

**JB** JOSSEY-BASS TEACHER

GRADES **7-12**

**JULIA G. THOMPSON**

Best-selling author of *The First-Year Teacher's Survival Guide*



# Discipline

## SURVIVAL GUIDE

*for the Secondary Teacher*

**SECOND EDITION**

**Fully Revised  
and Updated**





### More Praise for the second edition of *Discipline Survival Guide for the Secondary Teacher*

“In my first year as a New York City Public School teacher, I utilized Thompson’s helpful thoughts on how to be a more effective educator. Her common-sense advice for teachers is a breath of fresh air. Applied consistently, the principles in this book will help every teacher perfect their craft by addressing the most important factor in teaching: classroom discipline. If you are looking for real tools that you can use to make the most of your and your students’ time, this book is for you!”

—Adam Kofod, classroom teacher, Petaluma, CA

“After a tough power struggle with a student in my classroom, Julia Thompson helped me calmly implement different methods based on student behavior to cool the situation, rather than have it escalate beyond repair. Her book provides a series of different strategies to engage in with students, since in many cases the first strategy used may not work. Thompson also teaches us to find the positive in students. When I let students and their parents know about the positive aspects of their work and behavior—instead of just problems—it creates a better working relationship.”

—Michele Sambiasi, secondary teacher, Fairfax County Public Schools, VA

“Julia G. Thompson has packed so much valuable information about student discipline into her new book that it could stand alone as the only resource a teacher needs.”

—Jill Hare, editor, TheApple.com

### Praise for *The First-Year Teacher’s Survival Guide*

“Julia Thompson earns an A+ for her practical and comprehensive *First-Year Teacher’s Survival Guide*. This veteran educator skillfully provides effective classroom-tested strategies to guide the new teacher through the possible problems and potentially stressful situations often encountered during that memorable first year of teaching. . . . *The First-Year Teacher’s Survival Guide* should be required reading for all new teachers!”

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and educational consultant, Islip, New York

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—Gloria Smith, early childhood staff developer,  
District 7, Bronx, New York

“This book is like having a personal mentor to guide new teachers through the demanding process of becoming educators. Experienced teachers will also find fresh insight that can transform effective instruction from instinctive to intentional.”

—Elisabeth H. Fuller, coordinator of grants, budget, and resources,  
Isle of Wight County Schools, Virginia



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# **Discipline Survival Guide for the Secondary Teacher**

SECOND EDITION

JULIA G. THOMPSON



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## About This Book

If you teach, you will have discipline problems. In fact, discipline problems in today's secondary classrooms are so prevalent and disruptive that in survey after survey teachers report that their frustrations with discipline issues are the most unpleasant part of their profession. The failure to manage a classroom successfully is often the reason that even the most dedicated teachers leave education for a less stressful career.

If you are a teacher who has faced challenging and discouraging discipline problems, the second edition of *Discipline Survival Guide for the Secondary Teacher* has been written specifically for you. You will find valuable, classroom-tested advice on how to adopt a comprehensive approach to discipline as you work to create a positive classroom environment. You will learn how to help your students become self-disciplined, goal-oriented, successful learners as you hone your skills and enhance your charisma as a classroom leader.

Each section of *Discipline Survival Guide for the Secondary Teacher* offers a variety of sound ideas and teaching tools designed to enable you to apply the most up-to-date theories and research about crucial topics such as student motivation, classroom management systems, teacher-student relationships, effective instructional techniques, student safety, and the importance of high expectations. This book also provides workable suggestions about how to prevent discipline issues from disrupting the learning climate in your classroom. As you work through each section, you will also find reproducible activities for your students, forms to help you efficiently organize your school day, and opportunities to reflect on your strengths as an educator. The realistic support and invaluable guidance within each section will enable you to create an orderly, positive, productive classroom where all of your students can learn and succeed.



## About the Author

**B**est-selling author **Julia G. Thompson** has been a public school teacher for more than thirty years. She has taught a wide variety of subjects, including English, reading, special education, math, geography, home economics, physical education, and employment skills. Her students have ranged from reluctant seventh graders to gifted college students. Thompson currently teaches in Fairfax County, Virginia, and she is an active speaker and consultant. Author of *The First-Year Teacher's Survival Guide* and *The First-Year Teacher's Checklist*, she also publishes a Web site that offers tips for teachers on a variety of subjects. As a classroom expert, Thompson also provides discipline advice as “Dear Julia” at TheApple ([www.theapple.monster.com](http://www.theapple.monster.com)) and at [TeacherAdvice@Twitter.com](mailto:TeacherAdvice@Twitter.com). To learn more, go to [www.juliagthompson.com](http://www.juliagthompson.com).





