

8 Classroom Disrupters: *Getting Them Back on Track*



Illustrations: David Clark

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NEA Today Professional—An e-book of practical resources for educators.

Managing Behaviors

Are the characters in your classroom driving you crazy? You know the ones—the time wasters, the back-talkers, the homework refusers. But what can you do?

Every class brings a unique mix of personalities, and a new student could walk in at any time. It's vital for new and veteran teachers alike to build their repertoires to include tactics for handling behaviors that disrupt teaching and learning. These classroom management skills are essential for not only maintaining your sanity, but also ensuring that each of your students can be successful.

"If we're interested in trying to improve academic outcomes, we really have to pay attention to the time we're spending managing behaviors," says George Sugai of the University of Connecticut's Center for Behavioral Education and Research.

Honing your classroom management skills takes patience and practice. You can begin with four techniques that pay dividends with all students. An essen-

tial first step to creating a classroom conducive to learning, according to Sugai and other experts' research, is to **set clear parameters**. Your students need to know what's expected of them and what they can expect from you, so define boundaries and post procedures early in the year. Further, establish expectations for each day at the beginning of class, whether that's posting an agenda on the board or verbally outlining the schedule for the day.

The best classroom managers are clear about boundaries, but they know they must be flexible, too. Every class brings unique challenges, so **tailor your procedures to your class**. Some are noisier, some crave more interactivity than others, and some may like to work with soft music playing.

Acknowledge appropriate behavior, and when problems arise, **discipline with dignity**. Avoid yelling, humiliating students in front of peers, or dealing with individual discipline problems in front of the entire class. Keep calm and devise an out-

of-class time to talk.

One of the best ways to improve your classroom management skills is to **observe an excellent teacher**. Find out what your colleagues are doing. Ask them how they might handle a specific problem.

Even in an organized classroom with procedures

tailored to the class's needs, students can be disruptive. That's where this e-book comes in. We look at the student behaviors most likely to derail your lessons and present strategies for managing them. With these ideas, you can help the Chatterboxes or Time Gobblers get back to what matters most: learning.

GOT A PROBLEM? ASK KATE!

Need more practical ideas for managing student behavior? You can turn to Kate Ortiz, the National Education Association's classroom management expert. With more than 30 years of experience, Kate offers help on topics from talking to texting to being off-task. Her advice is included throughout this e-book and on the NEA Discussion Board on Classroom Management.

<http://public-groups.nea.org/discussion/forum/show/162197>.



The Chatterbox and the Clown



What's behind all the chatter and clowning around in your classroom? You need to find out. Is Michael tattling out of a sense of justice or does he want your approval? Is Olivia even aware of how much time she spends talking? Is Luis telling jokes to impress others? Does Grace just need some social time? When you know what's behind the misbehavior, you can take steps to address it and to provide opportunities for teaching appropriate ways of talking and using humor. These are important social skills students will need in the work world and beyond.

Here are some ways you can help students rein in inappropriate behavior and focus on school work:

- At the beginning of the year, make sure one of your classroom rules about respect is: When someone is speaking, show respect by listening.
- At the beginning of class, let students know if they will have time to work and talk with others.
- Structure learning activities that give students opportunities to talk—and listen—to their peers.
- While students are doing a group activity, walk around and give feedback or attention to those who need it.
- Give each student time in front of the class—giving a speech or demonstration of a hobby, for instance, or solving a problem or reciting a favorite poem or

comedy routine.

- Set up times to listen to individual students.
- Discuss the chatter and clowning around with them as a group. Be prepared to guide the discussion, but listen to their concerns about disruptions in the classroom and solicit their solutions.
- Talk with individual students who continue to have difficulty with inappropriate talking. Make contracts with them, if needed.

Ask the Expert!

What do you do when your students talk out and talk back (Grades 6-12)?

Kate Ortiz says: Develop a plan to address the specific behavior. See the full answer at:

<http://public-groups.nea.org/discussion/topic/show/395609>

More Tips for the Talkers (Videos)

Teacher TV—The Talker (Grades 6-12)

www.nea.org/home/52810.htm

How to Teach Math as a Social Activity (Grades 5-6)

www.edutopia.org/math-social-activity-cooperative-learning-video

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TIPS NEWSLETTER—
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Browse hundreds of online tips or search for a specific topic at nea.org/works4me.

Once a week, the free Works4Me e-newsletter delivers the best tips of the bunch to your in-box. Sign up at www.nea.org/signuexpress.



