

Cell Phone Policies

Cell phone addiction is a modern teacher's torment. What to do about it is a hotly debated topic. Let's say, however, that you do not want your students to look at or touch their cell phones during classroom instruction. But, inevitably, some do. What is your plan when that happens? Below are **4 ways** to deal with cell phones and some advice for how to make these ideas work.

The Classic "No Cell Phone" Policy:

When a student has their phone out, offer them the choice to give it to you until the end of the period (for elementary teachers this would be the end of the day) or take it to the office and give it to an administrator until the end of the day. If they refuse to give it to you, or they put it in their pocket or backpack, ask them to step outside. Explain their choices again (give it to you or give it to an administrator). Then ask them to go back in and place it on your desk. If they do not place the phone on your desk within 30 seconds, write them a referral and send them to the office.



VARIATION: If you can't send students to the office for refusing to give up their cell phones when requested, offer a different consequence instead, such as detention, phone call home, or loss of a small classroom privilege.

The Cell Phone Charging Dock:



Plug in and attach to your wall at the front of your room a USB charging dock that you can plug 6 or more USB chords into. When a student has their phone out, offer them the choice to give it to you until the end of the period OR plug it in at the charging dock until class is over. Kids use their own USB chords/strings. If they refuse to do either, or they put the phone in their pocket or backpack instead, make their choices clear again (give it to you or plug it into the dock) and give them 30 seconds to cooperate with one or the other. If they do not, apply an appropriate consequence, such as a referral to the office, detention, a phone call home, or the loss of a small privilege.

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The Cell Phone Caddy

At the front of the room, hang a caddy (pocket holder, similar to a hanging shoe caddy) that has 30 or more numbered pockets. Tape a number to the corner of each student desk in your room. If a student has their phone out, give them the choice of giving it to you or placing it in the cell phone caddy in the pocket that has the same number as their desk. If they refuse, or put it in their pocket or backpack instead, make their choices clear again (you or the caddy) and give them 30 seconds to cooperate with one. If they do not, apply some appropriate consequence.

VARIATION: Students who put their cell phones in the caddy upon entering the room, without being asked, receive extra credit.



The Cell Phone Box



Glue or staple a ribbon or similar piece of cloth to the bottom of a shoe box, or any similarly sized wooden or plastic box, such that the ribbon can be used to tie the box shut, like a birthday present. Place one box in the center of each group table. When class begins, as part of your warm up activity, have all students in a group turn off their phones and place them in the box. Then have one student tie the ribbon, sealing the box until the end of class.

Implementing Tricky Procedures

Teaching and reinforcing tricky procedures with students, such as the cell phone policy, often works best when you set them up for success by doing the following:

- you are clear about what you want and what will happen when you don't get it
- you model what students should and shouldn't do
- you check for student understanding
- you follow through consistently

(learn more about each of these steps on the next page)

Implementing Tricky Procedures

Teaching and reinforcing tricky procedures with students, such as the cell phone policy, often works best when you set them up for success by doing the following 4 things.

- ☑ **Be clear about what you want and what will happen if you don't get it.** Let's assume that your cell phone policy is the classic "no cell phone" policy described above. Tell the students this is the policy. Then tell them what the consequences will be if they have their phone out during class. For example, you might tell them that the first time you will ask them to put it away: "Put it away or I will have to take it. This is your first and only warning for this year." After that, any time they have their cell phone out, whether it's the same day or a different day, you will confiscate it and give it back at the end of the lesson. If you confiscate their phone more than 4 times, upon the 5th time you will not give it back at the end of the lesson. Instead, you will take it to the office and they can pick it up at the end of the day from an administrator.
- ☑ **Model what students should and shouldn't do.** Give a student your cell phone. Ask them to pretend it is their cell phone and to pretend to be using it. Ask them to give it to you. After they give it to you, address the class. "This is what you should do if I ask you for your phone. Just give it to me immediately and I will give it back at the end of class." Then model the wrong way to do it. Give your phone to a student and ask them to pretend to use it. Ask them to give it to you, [*but tell them to refuse*]. Give them a choice "You can give me the phone and get it back at the end of class. Or you can go to the office and have an administrator take it away until the end of the day." [*Tell the student to refuse*]. Hand the student a referral (or model the application of some other appropriate consequence you intend to use when students refuse to give you their phones). Do the model again, but this time have the student put the phone in their pocket or backpack, instead of handing it to you. Hand the student a referral. De-brief with the class what they saw.
- ☑ **Check for student understanding.** Give the class a cell phone policy quiz to verify that they all know and understand what the policy is, what they should do if you ask for their phone, and what will happen if they refuse to give you the phone when you ask.
- ☑ **Follow through consistently.** Be ready for one or two students to test the policy. Have consequences ready for this. Follow through by applying the consequence calmly, without frustration or sarcasm.

TIP FROM THE TRENCHES: *Get the administration on your side in advance. Let your administrators know what your policy is and how to you plan to teach and reinforce it. Ask them if it will be okay to write a couple of referrals for "refusal to relinquish cell phone" just in the first two weeks of your implementation of the policy as students test your boundaries. Ask them if they can support you in your efforts by taking the phone away from any student you send up, and not giving it back until the end of the day. If your administrators are not on board with any part of this, ask them how you can alter your policy such that they could support you. Be open to their alternative ideas and willing to try what they suggest. Or, consider using an alternative consequence such as detention or a phone call home or a loss of a small classroom privilege instead.*