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*For Phil, with gratitude, admiration, and love*



## Introduction

**A** great deal has changed in secondary classrooms since *Discipline Survival Kit for the Secondary Teacher* was first published. In the intervening years our classrooms have expanded to include an increasingly diverse population as immigrants from across the world send their children to schools unprepared for a large influx of nonnative speakers. The troubling decrease in the literacy rate continues to cause concern as educators strive to help students whose inadequate reading and critical thinking skills result in record poor standardized test scores and low graduation rates. The global economic downturn has also had a detrimental effect on schools as funds for much-needed improvements, training, and equipment have all but vanished in many districts. In perhaps the most heartbreaking turn of events, incidents of horrific school violence have instilled an unprecedented sense of fear in teachers and students alike. And not surprisingly, in recent years the teacher shortage has become more and more severe as educators opt for less-challenging careers.

In spite of the troubles that our profession has weathered since the first publication of *Discipline Survival Kit for the Secondary Teacher*, there have also been many noteworthy positive changes. Dedicated researchers have teamed with classroom teachers to develop instructional strategies that focus on reaching the needs of all learners. Ongoing research has taught us a great deal about how to apply the knowledge that we now have about how the human brain functions and how we can help our students learn. Even with a lack of funds, teachers still involve themselves in professional development activities. With professional reading, online courses, study groups, online forums, and independent studies, we strive to learn as much as we can from our colleagues and other experts in our profession. The rapid growth of personal technological resources has made it easier for us to access information easily. With just a few keystrokes, we can discuss classroom issues with teachers in other parts of the world, find innovative lesson plans, research the best way to decorate our classrooms, and even share stress-relieving laughter over humorous classroom incidents. Finally, the Internet has become an indispensable classroom tool as more and more students have access to computers.

Even though a great deal has changed for secondary teachers both for better and worse in the last few years, much has remained the same. Many teachers across our country are coping beautifully with the recent, anxiety-provoking changes in education. These teachers manage their students' difficult behavior with skill and grace. Their students are successful, and they themselves find a great deal of personal satisfaction in the positive learning environment that they have established in their classrooms.

The dreams that they had when they chose education as a career are everyday realities. These secondary teachers have found successful ways to help their students become self-motivated and self-disciplined.

The *Discipline Survival Guide for the Secondary Teacher* provides a useful desktop reference filled with essential techniques and strategies necessary to manage the wide range of problems and responsibilities related to discipline in the secondary classroom. It serves as a practical guide to solving many of the behavior management problems that secondary teachers encounter each day. The timely, school-tested solutions in the *Discipline Survival Guide for the Secondary Teacher* help you develop a classroom climate where cooperative students can focus on positive behaviors rather than negative ones. Experienced and novice teachers alike will find strategies, activities, tips, and tools that provide solutions to many of the frustrating problems involved in managing student behavior.

Specifically, the goals of this Guide are to

- ▶ Allow you to be in control of your class
- ▶ Help you create the kind of motivational environment where mannerly conduct and successful learning are the order of the day
- ▶ Use the technological resources available to you and your students
- ▶ Provide some solutions for the problems caused by the rapid changes brought about by technology
- ▶ Use instructional strategies appropriate for all learners
- ▶ Help you develop your classroom leadership skills
- ▶ Provide you with up-to-date solutions to some of the most common discipline problems that are unique to secondary classrooms
- ▶ Save you time with an array of easy-to-use charts, forms, checklists, and reproducible materials
- ▶ Help you guide students toward more successful collaborative relationships with you and with each other
- ▶ Help you create a productive learning environment where you and your students can feel a sense of safety and belonging
- ▶ Enable you to reduce disruptions and effectively manage student behavior
- ▶ Help you motivate your students to take the initiative for their own learning
- ▶ Increase your confidence in your ability to find the satisfaction that a career in education can bring

Within the Guide are a broad range of topics designed to help teachers move beyond controlling a crowd of unruly adolescents to teaching a group of self-disciplined students who love learning. The information in each section helps you meet the challenges that your students bring to school each day. For example:

**Section One:** Accept responsibility for creating the positive discipline climate that you want for your students.

**Section Two:** Begin the process of designing your personal discipline plan using the most effective discipline practices available to you.