The Limelighter

A Limelighter, or Attention Demander, wants to be in the spotlight. She's the one who circles you on the playground like an adoring moon, forces her way into conversations, leaps out of her seat to show you her work, or asks a litany of unnecessary questions. Why? Limelighters crave the feeling of success and may feel insecure in developing healthy social relationships. You don't want to squelch their confidence, but you have to find constructive ways to meet their need for attention.

"I had a girl this year who acted like she didn't know an answer—just to get my attention!" recounts Missouri educator Peg Scholl. "If I asked somebody else a question, she'd answer. She'd just blurt out, blurt out, blurt out."

Scholl cut the barrage with a one-on-one solution: a card taped to her student's desk and instructions to mark it every time she talked out. They set a goal (without a reward) and the student met it. Other strategies? Try giving a Limelighter additional classroom responsibilities, or hold an individ-

ual conference, perhaps with your school counselor and parents, to talk through the student's insecurities.

Interestingly, many experienced teachers don't regularly reward students for good behavior—instead, they use a "random rewards" system that can curb class-wide limelighting. You choose to ignore disruptive attention-seeking behavior, while offering positive attention more "randomly," effectively severing the tie between acting out and receiving attention.

"When I do use rewards, they're random, unexpected, and unannounced, like, 'Man, everybody got

their work done! Let's play mental tic-tac-toe!'" says teacher and classroom management expert Kate Ortiz.

Encouraging the Overactive Questioner To Be More Self-Reliant

"Periodically, I have students who ask exorbitant amounts of questions, either for lack of using their skills to figure out an answer or for attention. I developed a plan to curb this behavior. When applicable, I give a student three 'tickets' (made from colored construction paper) each day, and whenever the student asks me a question, he or she also must hand me a ticket. When the tickets are used up, the student may not ask me another question that day. I have seen children become independent thinkers and self-sufficient when on this plan. They save the tickets for really important questions."

—Submitted by *Laraine R.*, a fourth grade teacher (Los Angeles, California), NEA discussion board



FACEBOOK:
NETWORKING WITH EDUCATORS
AROUND THE COUNTRY

NEA Today's Facebook page explores your toughest teaching challenges—and offers solutions. We'll bring you tips and tricks for the classroom, keep you informed on the latest education news, and help you connect with others who are working to create great public schools for every student. Become a fan at:

www.facebook.com/neatoday



The Media Maven

When you invite students to open their books, the Music Man shakes his head wildly. This isn't his opinion of *Macbeth*—he's busy jamming to his iPod. Kids are more plugged into technology than ever, and you may notice several varieties of Media Mavens sidling into your classroom, including Cell Phone Sisters, iPad Impresarios, or Facebook Fanatics scrolling on their smartphones.

All that texting, clicking, and friending can not only distract the Mavens, but also their neighboring peers—and you, too! Many schools have official device policies, empowering teachers to confiscate the devices or dish out consequences for disruptive users. Still, you might be tempted to decide on a case-by-case basis what techno-gear to allow your Maven to use.

"This is a confrontation that's begging to be had," says California teacher Jim Burke, author of *The Teacher's Essential Guide Series: Classroom Management*. "The new teacher thinks, 'Oh, I don't want to stir the waters already!' and says, 'I'll let you slide today.'"

Mistake! "The experienced teacher takes it off the table by taking it off the table right away," Burke says. "And you've got to be consistent. If it's Friday afternoon and the kids are taking a test, and the first kid done says, 'Can I listen to my iPod?' If you answer yes, it's a progressive loss of territory.... You don't have to be a jerk. Just say, 'I have to be clear. This is school policy.'" Always follow school policy—to do otherwise puts you at risk for discipline, he adds.

Ask the Expert!

How do you enforce cell phone policies?

Kate Ortiz says: You have to be the "bad cop."

See the full answer at:

<http://public-groups.nea.org/discussion/topic/show/270890>

Crafting a Workable Cell Phone Policy (Grades K-12)

www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin/admin393.shtml

iDiscipline Ideas

NEA's Works4Me Tips

- Offer "device time" during the last few minutes of class as a good-behavior reward.



- Model the rules by keeping your own cell phone in your desk!
- Take away participation points from repeat offenders.

NEA's Discussion Board Tip

- Use music or dance in your lessons to engage the Music Man.
<http://public-groups.nea.org/discussion/topic/show/288952>

Digital Gadgets

Kathy Schrock's Guide for Educators

<http://www.schrockguide.net/gadgets.html>

This site offers resource pages about handheld devices and digital "gadgets" available to support all types of new teaching and learning initiatives for the K-12 classroom.

