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CHAIR TIPPING

description/
GOAL

Students in your class lean back in their chairs—that is, they sit so only two legs of the chair are on the floor. Your goal is for the students to sit properly at all times, with all four legs of the chair on the floor.

Ask yourself . . .	If yes . . .	If no . . .
Have you or other staff members been aware of this problem for only a few days or a week?	Go to Plan A.	Proceed to the next consideration.
Are students unaware of the extent of their inappropriate behavior?	Go to Plan B.	Proceed to the next consideration.
Do students lack the motivation to behave appropriately?	Go to Plan C.	Review each plan and choose the one that best suits your situation.



PLANS

PLAN A: For a problem that has just begun or occurs infrequently.

PLAN B: For students who are unaware of the extent of their inappropriate behavior.

PLAN C: For students who lack the motivation to behave appropriately.

Although these three plans are designed for a classwide problem, they can be modified easily for use with one or a few students.

Plan A

It is not always necessary or even beneficial to use an involved plan. If the chair tipping has just begun or occurs infrequently (two to five times per week), the following actions, along with making the students aware of your concerns, may resolve the situation.

1. Present the situation to the class.

- a. Hold an informal discussion with the class. Schedule it for a time when you are calm and won't be interrupted.

Tell the class that you find their chair tipping to be a problem and explain why. Inform them that there are both safety and economic reasons why you cannot allow this behavior to continue. Explain that chair tipping can result in severe injuries (such as skull fractures). It also puts undue stress on the chair and undue wear and tear on the floor.

- b. Then clarify your expectations. Tell the students that the chairs were designed so that when someone is seated, all four feet of the chair remain completely on the floor. Give the students the opportunity to ask questions and make comments.
- c. End the session by thanking the students for listening and telling them that you are confident they will make an effort to follow appropriate procedures in the future.

2. Respond consistently to all instances of chair tipping.

Whenever a student is tipping back in a chair, gently correct the student by stating your expectations about chair sitting. "Nathaniel, remember you need to keep all four feet of the chair on the floor." Avoid being emotional or talking too much when correcting the student. Your goal is simply to impart information.

3. Use reinforcement to encourage appropriate behavior.

- a. Praise individual students who are meeting your expectations for sitting in chairs properly (i.e., not tipping back). Keep an eye on the students who have the greatest tendency to lean back in their chairs and acknowledge them for treating school property with care.

- b. Also be sure to praise those students who have had little or no problem with chair tipping. These students do not need positive feedback as often as the students for whom chair tipping is a problem, but you do not want them to think that you take their appropriate behavior for granted. "You people seated at this table consistently use the furniture the right way. Thank you." If public praise will be embarrassing for the students, praise them privately or even give them a note.
- c. When appropriate, praise the class as a whole for treating school property with respect. Whenever the students are sitting correctly in their chairs, you can praise them for their responsible behavior.

Plan B

Occasionally students are not really aware of when or how frequently they are leaning back in their chairs. In these cases, the intervention must include a way of helping them become more aware of their own behavior.

1. Conduct a class meeting about the situation.

- a. Depending on your personal philosophy and the extent (severity/longevity) of the problem, conduct either an informal class discussion or a more formal class meeting. In either case, wait until you are calm (i.e., not right after an incident has occurred) and make sure there will be enough time to adequately present the issue.
- b. Inform the students about the meeting in advance so they will have time to think about the problem. "Class, this afternoon we are going to have a meeting on the problem of chair tipping. Please give some thought to this situation and how we, as a class, might solve it."
- c. Tell the class that you find their chair tipping to be a problem and explain why. See Plan A, Step 1.
- d. If you want the students to assume some ownership of the problem, hold a brainstorming session. Before the meeting, identify any aspects of the plan that you do not feel comfortable opening up to a group decision—for example, whether there will be

a consequence for chair tipping and, if so, what the consequence will be. If you firmly believe that there should be a consequence for chair tipping, you should not seek student input on that particular issue.

- e. Describe your preliminary plan, as appropriate. Invite the students to give input on the plan. Together work out any necessary details, such as goals and rewards. Incorporating any of the students' suggestions that strengthen the plan is likely to increase their sense of ownership in and commitment to it.
- f. Use an agenda, such as the sample shown below, to provide a structure for the meeting. Write the agenda on the board shortly before the meeting.