**Section Three:** Develop your full potential as a classroom leader.

**Section Four:** Use three key elements to establish a positive classroom environment.

**Section Five:** Begin the process of moving your students toward becoming self-disciplined learners.

**Section Six:** Develop and implement effective classroom management systems.

**Section Seven:** Establish a productive relationship with the families of your students.

**Section Eight:** Cultivate a classroom climate where students work in harmony with each other and with you.

**Section Nine:** Design and deliver effective instruction that encourages students to stay on-task for the duration of the class.

**Section Ten:** Use a variety of motivational techniques to help students achieve.

**Section Eleven:** Prevent discipline problems with a variety of strategies.

**Section Twelve:** React appropriately once misbehavior has occurred in your classroom.

Busy secondary teachers can use this resource in many ways. You can browse through it section by section, gathering ideas to fit your own classroom situation. You could use the table of contents to find advice quickly in a particular section that addresses a concern you have at the moment. Or you can use this Guide to analyze the discipline problems happening in your classroom. The most effective use of the information in these pages, however, would be to enable you to create the kind of positive classroom environment where the teacher is in control and where students are engaged in the enjoyable process of becoming lifelong learners.





## SECTION ONE

# Successful Discipline Rests with You



### In this section you will learn

- How to accept responsibility for establishing a positive discipline climate
- How to select effective discipline strategies
- How to allow students to make appropriate choices
- How to anticipate student behavior patterns
- How to use proactive attitudes to help students be successful

## YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

This is a book about classroom discipline. This is not a book about lesson plans or grading papers or writing objectives on the board each day. It's not about taking attendance or delivering lectures or even about designing fair test questions.

Instead, it is about an issue far more puzzling and complex than any of these. It's about being sent to the principal and sassing the teacher and passing notes in class. It's also about teen substance abuse and bullies and students who bring weapons to school.

These problems have plagued teachers for as long as students have been coming to school. If you have discipline problems during the school year, take heart. Everyone who teaches does. *Everyone.*

We long for a positive discipline climate in our classes. Everything runs smoothly when that happens. We teach well. Our students learn what we want them to learn. The school day is a joyful, satisfying experience. When the climate is a negative one, however, even our best lesson plans are useless. We can't teach because our students are too disruptive to pay attention. We do not enjoy these frustrating days. We endure them. Our students do, too.

With this in mind, it's understandable that the word *discipline* usually has an unpleasant connotation for most of us. Our hearts sink at the thought of coping with discipline issues. We tend to think of *discipline* in the same way we think of the word *misbehavior*: discipline referral, disciplinary detention, or being sent to the office for disciplinary action.

*Discipline* in this book is not a negative. Quite the opposite is true. In this book the word *discipline* means the systematic and positive training you provide for your students to help them develop self-control. It is the means by which we have orderly classrooms and high-achieving students.

Fortunately, the discipline dilemma that all teachers face has solutions. We can take control of our classes. We can have a positive learning environment in our classrooms.

This book offers a wide variety of ways to create a peaceful and productive classroom. It's about how to manage the students in your class with sensitivity and dignity so that there is harmony in your classroom instead of strife.

This book is also about the most important factor in the discipline dilemma: the teacher. Never doubt that you make a difference in the lives of your students. In many ways teachers are the most idealistic people in our communities. While other adults see a group of teens loitering on the sidewalk just wasting time, we teachers don't seem to notice the silly clothing and too-cool hairstyles. Instead, we see the future.

We see what others cannot: potential doctors, teachers, accountants, lawyers, soldiers . . . our colleagues-in-waiting. Perhaps it is this gift that makes us struggle in the face of so many obstacles to help our students become the people we know they can be.

## ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY

Establishing a positive classroom discipline environment is a complex undertaking. It can cover issues as insignificant as dealing with a lost pencil or a talkative student to more serious ones such as incomplete assignments, cheating, and weapons at school. Creating a positive classroom discipline climate is a challenging task that demands that students operate within carefully constructed boundaries while, at the same time, developing into independent and self-disciplined learners.