Edutopia's The Sky's the Limit: Kids' Top Tools for the Classroom

www.edutopia.org/student-opinions-classroom-technology

Students tell what technology they use outside of school that would be good for the classroom. And why and how that would work.

"Get Smart!" Score some "cool teacher" points with those iPad Impresarios: Use those snazzy devices in class.

www.nea.org/home/41992.htm

The Refusenik

It's one thing when students' assignments are a mess of errors—it's another when they hand in a blank piece of paper. It's one thing when students are easily distracted—it's quite another when they simply ignore you. These are kids who just don't do the work. Maybe they're bored, maybe they don't have the necessary skills, or maybe they're asserting their own power. Whatever the reason, it can drive you crazy. It's hard to teach a student when he or she seems unwilling to learn.

Fortunately, you're not the only one with this issue. "Been there, try this!" say your colleagues on NEA's "Ask the Expert" discussion board. Read excerpts of their responses below— and feel free to jump in yourself at <http://public-groups.nea.org/discussion/topic/show/280577>.



"We have probably all encountered a student who refuses to do work, unfortunately. While we can do our best to engage the child and build a positive relationship with him, we cannot do his work; we can only do ours. At some point it becomes necessary to stop expending so much energy on one child who refuses.

"When I have tried the motivational tools I know, including involving the parents and administration, and I notice the child is not working, I walk to his or her desk and quietly say something like, **'I notice that you have not begun the work. Is there anything I can do to help?'**

"When the child says no, I quietly say, **'Choosing not to work is a poor decision. I hope you will choose to begin working.'** Then I walk away and don't say anything more.

"Any time the child does work, I make sure to quietly say, **'I see you are choosing to work. Good decision.'** With some passive aggressive/oppositional students, I have found it best to just give them a private thumbs-up or wait until the end of the period because drawing attention to their compliance can backfire."

—Kate Ortiz

"Perhaps the child needs to be accelerated academically."

—Anne H.

"If nothing else, pay special attention to the child—it doesn't have to make you go too far out of your way. Say hello more consciously, ask questions and remember responses. Never ignore a child who needs your help."

—Barb B.

"What about giving up a lunch break or two to try to get to this kid? What about a bit of time after or before school, if you can get them to show up?"

—Kate M.

"This guy needs to experience daily doses of success. All you have to do is orchestrate it!"

—Wendy R.

"One book that has given me amazing insights in working with these students is *The Angry Smile* by Nicholas Long. I often get it out and re-read sections of it! Another thing I try to do is ask for their help and give them things to do to help me. Sounds kind of backwards, as the students that are successful seem to deserve those jobs (taking things to the office, etc.) but they are not the ones that need the boost. Giving responsibility even when it does not seem deserved can sometimes produce just the opportunity to begin building a relationship."

—Terry R.

"If a child has done a '180' from competent student to completely disruptive, this may indicate something affecting his or her mental well-being. It could be a bullying situation or some other traumatic event in this youngster's life.... In any case, it's time to seek the help of a healthcare provider or counselor."

—Robert E.

"One suggestion is to offer assignments that add up in points. You provide the assignments and potential points, and information on how many points add up to each grade. They choose how many assignments to do."

—Hal D.

The Short Fuse

Even the most experienced teachers are overwhelmed with growing numbers of students who just seem angrier than ever. What's the deal?

There always have been kids with emotional issues, but perhaps now more lack support, says veteran Vermont teacher and "I Can Do It!" trainer Kathy Buley. Consider that the recent economic recession has sent many parents onto the jobless rolls—and many thousands into foreclosure and homelessness. That kind of stress can create anger and defiance in children, who often feel powerless to help.

Frequently, these students simply need to know that somebody is paying attention—and that's you. Try to commit to two minutes at the beginning of each class to touch base with the often-angry student, Buley suggests. "Prime the pump for the day—ask 'How is the day going to go today?'" To her second-graders, Buley says, "Did you have breakfast? Was everybody nice at the bus stop?" For older students, you could ask, "How has your day been?"

Pay attention to the things that make them unique. "When you can talk to them about the fact that they

go to the skate park every weekend, you're modeling [caring behavior and showing them] that they're not a paper cutout," says Buley.

For more on developing the bonds that can cool those Short Fuses, see "A Quality Teacher is a Caring Teacher," www.nea.org/tools/15751.htm and "Calm, Cool, and Consistent," www.nea.org/tools/15746.htm.

