have space. Like, okay, I'm gonna circle back later and have this conversation when I can.

have it privately for more than two seconds. So giving yourself that space, so, so wise. So those are our 10 commandments of classroom management. I hope that you found these helpful. If you want

to dive deeper into these 10 commandments, we have a few resources for you. We have our YouTube playlist where we're going to do a video series on each one of these. You can get that at [teachfortheheart.com slash playlist](https://teachfortheheart.com/playlist).

We also have a Ten Commandments starter pack that can help you kind of implement these into your classroom. So we will link both of those in the show notes for this episode. As we wrap up, Julie, do you have any kind of final thoughts or feedback for people that are hearing these commandments?

Julie (24:36)

Yeah, I think this is a really good starting place. These 10 pillars, if you will, really are essential to having like a smooth class and ~ have a heart that's at peace in the midst of a very stressful career. so yeah, I just feel like hold on to these and then definitely if you have time, dive into those ~ deeper videos that we're going to be putting out there. And I think it'll be beneficial for sure.

Linda Kardamis (25:03)

Yeah, I hope you guys will check out those resources or if you want to jump straight to the solution you want to get the help, putting together your plan, implementing all these commandments into your classroom, that's exactly what we help you do in Classroom Management 101. So you can head to [teachfortheheart.com / cm101](https://teachfortheheart.com/cm101) and you can use the code `podcast20` to save 20 % on your enrollment. Well, this episode has been brought to you in partnership with the Herzog Foundation. All views and opinions are our own and don't necessarily reflect those of the Herzog Foundation.

Thank you so much for being with us. I look forward to being with you again soon. In the meantime, you remember God is at work in you and through you, and he's using you to make a difference. Keep your eyes on him and teach 4 the heart.