The difficult and complex nature of classroom discipline issues is the result of several significant factors. Classroom discipline practices vary widely from region to region, district to district, and even from teacher to teacher. Discipline practices are also affected by the ages, abilities, personalities, maturity levels, backgrounds, and interests of the students they govern.

To further complicate matters, a classroom discipline climate is an ever-shifting environment where the naturally occurring daily changes that happen as students learn and mature influence discipline practices.

Because of the fluid nature of classroom discipline, no magic bullet exists. There is not a perfect solution that will work in every classroom all the time. Instead, teachers today must do what sensible teachers everywhere have always done: craft discipline plans uniquely designed to create a comfortable, businesslike, and safe learning climate where their students can achieve academic success.

The responsibility for a successful discipline climate rests with the classroom teacher. Although too many of us blame our students, their families, the school board, or even society for the discipline problems we encounter, the ultimate responsibility for creating a productive classroom is ours.

If we are the ones who are responsible for the discipline climate in our classrooms, then we are the ones who can make positive and effective choices to help our students. When we assume responsibility for the discipline climate in our classes, then we also gain the power to make positive changes.



Luckily for those teachers who accept this responsibility, the skills necessary to create a positive discipline climate can be learned. If we want to provide an atmosphere for achievement where we engage our students in actively acquiring knowledge through cooperation and motivated hard work, then we must realize that we are the keys to their success. Students will respond positively to our personalities, our energy, our enthusiasm, and our charisma.

Accepting this responsibility does not mean that a career in education becomes any easier; we still face unique problems. We have little or no chance for advancement and many of us are poorly paid. We are seldom recognized publicly for our hard work. Parents and principals may be grateful, but they don't knock on our classroom doors every day to tell us what a good job we are doing.

Teachers who decide to develop positive relationships with their students, who decide to use alternatives to punishments and threats, who decide to cope with the problems that we all share become successful teachers who are free to make positive changes because they have accepted responsibility for their actions.

## YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Take comfort in the thought that you are not alone with your discipline problems. We *all* experience them, even those teachers who seem to have well-disciplined classes. Successful teachers *do* have discipline problems just like the rest of us, but they have found ways to minimize their negative impact.

Many of our discipline problems, surprisingly enough, are not directly caused by our students. Here is a list of some of the many factors that can have a negative impact on your classroom performance:

- ▶ Overcrowded classes
- ▶ Too little productive time with students
- ▶ Students with overwhelming family problems
- ▶ Ineffective local discipline policies
- ▶ Overworked and unsympathetic administrators
- ▶ Parents or guardians who do not support school personnel and policies
- ▶ Parents or guardians who are unreachable or difficult to contact
- ▶ Buildings that need repairs and better maintenance
- ▶ Colleagues whose problems with classroom management spill over into our classes
- ▶ Uncertainty over the right action to take when problems occur
- ▶ Outdated textbooks, equipment, and other materials
- ▶ Teacher distress and burnout

In addition to the negative factors that can affect classrooms, many positive factors can also help you create the classroom that you would like for your students. Here is a list of those influences that have a positive bearing on your classroom performance:

- ▶ Economic status, race, and gender are no longer the barriers to education that they once were.
- ▶ School districts continue to develop a variety of programs designed to meet the unique needs of every student. We no longer offer a one-size-fits-all version of education.

- ▶ Today we know more than ever about which teaching methods are effective in helping our students learn. Research-based learning strategies and differentiated instruction are just two of the positive methods that are changing how we teach.
- ▶ Many private businesses and foundations recognize the need for assistance in public education and are generous in their support.
- ▶ Teachers are better prepared than ever to assume their professional responsibilities. Professional development opportunities abound both locally and on the Internet. New teachers have become one of our best resources.
- ▶ Technology makes it easier for us to be better teachers. We can reach out to students and their families in a variety of ways, learn new information, access lesson plan ideas from thousands of other teachers, and keep abreast with the latest news and trends in our field with just a few keystrokes.

