

School Discipline

1. Bad behaviour - Before you read

Look at these examples of bad behaviour in school. How would you classify them?

Very serious / serious / quite bad / not bad behaviour

- Chewing gum or eating sweets in class
 - Playing truant (not coming to school/not telling parents)
 - Smoking in the school building (in the toilets?)
 - Swearing (using bad language)
 - Swearing at a teacher or insulting a teacher
 - Not doing homework
 - Cheating in exams (copying from secret notes or another pupil)
 - Shouting and making noise during lessons
 - Running in the corridors
 - Writing on walls, desks and other school property
 - Stealing from other pupils pockets or bags
 - Calling a teacher or another pupil bad names (bullying)
 - Carrying a dangerous weapon (gun, knife, penknife)
 - Hitting other pupils or teachers
 - Not listening/paying attention in lessons
 - Wearing unsuitable clothes for school
 - Kissing boys/girls during the lesson or in the corridor
 - Leaving the classroom without permission
-
- Who deals with bad behaviour in your school?
Are there any school rules?
Are there any special punishments for very bad behaviour?
 - Have you ever broken a school rule or been badly behaved in school?
What happened? What did your parents say or do?

2. Punishments

- What is the most / least serious punishment you can get in your school?
- What is the most / least serious punishment you can get in a UK school?
- How does your school compare to a British school? Is it stricter?

3. Read and find out

What is detention?

What did Freya do when the school gave her detention?

What two reasons does Freya give for her actions?

What is a home school contract?

Why do you think schools give these contracts to parents?

School Discipline

Punishments in UK schools

- **Exclusion:** a pupil is excluded from the school and cannot come back. The pupil has to find a new school or a different method of education (home tutor, special centre for difficult pupils)
- **Suspension:** when a pupil is suspended they cannot enter the building or attend lessons until the school has a meeting about their case. Suspension can last from 1 to 45 days in a school term. The school usually gives work to do at home with a tutor (special teacher).
- **Detention:** a pupil is detained/asked to stay at school at the end of the school day. The pupil must work for 30 minutes or an hour more before they are allowed to leave the school.
- **Lines:** a pupil has to write a sentence many times (100 times) on a sheet of paper: An example sentence: I must not shout in class. This punishment is sometimes given during detention too.

Case Study

Freya Macdonald, a 15 year old pupil from Scotland, made the news this month in the UK. When her Secondary school gave her detention, she went to a lawyer and took legal action against the school. The teenager believes that it is not legal to keep a pupil in the school building against their wishes.

She is citing Article 5 of the European Convention of Human Rights which is now also part of Scots law. It says that it is illegal to detain children against their will. If schools want to keep pupils after school hours they should ask for a court order.

Freya says that repeated detentions disrupted her education and stopped her from learning successfully. She is citing article 2, which states that every child has the right to an education. She is now refusing to return to school until the school respects her civil rights. She wants the headmaster and her teachers to sign a letter to promise they will respect her rights. Many schools in the UK now give parents a home school contract. This is a contract explaining the school discipline and rules. Parents must sign this document and agree that they accept the school's rules. They are responsible for their child's behaviour and must respect the discipline methods used in the school.

4. School rules

Every school in the UK must have a code of conduct. This is a written document with guidelines for good behaviour and school rules to make sure pupils behave well. For example:

- Pupil code of conduct: 1. Get to school on time 2. Move about the school quietly
- School rules: 1. Everyone *must* walk in the school corridors 2. Pupils *are not allowed* to leave the school during lessons without a written letter from a parent.
- Write or explain three rules that are important in your school.
- Invent four rules for teachers in schools: e.g. Teachers are not allowed to shout during lessons.

5. Group decision making - Make the punishment fit the crime.

You are a teacher in a UK school and you must decide how to punish pupils who are behaving badly. Look at the list of bad behaviour in exercise (1). Choose a punishment for each example. All members of your group must agree.

6. Detention: What do you think?

Some pupils from UK schools give their opinion on detention. Is it a useful punishment? Is it fair? What do you think? Do you agree with them?

- I have had a lot of detentions for not doing my homework. It isn't fair and it wastes teachers' time. Kelly Watson 14.
- It is not really a punishment. We used to spend half an hour copying words from a dictionary. What's the point in that? It didn't make me behave any better! Mark Summers 17.
- We get detention for swearing or fighting and I agree with that. But we also get it for not doing homework. That's stupid! Lisa Brown 13.
- I had detention once last year and it made me think again. My parents were mad at me and I missed the last bus home. I am very careful now. Detention is a good thing and more pupils should be given detention! Barry Shapiro 15.

7. Role play

The school has telephoned your parents to complain about bad behaviour. You do not think it is that serious. Now you go home and your father/mother is waiting to speak to you. How do you explain your behaviour? Is your father/mother angry or understanding? Imagine the conversation. Act it out.

8. Discussion: the reasons for bad behaviour

The numbers of pupils being excluded or playing truant is increasing every year in the UK. Teachers complain that bullying is a serious problem and that pupils are becoming more and more violent. Here are some opinions from a nationwide opinion poll on the Internet.

- Do you agree? Is your country facing similar problems? What are the solutions? Is exclusion a good thing? Is corporal punishment a bad or useful thing?
 - Badly behaved children have an effect on class performance in exams. They should be excluded after 1 warning, not 3 or 4. Schools are not strict enough.
 - Schools need special police type assistants who can deal with discipline. This means teachers can concentrate on teaching.
 - Parents are the key. Discipline begins at home. Parents of badly behaved pupils should do a parenting course to teach them how to control their children. Then the parents should be arrested if their child continues to behave badly.
 - Teachers need to start using the cane (a big stick). We certainly stopped our stupid behaviour if we knew we were going to get a good whack (hit).
 - Excluding pupils only makes the problem worse for society. All the badly behaved pupils then meet up in special schools! It is like a training camp for crime. Badly behaved pupils should be allowed to continue in their school. They need help and patience.