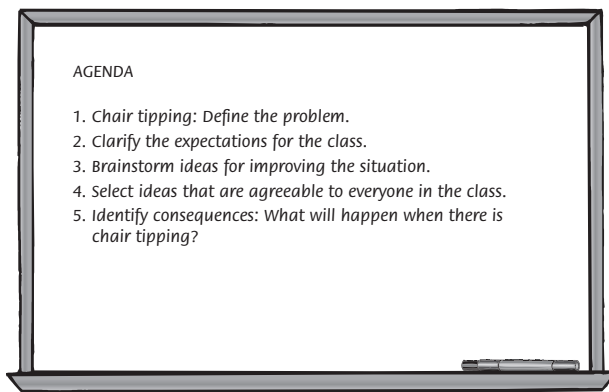


FIGURE 1. Sample agenda

Clarification of Agenda Items

Item 1: Share any information you have collected and explain why chair tipping is a problem.

Item 2: Clarify specifically how you want the students to behave with regard to chair tipping in your classroom. Be thorough.

Item 3: For brainstorming to be effective, you need to establish clear rules for you and the students. For example:

- Any idea is OK (but no obscenity).
- Ideas will not be evaluated initially. Students should not voice their approval or disapproval by saying, for example, "Good idea" or "What a stupid idea" during brainstorming.
- All ideas will be written down and discussed at the conclusion of brainstorming.

Item 4: Lead the class to consensus on any decisions that need to be made. Use voting as a decision-making process when appropriate.

- g. End the session by thanking the students for their participation.

2. Respond consistently to all instances of chair tipping.

- a. Whenever a student is tipping back in a chair, gently correct the student. See Plan A, Step 2.
- b. Make sure each incident of chair tipping is recorded (see Step 3).

3. Publicly document the frequency of chair tipping in the classroom.

- a. Because the goal is to obtain a total count of chair tipping incidents each day (a frequency count), as opposed to putting undue peer pressure on individual students, it is not necessary to identify which students are leaning back in their chairs. Simply record each incident of chair tipping electronically or by writing a tally mark on a card.
- b. Each day, hold a short class meeting to publicly record the information and review the day's record. If appropriate, have a student chart the information on a graph (or do it yourself). Briefly discuss whether the number of incidents was more, less, or about the same as on previous days.

If the day did not go well, encourage the students to talk about why. Help them identify what they can do the next day to remember to keep their chairs flat on the floor.

- c. If the students behave inappropriately during the meeting, keep the review session very short. Simply let the class know that you are sure tomorrow will be a better day.

4. Use reinforcement to encourage appropriate behavior.

- a. Praise individual students who are meeting your expectations for sitting in chairs properly. See Plan A, Step 3.

- b. When appropriate, praise the students during the end-of-day review meetings for their willingness to look seriously at the day’s results. Even on a bad day, praise the students if they discuss why it was a bad day. “Class, you are really handling this responsibly. Even though it was a rough day, you are willing to talk about things you might do differently tomorrow. That is a real sign that we are making progress.”

Always try to make these meetings upbeat and encouraging regardless of how the day went. You want the students to look forward to the review at the end of the day.

Plan C

Sometimes students fall into the habit of chair tipping and are simply not motivated to behave appropriately. In this case, the intervention should include a structured system of reinforcement (rewards and consequences) to encourage the students to change their behavior.

1. Conduct a class meeting about the situation.

See Plan B, Step 1.

2. Respond consistently to all instances of chair tipping.

- a. Establish a consequence that is logically associated with chair tipping, but is mild enough that you will be willing to follow through on implementing it each time an incident occurs. For example, you might take away the student’s chair for the remainder of that instructional activity and return it at the beginning of the next activity. Thus, if the tipping occurred at the beginning of a math lesson, you would return the chair to the student when the math lesson is completed.
- b. Before you begin implementing the consequence for chair tipping, make sure the students understand exactly what will happen when they lean back in their chairs. “Class, from now on, if I have to give a reminder to someone about chair tipping, that person will lose the privilege of having a chair for the remainder of the activity.”
- c. Whenever a student is leaning back in his or her chair, implement the consequence. Do not worry if at

first the students act like it is great fun to be without a chair. If you simply ignore this behavior, the students will tire of the game within a few days. Also make sure the incident is recorded (see Step 3).

3. Publicly document the frequency of chair tipping in the classroom.

See Plan B, Step 3.

4. Have the class establish a performance objective for reducing their number of daily incidents of chair tipping.

Because the students may be inclined to set an unrealistic goal, such as reducing the number of incidents each day from 15 to zero, you may have to help them set a more attainable goal. It is reasonable to aim for a reduction of about 30% each week—for example, from 15 to 11 incidents a day. Explain to the students that if the goal is 11, they can always have fewer incidents than that, but they increase their chances of success by making the goal attainable. As the class consistently experiences success, lower the goal by 30% each week until their objective is zero incidents.

