CHAPTER ONE

Understanding The RCMPlan™

Few things help an individual more than to place responsibility upon him, and to let him know that you trust him.

—Booker T. Washington

AN ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM SCENE

To Theresa Diaz, a first-year, fifth grade teacher at Lincoln Elementary, the early morning was filled with the last-minute rush: friends planning after school activities, students entering and exiting the restrooms, and teachers standing guard at their doors directing children into their classrooms. In the hallway, behind the door to Ms. Diaz's classroom, four female students whispered plans about sitting together at lunch. School was important, but their group was becoming a more primary focus. Ms. Diaz's greeting only lowered their whispering, and their indifference to the setting was obvious.

Placing coffee on her desk, Ms. Diaz was pleased to see almost everybody seated at their assigned desks—except, of course, Janene and Tyrone, who were arguing in the back of the class. With the bell, Ms. Diaz expected full attention . . . but Curtis, as usual, was not yet seated. Before

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Ms. Diaz could give him his daily "sit down," Janene and Tyrone increased the volume of their exchange until Ms. Diaz could constrain herself no longer and sprang into action. She spoke to them as sternly as possible without showing her temper, yet was aware that her pitch was too high for effective intimidation; but somehow, she had to gain control. The class watched nervously as she sarcastically asked the two students if they were going to join the class for the day. Her approach seemed to distract them, and Janene laughed, while Tyrone took offense and answered with a wisecrack about Ms. Diaz's ethnic group.

Ms. Diaz ignored the bait, ordered Curtis to sit, and asked the class to take out the individual assignments they had been working on for the last few mornings. She could only hope that she had gotten on the right side of the contest by scoring a slight victory, temporary as it would be.

Harrison waved his hand at Ms. Diaz and asked to present his paper on the upcoming presidential election. Ms. Diaz looked around at the other hands, noting the expressions of those who did not volunteer as withdrawn and clearly not engaged. She decided to ignore them; she couldn't afford to waste what little productive time she had to extract what they probably didn't know anyway.

So, she quickly agreed to Harrison's insistence, trying to move rapidly into the lesson without further distraction. But Tyrone asked, tauntingly, why he never got a chance to go first. Ms. Diaz saw her chance to embarrass Tyrone and asked Harrison to allow Tyrone to demonstrate his knowledge. Tyrone said that he and Janene had done the work together. Ms. Diaz replied that she was not interested in group work. She wanted to know what he was capable of—what he had done. Tyrone responded with more sarcasm, this time directed at Harrison. Yuki, Harrison's friend, stared hard at Tyrone. Ms. Diaz felt her grasp of control become increasingly precarious.

Pushing hard ahead, she offered a short introduction, describing how she expected the class to carry on the discussion. The PA system interrupted the effort with innocuous announcements. Ms. Diaz, clearly frustrated by the further delay, started again, but the class took precious minutes to refocus. Ms. Diaz then asked Harrison to read his one-page paper, hoping the topic would engage everyone with something she considered important and immediate. She knew she was taking a chance, but the issue was in the news and certainly entwined in the current topic

of study. Within a few minutes, she realized she was both right and wrong. The class was listening to Harrison, but the class was also becoming agitated as he confronted their preconceptions. Harrison was subsequently attacked for his position.

Sensing the drift of the arguments, Ms. Diaz recognized she needed to keep a tight lid on the discussion—quite opposite to what she had hoped. These arguments were laced with threads of racial, ethnic, and class conflict. She could clearly see the vast diversity of her students, and guess their social and economic status. But as she looked at her class more closely, she realized that she did not really know them; she had not shared their experiences. She did not understand the extraordinary diversity of background, ability, and interest that confronted her. What could she do with this situation to make it work? Did she have the appropriate training? Did she have the skills? Could she succeed?