## WHY PUNISHMENT AND OTHER INEFFECTIVE DISCIPLINE TECHNIQUES DO NOT WORK

Teachers who want to create a well-disciplined class realize they cannot do this by using outdated practices. It is only natural that we tend to model our teaching styles on the experiences we had in school. We want to re-create for our students the positive experiences that we enjoyed. We want to inspire them as we were inspired. We want to shape their lives as school shaped ours.

But in our attempts to do this, we sometimes re-create the negative experiences that we had in school as well. Punishment is used far too often in public schools today. It is, in fact, the most often-used discipline practice in secondary schools across our nation.

Punishment is a historical tradition in child rearing. We have been taught that if we “spare the rod,” we will “spoil the child,” even though research has shown time and time again that spanking has an adverse effect on almost every child. Yet very few adults can say they were never spanked when they were children.

Another reason that punishment is used in schools is that both parents and children expect it. Teachers who decide never to resort to punishment may seem to be too nice or too weak to be effective classroom leaders.

The problem is that punishment often does work—in the short run. If you want to establish brief control of a class, setting an example by punishing one pupil will quickly cause the others to sit up and take notice that you mean business. Many of us can recall embarrassing moments at the hands of an insensitive teacher. Most of us can also clearly remember an unfair incident in a class long after we have forgotten the weighty content of the course.

Many adults look back with nostalgic fondness on particular teachers who were very strict. These tough teachers held their students to very high standards of conduct and taught their subject matter thoroughly and well. Class reunions abound with fond stories about these respected teachers. More careful consideration, however, indicates that those tough teachers are revered only if they were caring, knowledgeable, and fair as well as strict.

If the modeling that we attempt for our students includes crowd control mainly through punishment and the fear of punishment, then it is not likely that we will be successful in creating the kind of positive classroom environment that we want. Rising dropout rates and the increase in the numbers of at-risk students are only two indications that we need to move away from discipline practices that are mainly punitive to take a more humane approach to our students.

## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT ADOLESCENTS

The turbulent adolescent years are marked by erratic growth and unpredictable changes. The turmoil of these years produces students who need understanding, reasonable, and compassionate teachers. Although making broad generalizations about any group is a risky business, many secondary students share some relevant character traits. These traits can have a significant impact on the success or failure of classroom discipline policies.

In the following list, you will find a few of these shared adolescent character traits, together with the chief challenge each one poses for the classroom teacher. This will be followed by three brief suggestions for making sure that each character trait can have a positive effect on your classroom.

### Peer Pressure Is Intense for Teens

It is no surprise to teachers that teens are greatly influenced by their peers. Adolescents turn to their peers for support and guidance. Unfortunately, the guidance they receive is not always beneficial.

#### *The Challenge*

To give students the positive values that will enable them to resist negative peer pressure.

#### *How Teachers Can Help*

- ▶ Create positive identities for all of your students by including team-building exercises in collaborative work so that students can learn to work together in a positive way for a common goal.
- ▶ Create positive peer pressure by allowing students to participate in the creation of class rules, policies, and procedures. Involving students in this process will encourage them to work together to enforce them.
- ▶ Bring in brief articles for class discussions about positive values that would benefit your students. Use them to discuss the choices they make about almost every aspect of their lives and the positive and negative outcomes of those choices. You can extend the impact of these discussions by displaying these articles on a bulletin board. They will serve as visual reminders of the values you want your students to develop.

### A Teenager's Emotional Energy Is High

The world of adolescence is a technicolored one. Emotions and experiences that are familiar to most adults are brand-new for your students. This makes teens easily impressionable, sensitive, moody, and excitable.

#### *The Challenge*

To channel this intensity into productive outlets.

### ***How Teachers Can Help***

- ▶ Build in class activities that allow students to be active and involved. Role-playing, panel discussions, and games are positive ways to begin.
- ▶ Use the time that might be wasted at the end of class for a forum to discuss teens' current concerns. Even a brief discussion can give your students some options other than the unacceptable responses they might make to events in their lives.
- ▶ Adjust your own attitude. Learn to view adolescents as joyful and vigorous rather than annoying. Laugh with them. Use that mixture of relief and nostalgia that you feel when you recall your own teen years as a guide to understanding your students.

### **Having Fun Is Very Important to Secondary Students**

The competition that many educators feel with the entertainment value of popular culture, the Internet, the music industry, and television is real. Many students, used to attractive and fast-paced entertainment, grow restless when they are expected to concentrate for a long time.