5. Implement a system for rewarding the class for appropriate behavior.

- a. During the initial meeting to discuss the situation with the class (see Step 1), have the students brainstorm a number of classwide rewards they might want to earn. Review the list and eliminate any items that are not possible—for example, the suggestion is too expensive or can’t be provided to all the students in the class. See Appendix A for a list of possible reinforcers.

Assign prices (in points) to the items that remain on the list. Prices should be based on the instructional, personnel, and/or monetary costs of the items. Monetary cost is clear—the more expensive the item, the more points required to earn it. Instructional cost refers to the amount of instructional time lost or interfered with by a particular reward. Thus, an activity that causes the class to miss part of academic instruction should require more points than one the class can do during recess. Personnel cost involves the time required by you or other staff to fulfill the reinforcer. Receiving an extra recess period that requires supervision costs more than playing music in class for 15 minutes.

- b. Have the class vote on the reinforcers. Students will work first for the reinforcer that earns the most votes, then for the item that comes in second, third, and so forth.
- c. On days when the class keeps the number of chair-tipping incidents at or under their identified goal, award them a point (or points). They will continue to accumulate points until they can pay for their reward.
- d. An alternative is to use a Mystery Motivator as described in *The Tough Kid Book* (Rhode, Jenson, & Reavis, 2010). In this system, you mark random days on a calendar with an X, then cover all the daily spaces with slips of paper. On each day the class attains their goal, uncover the space for that day. If there is an X, the class earns a predetermined reinforcer.

NOTE: Also uncover the spaces for days when the class was unsuccessful to show whether they would have received a reward had they achieved their performance objective.

- e. If you think a classwide system is unlikely to be effective, consider using a team competition and response cost lottery. Divide the class into four to six equitable teams—each team should have the same number of typical chair tippers. Give each team a certain number of tickets at the beginning of each day and have them write the name of their team on their tickets.

Whenever a student is tipping back in his or her chair, that student's team loses a ticket. At the end of the day, each team puts their remaining tickets in a hat for a drawing. The name of the team on the drawn ticket earns the predetermined reward for that day.

With this system you will be giving daily rewards, so the reinforcers should be moderate and reasonable. For example, award a pass for five minutes of extra time on a computer to each team member.

- f. Regardless of the reinforcement system you use, keep student attention focused on the fact that they are treating school property with care and respect. "Class, you earned your point for the day, but more importantly, you are treating school property with care and respect. We can all be proud of our classroom."

Preparation & Implementation

The following steps are designed to help you develop and implement any intervention plan effectively, whether you use one of the model plans or create your own custom plan. The steps are suggestions—you do not need to follow them rigidly or in any particular order. Use your professional judgment and the knowledge of your particular situation to make them work for you.

1. Make sure you have enough information about the situation.

For a behavior like chair tipping, the most useful information involves tracking how often it occurs. Keep a frequency count for about a week. Some behavior management programs allow you to track frequency using a handheld electronic device. Or simply keep a note card in your pocket or on a clipboard and write a tally mark whenever you notice a student leaning back in his or her chair. **NOTE:** When the problem has just begun or occurs infrequently (i.e., when a minimal plan such as Plan A is appropriate), you may not need this level of objective information.

2. Determine when and how to include the parents/guardians.

- a. With a procedural issue such as chair tipping, it is not necessary to involve parents when the problem is classwide. However, when the situation involves only one or a few students who continue to lean back in their chairs, contact the parents/guardians of those individuals. Explain that the student is not using the classroom chairs properly and what steps you are taking to correct the situation.
- b. Although frequent contact with the parents/guardians is not required, inform them beforehand whenever you are going to implement an individualized plan. Then give updates on the situation approximately every two to four weeks.

3. Give the class regular, ongoing feedback about their behavior.

Hold short end-of-day review meetings for at least two weeks to evaluate the situation. In most cases, three to five minutes should suffice. Discuss whether or not the students' behavior is improving. Review

PREPARATION & IMPLEMENTATION

the frequency count for the day. As much as possible, focus on improvements, but also address any new or continuing problems. As the situation improves, fade the meetings to once a week, once every other week, then to once a month.

4. Evaluate the situation and the plan.

After you implement the intervention plan for at least two weeks, determine whether it is effective. Base your decision on the objective information you collect (the frequency count) and/or your and the students' subjective perceptions. If the problem behavior has remained the same or worsened, make some kind of change—modify the current plan or switch to another plan.

If the situation has improved, continue the plan for another two to four weeks. After a month or more of appropriate and acceptable behavior, gradually fade and then eliminate the intervention. Always inform the class (or affected students) before changing, fading, or eliminating the intervention plan.

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