THE RCMPLAN™

This classroom scene illustrates a few moments of the complex dynamics and inherent potential for conflict in elementary classrooms in the United States today. Undoubtedly, this image is disquieting, but real. Compared to a decade ago, societal and personal conditions are more complex, harder to grasp, and more difficult to control. The nation's public schools absorb the pace and degree of these changes, and the individual classroom teacher stands at the core of the expected change process. The teacher likely depicts the perfect panacea capable of clearly manifesting the stability needed for behavioral and academic changes in our children.

The RCMPlan™ is a schoolwide, behavior-correcting plan that enhances a school's capacity to safely and effectively educate all students. The RCMPlan™ applies evidence-based support systems to maximize opportunities for teaching academics and prosocial behaviors.

The following characteristics are embedded in the plan (Horner, Sugai, Todd, & Lewis-Palmer, 2005; Sugai, 2000; Sugai & Horner, 2002; Sugai, Sprague, Horner, & Walker, 2000):

- A team-based approach to identify, implement, and evaluate best practices, including administrators, teachers, school psychologists, other support personnel, and parents.
- Support for improvement efforts with budget, personnel, and resource allocations.
- Use of research-validated practices.
- Proactive behavioral instruction, teaching and modeling appropriate social behavior, with plenty of positive feedback.
- Opportunities for students to practice the expected behavior, aiming for fluency.
- A continuum of behavioral support to increase the intensity of the intervention as the intensity of the problem increases.
- Data-based systems and schoolwide, behavioral goals to guide decisions, keeping staff informed on current guidelines along with what is and is not working.

Promoting good citizenship by developing responsible children who can live productively in a democratic and multicultural society is a key goal of responsible classroom management (RCM). This involves acting responsibly and practicing socially acceptable behavior. Responsible students also self-correct inappropriate behavior after hey experience natural consequences for any inappropriate acts. William Glasser, in his book *Reality Therapy* (1990), defines responsibility as follows:

> . . . the ability to fulfill one's needs, and to do so in a way that does not deprive others of the ability to fulfill their needs. . . . . A responsible person also does that which gives him a feeling of self-worth and a feeling that he is worthwhile to others. (p. xi)

Glasser believes children have certain needs that must be met by either the home or the school. When students behave inappropriately, it is because (according to Glasser) their basic needs are not being met. If the home does not satisfy those needs, then the school must try to meet them. Accordingly, the school and teachers must assist children in being successful in what they undertake—in their effort to learn, and in their pursuit of

self-worth. It follows that if a child misbehaves in school, then teachers must somehow help the child meet unmet needs. If a child cannot adjust and behave more productively, then teachers must find ways to alter their own behavior, or the structure and contents of the classroom, to assist the child.

Taking a similar position to Glasser, RCM posits that teachers should not try to alter a child's world and allow the child to avoid the consequences of misbehavior. Changing the school environment is not the same as altering rules and expectations so that a child can avoid injury to self-worth. Rather, teachers should help students make value judgments about what causes a problem. When children judge their misbehavior and commit themselves to change, they will learn responsibility. Once a child commits to change, a teacher can accept no excuse from the child for not maintaining the commitment.

The RCMPlan™ ensures that a child is not permitted to escape responsibility for misbehavior. This does not mean that a teacher should punish or praise a child for a certain act, since this disconnects the child from directly accepting responsibility for the behavior. While punishment permits the child to focus on the punishment and the consequent feelings of revenge, praise motivates the child to seek similar commendation for any and all activity. Both practices thereby delay self-motivation. As an alternative, teachers must use logical consequences for the child to correct the misbehavior and develop responsibility.

BECOMING A SUCCESSFUL RCM TEACHER

To be successful, RCM teachers must analyze their own behavior to determine where they might inject unfavorable behaviors and attitudes into the classroom. Tendencies toward authoritarian or permissive control, prejudice, ignorance of the correct methodology, indecisiveness, or uncertainty about the goals of RCM will each undermine the RCM classroom and school.

