



# Accepting Decisions of Authority

## Teacher Notes

Many students, especially adolescents, will at some point challenge your decisions. However, if students regularly disregard your authority or refuse to accept your decisions and those of administrators, managing the classroom and dealing with disruptive behaviors becomes nearly impossible. Unfortunately, some students have learned that if they threaten, act out or carry on, they can reverse any decision or reduce any punishment. If you allow students to get away with manipulative behaviors that undermine your decisions, expect to see more argumentative and confrontational responses from them. This is especially true when you're correcting their misbehaviors and making discipline decisions.

As you help students learn this skill, assess your own approach to discipline. Are your discipline decisions consistent and fair, or are they arbitrary and rash? If students perceive them to be the latter, they have little incentive to follow your rules or engage in appropriate behaviors.

## Proactive Teaching Interaction

### Introduce the Skill

Have students brainstorm reasons why it is important for them to respect and accept the decisions of authority figures at school and in the community. Reasons can include:

- Prevents you from getting into dangerous or troubling situations
- Reduces chaos and keeps order

- Shows respect and demonstrates maturity
- Reinforces the social and behavioral expectations in your community
- Sets a good example for your peers and others

## **Describe the Appropriate Behavior or Skill Steps**

### **Accepting Decisions of Authority**

**1. Look at the person.**

- Don't stare, make faces or roll your eyes.

**2. Remain calm and monitor your feelings and behavior.**

- If you feel yourself getting emotional, take deep breaths, silently count to ten or use another strategy to calm yourself.

**3. Use a pleasant or neutral tone of voice.**

**4. Acknowledge the decision by saying "Okay" or "Yes, I understand."**

- Don't argue; be respectful.
- Keep the interaction cordial.
- Avoid using harsh words or a hostile voice tone.

**5. If you disagree, do so at a later time.**

- Ask the person if you can speak to him or her at a later time.
- If the person does not want to talk with you, respect the decision.
- If the person agrees to talk with you, have a plan for what you want to say that includes specific reasons why you disagree.

**6. Refrain from arguing, pouting or becoming angry.**

- The decision may not change, so be prepared to accept a "No" answer.

### **Give a Reason or Rationale**

By definition, authority figures have the experience, knowledge and power to make decisions that directly affect you. While you might not always agree with them, most authority figures have your best interests at heart. If you can look at the decisions from their perspective, you're more likely to understand their reasoning, learn from the decisions and make better choices for yourself in the future. Other benefits of knowing how to accept the decisions of authority figures include:

- You show your respect and, in turn, earn respect.



- You avoid saying or doing anything that will create more tension or cause trouble.
- You avoid earning negative consequences for arguing or being confrontational.
- Others will see your maturity, and they may be more willing to include you in future decisions when appropriate.

## Suggested Activities

**Government/History:** The United States Supreme Court has the final say on questions related to the Constitution and the laws of the United States. Select a prominent or controversial court decision that divided the public or caused passionate debate. Examples can include *Dred Scott v. Sanford*, *Roe v. Wade*, *Brown v. Board of Education* and *District of Columbia v. Heller*.

Discuss the public's response (protest marches, demonstrations, additional legal challenges, celebrations, etc.), and relate it back to the issue of accepting decisions of authority. Topics for discussion can include the time, energy and money that are sometimes invested in challenging authority. Also talk about the risks, including loss of reputation or freedom. Ask students to think about when it is appropriate to take risks and make sacrifices to challenge authority and when it is not. Also remind students that disagreeing appropriately does not guarantee a decision will be overturned.

**Science/Math:** Read the following paragraph aloud and ask students to answer questions about accepting decisions of authority. Questions can include:

- Did Einstein accept the decision of the government?
- Do you think he should have responded differently to the government's decision? Why or why not? Explain your position.

Albert Einstein is best known for his Theory of Relativity. However, he also was instrumental in the development of nuclear physics. The locations and workings of the parts of the atom were important developments in science and physics. That understanding opened many new research opportunities. The United States government was interested in applying the research to military weapons, such as atomic bombs. Einstein pleaded with members of the government to channel the knowledge about the atom toward more productive and peaceful pursuits. His concerns were noted but ignored as the government launched the Manhattan Project to build an atomic bomb.

Einstein chose not to assist the government in this effort, which he considered dangerous and destructive for humanity.