#### ***The Challenge***

To engage our students' attention fully for an entire class period.

### ***How Teachers Can Help***

- ▶ Divide lesson plans into ten-minute blocks of time and include several shorter activities in a lesson.
- ▶ Use a variety of activities to make class interesting for yourself and for your students. Don't be afraid to be creative and a little off-the-wall in your approach.
- ▶ Include music, art, and other areas of popular culture in your lessons. Have students fill out questionnaires to find out their interests. (See Section Eight for student interest inventories.)

### **Secondary Students Don't Always Use Time Wisely**

Students in the secondary grades are very busy people. They have after-school jobs, active social lives, and a dizzying round of family, sports, and community activities. Even though they may fill their days with numerous activities, many teens tend to choose activities that offer short-term gains rather than long-lasting benefits.

#### ***The Challenge***

To guide students in making wise use of their time.

### ***How Teachers Can Help***

- ▶ Watch out for the signs of trouble—sleepiness, inattention, or poor performance in class—and talk with the student. If the problem persists, contact the student’s parents or guardians for help.
- ▶ Work with your students to help them set both long-term and short-term goals for themselves. Help them determine what activities need to take priority if they are to reach their goals.
- ▶ Focus on time-management techniques to help students stay on track. Show your students how to use a daily planner, a syllabus, and a personal calendar.

### **Adolescents Want Their Schooling to Have a Practical Purpose**

Secondary students are intensely pragmatic about the work they are assigned in school. Vague assurances that “You will need this when you get to college” just do not provide the relevance that many students need to do their best work.

#### ***The Challenge***

To make students understand why they need to learn the material in a lesson.

### ***How Teachers Can Help***

- ▶ Follow sound educational theory and design lessons around a clearly stated objective. Use this to motivate your students to want to learn the material. Make sure that you yourself know how and why they will need this information. Just because it is part of your district’s curriculum is not a convincing reason.
- ▶ Include as many real-world applications for the knowledge and skills that you teach as you can. Build in the connections to past learning and to what the students have learned in other classes.
- ▶ At the end of class, ask students to brainstorm ways that they can use the material in the day’s lesson before the next class meeting.

### **Adolescents Do Not Want Absolute Freedom**

Secondary students need and want guidance from caring adults. They need positive role models who will show them how to build constructive relationships with others and how to manage the sometimes troubled course of their lives.

#### ***The Challenge***

To provide support and guidance for a large group of needy young people.

### **How Teachers Can Help**

- ▶ Be a positive role model. Studies have shown that positive and helpful teachers tend to create positive and helpful students. Modeling stable behavior is a good way to begin.
- ▶ Set reasonable limits on the behaviors you will and will not tolerate. When your students test those limits, you have an opportunity to teach them—by your example—how to set limits for themselves.
- ▶ Be accessible for your students. Plan time after school when you can meet with students or sponsor a school organization. Above all, be a friendly adult who cares about their concerns.

### **Insecurity Is a Far-Reaching Problem**

Even the toughest adolescents are not always as sure of themselves as they would like us to think. Their confidence is a thin shell that is easily cracked by failure or the fear of failure.

#### **The Challenge**

To make students feel more confident about their ability to succeed in school.

### **How Teachers Can Help**

- ▶ Involve all of your students in your lessons. Many students have learned the fine art of being invisible in a classroom. Be sensitive to their fears and shyness, but get students engaged in positive activities where they can succeed.
- ▶ Be positive with your students. Focus on their good points. Make sure you let them know about the good things they do. Students have no reason to try harder if a cranky teacher is going to criticize them needlessly.
- ▶ Begin a unit of study with activities that are easier to complete successfully than the ones later in the unit. When students see they can accomplish the work, they tend to try harder to complete assignments.

### **Mistakes Usually Arise from Inexperience**

Contrary to what we may believe on a day when nothing is going right, our students do not get out of bed with the intention of failing our class and upsetting as many people as possible in the process. Students miscalculate the amount of time that it will take to complete a project, or they say the wrong thing to the wrong person at the wrong time. These errors and countless others like them are made by young people who are trying to figure out the complicated business of living.

#### **The Challenge**

To reduce the negative effects of the mistakes that students make.