According to the RCM perspective, external rewards in the form of reinforcement, or even casual praise, delay development of the responsible child. In a dynamic, creative, and uncontrived classroom, a teacher depends on the excitement from tapping a child's inherent need to know, learn, and very importantly, belong. RCM teachers derive a significant portion of stable behavior from

excellence in instructional preparation and execution. Successful RCM teachers, then, carefully entwine **standards** and **guidelines** into the instructional process alongside **expected behaviors** supported by **natural and logical consequences**.

The Three Major RCM Principles

While The RCMPlan™ integrates many educational beliefs, three major principles maximize student success. These are listed and briefly addressed here, with much greater detail offered in later chapters about how these principles work in harmony to achieve all the desired behaviors discussed to this point.

The basic-program principles of The RCMPlan™ include:

1. Responsibility is taught and incorporated instructionally within a warm and inviting classroom.

The RCM approach to classroom management develops responsible children who can live productively in a democratic and multicultural society. Within the RCM classroom, responsibility is taught and then expected. Teachers, and the school organization, should implement democratic principles in their teaching and leadership roles. Human equality, dignity, self-worth, participation in decision making at all levels, and acceptance of the consequences of behavior should all be concepts integrated into the curriculum and consistently taught.

The school and classroom environment, and the concomitant instructional effort, embody the RCM approach. In a safe and inviting environment, a child feels secure and protected, and is then prepared to learn. The more positive the experience of the classroom, the greater the opportunity the teacher has to guide the students toward responsible behavior. Organization of space and time, format and presentation of instructional materials, the demeanor of the teachers, and the amount and kind of preparation are all critically important to success in an environmentally sound school and classroom. The RCM approach requires a teacher to clearly state the objectives of all planned classroom activity. This outcome-based approach to instruction necessitates the teacher's careful preparation and constant evaluation of student behavior. Precise and sensitive instructional guidance builds the foundation for responsible student behavior.

2. Standards, guidelines, and expected behaviors replace rigid school and classroom rules.

The RCMPlan™ does not use rules. Instead, the teacher uses standards, guidelines, and expected behaviors. Standards define the general direction of the desired behavior. Guidelines provide specific directions to successfully meet those standards, and expected behaviors represent grade level and developmentally appropriate actions to follow. In the RCM classroom, teachers act swiftly, consistently, and unemotionally to instill desirable behavior. As students learn to internalize responsible behavior, their self-esteem matures, and they increasingly gain internalized control over their own behavior.

3. Consequences teach students to self-correct inappropriate behaviors and assume responsibility for their actions.

Logical consequences link a student's inappropriate action to violated expected behavior, breaking the guideline and thus the standard. A logical consequence is not punishment. Instead, more realistic consequences result from not doing what is expected. For example, one guideline states, "The student is to come to school prepared to learn." In discussing this expectation, the teacher gives a directive for students to complete homework on a daily basis. Every child is expected to do the homework, with no exceptions. If a student comes in without his homework, he is not penalized with a low grade. Instead, he may be asked when he would like to complete the assignment—at break, during lunch, or after school. Those may be his only choices or there may be others. Specifically, the teacher may assign another consequence if she believes the initial one would not change the inappropriate behavior with this particular child. What happens if he doesn't have his homework in the future? One possibility is to simply repeat the consequence. Repeating a consequence can work well and proves that as teacher, she is serious. If the repeated consequence does not work, the teacher must move to something different with this student.

Individual Treatment

Within the RCM classroom, children are considered individuals who must be treated fairly and equally, but not necessarily the

same. No parent disciplines two or three children in the same manner. For one child, time in her room is punishment and to another child, it is as a reward. Discipline, then, has to be personalized. Teachers achieve this with RCM and receive far less parental complaints than with other programs.

RCM fosters and acknowledges student performance and personal responsibility, and does not use bribery and predetermined rewards. Too often, teachers attempt to motivate students to learn and behave acceptably in the classroom with external rewards. This process is time-consuming, and often results in children who rely solely on extrinsic rewards to accomplish what should be intrinsically important to them. In contradistinction to this scheme, the RCM approach to classroom management uses high expectations and reasonable guidelines and standards to develop intrinsic motivation.

Students practice internal-behavior control rather than have their behavior controlled externally. Strict rules for obedience insulate students from personal responsibility—a result contrary to RCM purpose. When a child is taught to act autonomously, according to agreed-upon standards, the child acts responsibly. Responsible behavior does not require enforcement, and will likely be repeated without the application of external inducements. Much of the problem in our nation today with college graduates entering the workforce and demanding personal entitlements, we believe, stems from continuous bribes and rewards for completing assignments and/or simply behaving as expected.

A MODEL FOR IMPROVING INSTRUCTION AND BEHAVIOR

The thinking of humanist psychologists Abraham Maslow and Mortimer Adler, and cognitive developmentalists such as Erik Erikson, Richard Havinghurst, Lawrence Kolberg, and Jean Piaget, underlies The RCMPlan™. Based on this foundation, RCM shares some of the integrated ideas with the programs of Dreikurs, Nelson, and Glasser, but in a more practical and individualized manner.

RCM is based on the notion that every child moves through several common developmental stages. These stages determine, to

a high degree, the behaviors, attitudes, cognitive capabilities, and physical characteristics that a child exhibits at any particular time. These proclivities, in combination with interactions with parents, siblings, peers, and teachers, greatly influence the pattern of behavior that a child adopts. To assure that children grow and prosper, and develop into healthy and well-balanced adults, every child needs unconditional love, security, and the certainty of belonging.

The ability to find workable solutions to life's problems is fundamental to a child's well-being. Within a hierarchy of learned behavior, the RCM model helps develop a capacity to solve problems. Children must be taught to examine and solve the many social and academic problems they will encounter during their growth. Accordingly, they must be given the opportunity to creatively and independently explore the world, define and achieve goals, and feel success upon which they will build self-assuredness, self-esteem, and ultimately, a strong self-concept.

RCM assumes that competent and responsible adults can teach most children, even so-called "problem" children and regardless of a child's socioeconomic or family history, to behave responsibly in the classroom, in school, and in the community at large. Behaving responsibly, according to RCM, means, in part, acting in accordance with an internalized set of values and beliefs, and with acceptance of the consequences of an act, whether positive or negative. On a continuum conveying degrees of responsible behavior, more responsible students self-correct behavior, use an internal locus of control, accept the consequences of their behavior, and follow guidelines to a greater degree than students who are less responsible. But regardless of where children fall on the continuum, most students can learn to behave responsibly. The real challenge lies in dealing with those few students—less than 5 percent of most classrooms—who exhibit anger, aggression, and mistrust in their behavior and attitudes. Their noncompliant behavior can be highly disruptive, and require exceptional treatment to make the classroom a viable operation. The RCM program addresses the needs of many of these students with the **intensive care unit** (a therapeutic removal from class, isolation, and counseling) and the team-led **discipline review committee**, both to be discussed later in this chapter. These tools use direct parent contact and establish two

levels of contracts, **behavioral improvement agreements**, to include behaviors not responding to the previous plans. These tools function with appropriate consequences ranging from isolation, suspension, expulsion, and even entry into the juvenile justice system.

The Functions of the
Discipline Review Committee

Classroom teachers use the intensive care unit (ICU) as a major consequence for significant disruptive classroom behavior, or intentional disrespect to a teacher or school employee. Students are removed from the setting where the offense has occurred and admitted to ICU. No work is permitted and the child must sit quietly and reflect upon the undesirable behavior. After the first visit to the ICU, the teacher meets with the student to establish procedures for avoiding a return to the ICU. Most students never return for a second visit. The discipline review committee (DRC), including parents and school administrators, monitors any rare second or third visits. No student is sent for a fourth time to ICU. Instead, a more severe consequence occurs. Usually by this time, the school is dealing with the top ten or so offenders in the entire school.

The DRC members, appointed by the principal or elected by the faculty, supervise all stages of The RCMPlan™. The DRC approves the overall school standard and guidelines, as recommended by the faculty and staff, and the chair serves as the major contact between teachers, students, and parents required to attend an ICU meeting. For each set of guidelines—such as behavior in the hall, parking lot, cafeteria, and other locations—a *specific* consequence correlates with the violation, including procedures for staff to follow. Prior to implementation or modification, the DRC must present the school's plan to the administration, faculty, and staff.

In the next step, individual teachers at the various grade levels and in special areas establish (or use the three we suggest) classroom guidelines (based upon school standards) and a pool of logical consequences for the classroom. After the first year, the faculty might seek student input as appropriate for revisions. This input allows students to be more involved in decision making and models participatory citizenship. Once the classroom plans are added

to the school plan, the administration and staff establish an intensive care unit, prepare space, and develop a supervisory schedule. Two personnel are recommended to supervise the ICU at all times. The role of the DRC will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

The ability to find workable solutions to life's problems is fundamental to a child's well-being. Within a hierarchy of learned behavior, the RCM model supports this capacity to solve problems. Children must learn to examine and solve the many social and academic problems that they will encounter during their growth. Accordingly, they must have the opportunity to creatively and independently explore the world, define and achieve goals, and experience success. Upon this, they will build self-assuredness, self-esteem, and, ultimately, a strong self-concept.

AN INVITATION TO CHANGE: THE RCMPLAN™ INVENTORY

Before beginning the RCM approach to schoolwide classroom management, reflecting on beliefs about children, teaching, and learning will help clarify one's professional knowledge and attitudes about the underlying principles of RCM. The RCMPlan™ inventory assists in this process, and requires a simple response from "agree" to "disagree," with "uncertain" gauging an uncommitted response.

Once the inventory is complete, compare your results to the "ideal responses" we suggest. Strong general agreement on the items suggests an understanding and compliance with the fundamental principles and practices of RCM. A strong general disagreement signals either misunderstanding or rejection of RCM principles. Uncertain responses indicate a lack of clarity surrounding RCM, the meaning of a particular statement, or one's own values and practices. This is a crucial step because potential users must understand and agree with the driving principles of RCM for it to be successfully implemented. By examining responses, you can identify areas of concern and further explore the underpinnings of RCM before proceeding.

If you don't feel prepared to take the inventory at this time, revisit it after you finish other chapters or the entire book. Use the inventory individually or use it with the entire faculty for training, keeping in mind that it is not just an inventory—it is a teaching tool.

The RCM Plan Inventory

Item	Rating		
	Agree	*Uncertain*	*Disagree*
1. Children and adults move through common developmental stages that affect their behavior.			
2. Teachers should ignore student misbehaviors and smile or wink when acceptable behavior is observed.			
3. Children should be taught problem-solving methods.			
4. Self-assuredness, self-esteem, and a strong self-concept are fundamental to success in school.			
5. "Problem" or "dysfunctional" children cannot learn responsibility and should be separated from "normal" children.			
6. A poor socioeconomic and family history make it impossible for a child to learn responsible behavior.			
7. Children should rely on extrinsic motivation to control their behavior.			
8. Teachers should reinforce acceptable student behavior with items exchangeable for privileges, fun activities, and events.			
9. Responsible children self-correct their behavior, use an internal locus of control, and accept the consequences of their behavior.			
10. Teachers should reward a student immediately and frequently, especially at the beginning when the student is becoming familiar with correct behavior.			
11. Only a small number of children in almost any classroom require serious attention for misbehavior.			
12. Teachers should model appropriate values and behavior.			
13. Teachers should use positive and negative reinforcements to modify the behavior of students within the classroom environment.			

Item	Rating		
	Agree	*Uncertain*	*Disagree*
14. Teachers should carefully monitor their own behavior in the classroom.			
15. Teachers should avoid correcting a misbehaving child to prevent damage to the child's self-esteem.			
16. When a child expresses dismay for being denied satisfaction of a demand, teachers should change their own behavior to meet the needs of the child.			
17. Teachers' guidance precludes children from experiencing the consequences of their behavior.			
18. Children should be allowed to experience the natural consequences of their behavior.			
19. An authoritarian approach to discipline permits a child to develop an internal locus of control.			
20. Teachers should not be concerned with developing democratic and multicultural values.			
21. Human equality, dignity, self-worth, and participation in decision making at all levels should be taught by teachers and integrated into the curriculum.			
22. The school and classroom environment are not important for developing a responsible student.			
23. A safe and inviting classroom is irrelevant to a child's success in school.			
24. Teachers should clearly state the objectives of their instruction.			
25. Teachers should praise students for exceptional performance.			
26. Teachers should not punish a child for misbehavior.			
27. Punishment and consequences are not the same.			

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Item	Rating		
	Agree	*Uncertain*	*Disagree*
28. Encouragement and praise will have the same positive effects on a child's attitudes and behavior.			
29. A responsible child relies solely on external rewards to motivate learning.			
30. External rewards are essential tools in controlling student behavior.			
31. Teachers should not rely on strict rules to control a child's behavior.			
32. Expressing strong emotions when dealing with a child's classroom misbehavior effectively controls that behavior.			
33. Teachers should closely monitor students for conformance to a code of discipline.			
34. Children should be involved in the development of behavioral standards and guidelines.			
35. Teachers should eliminate negative consequences so that a child enjoys school.			
36. Children should question the rules established by the teacher or school.			
37. Within the context of the classroom, students should not be expected to derive solutions to problems based on their rational understanding of their inner selves.			
38. Responsible behavior must be constantly reinforced with external inducements.			
39. A responsible child has internalized acceptable standards of behavior.			
40. Forcing a child to behave allows the child to internalize acceptable standards of behavior.			
41. A child is usually unwilling to cooperate unless forced to do so.			

Item	Rating		
	Agree	*Uncertain*	*Disagree*
42. Students should take an active role in developing and implementing learning experiences in the classroom.			
43. The rational, inner self is a myth.			
44. Students should be taught to act autonomously.			
45. A teacher's demeanor has substantial effects on a child's behavior in the classroom.			
46. Teachers should not use popcorn, candy, or other enjoyable items to positively reinforce an appropriate behavior.			
47. Children should be permitted to experience the consequences of their behavior.			
48. Teachers should arrange rewards to increase acceptable behavior.			
49. When children are treated equally, they are always treated fairly.			
50. Teachers should reward desirable behavior often and lessen the rewards as the desirable behavior is expressed.			
51. Children require a sense of security and belonging to function in school effectively.			
52. Due to misbehavior, students must sometimes be physically removed from the classroom environment and placed in a time-out area.			
53. To control behavior, teachers should direct a student to repeat an unacceptable behavior until the student is unwilling to continue doing so.			
54. Teachers should provide incremental rewards for small and incremental improvements in behavior.			
55. Most children do not require strong disciplinary actions in the classroom.			

Key to RCMPlan™ Inventory

Agree: 1, 3, 4, 9, 11, 12, 14, 18, 21, 24, 26, 27, 31, 34, 36, 39, 42, 44, 45, 46, 47, 51, 52, and 55.

Disagree: 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 22, 23, 25, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 35, 37, 38, 40, 41, 43 48, 49, 50, 53, and 54.

LOOKING AHEAD

Chapter 1 presented a scenario similar to the real-life classrooms teachers must face daily, followed by a description of the traditional classroom plans that focus on external-control models, such as fears or bribes, in comparison to The RCMPlan ™—a well-tested, internal-control model that allows students to correct undesirable behaviors. From there, the various roles and functions of the DRC were explained. Chapter 2 next presents procedures for setting up the instructional and classroom management environment.