Ask the Expert!

"We have a first grader who has called children names and hit or poked several of her classmates. Today she pinned a little girl against the wall with a bathroom stall door. Help!" —Benita S.

Kate Ortiz says: First, try to find out if this is a new behavior for the child. If she was previously aggressive in kindergarten or preschool, it may be helpful to find out what interventions have been tried previously, how effective they were, and whether her parents have been involved in addressing this behavior.

Be sure there are clearly stated rules/guidelines/expectations for behavior in the students' classroom, hallways, recess, etc. When aggression occurs, refer to the rules.

I recommend you design a written plan to deal with this child's verbal and physical aggression so you know right away what to do and the child knows what to expect. It is important to let this child know in a

direct, calm, quiet manner that any behavior that harms another person is not okay. When aggression occurs, let her know that she has broken a rule and provide an immediate consequence. I recommend that consequence involve removal from other children for a specific amount of time.

Include lots of positive verbal reinforcement for appropriate behavior. Catch her being good and let her know you notice.

Find more resources on page 11.



TOOLS AND IDEAS—
CLASSROOM
MANAGEMENT

NEA.ORG ONLINE RESOURCE

From classroom setup to dealing with abusive language, find the information you need to establish a smoothly run classroom.

www.nea.org/tools/ClassroomManagement.html



The Time Gobbler

Even your best lesson plans can be spoiled by the distraction-fed Time Gobbler. Every minute of your time counts when you're trying to accomplish tasks for the day—so, what to do with students whose delay tactics include skipping in late, fiddling with their books, and then moseying out of their seats?

First, consider why your Time Gobblers might be acting out. Some students delay starting their assignments, because they don't feel confident in their abilities. Others may need different activities to stimulate them, or aren't being challenged. You may have others who are just easily distracted dreamers. Time Gobblers whose performance is severely affected may need a one-on-one check-in from you. But what about keeping a class of *several* Gobblers focused?

"Having lots of established procedures is key," says teacher and classroom management pro Kate Ortiz. For instance: "When the bell rings, everything but [class] materials must be stowed, and there's an assignment on the overhead...usually three or four review questions, and it's very effective because it's graded."

Ortiz also writes every name on a clipboard and walks around, tallying misbehavior. They have 10 "self-starting points" a week and they do figure into final grades.

And, for those kids who pack up early? Dave Foley, author of the *Ultimate Classroom Control Handbook*, has a neat trick. With a few minutes left, close the door. Firmly. And say, "We really need to finish this lesson.

I'll close the door so you won't be distracted by people passing in the halls." Aaagh, your students will mentally moan, that's prime socializing time!

"The core thing is, find out what they don't want to happen and make it a possibility," Foley says.

Ask the Expert!

What can I do about students who are tardy daily?

Kate Ortiz says: Time to get help from a counselor. See the full answer at:

<http://public-groups.nea.org/discussion/topic/show/288009>

Tips for Transitions

Keep your Time Gobblers on their toes with these ideas for switching activities, rooms, or periods:

- As you announce an upcoming transition, remind students of the kind of behavior you're looking for.
- Publicly compliment those groups of students complying with your transition expectations.
- As students reenter the classroom, have the next activity waiting for them.
- After all students have reentered the room, give a signal that you are ready to begin. Say, "Let's get started," or turn off the lights, count backwards

from five, or ring a small bell. Then look at the clock, set a timer, or raise fingers on your hand with the prearranged understanding that lost minutes of instruction will be made up by the whole class (or a few individuals) before leaving for recess or lunch.

Excerpted from *Discipline Checklist: Advice from 60 Successful Teachers*.



Your Student, Your Friend?

As a professional, you know you can't show favoritism toward students by socializing or being friends with them—but that might not be so clear to your students. When you engage in activities with students that blur the lines between student and friend, you can compromise your authority and lose their respect, or even tarnish your reputation in the community. The table below delineates the difference between student and friend activities.

If students seek your company because they have difficulty making or keeping friends, you may want to

counsel them on how to be a friend. Talk about and demonstrate the behaviors of a caring person. Hold group discussions about friendship and have your students practice the behaviors they identify. Provide opportunities during class for group work and socializing.

Building positive relationships with your students builds their trust in you. And when they trust and respect you, they're less likely to disrupt your classroom.

Ask the Expert!

How do you remain friendly without becoming a friend of your students?

Kate Ortiz says: Build a healthy rapport with students. See her full answer at:

<http://public-groups.nea.org/discussion/topic/show/429421>

More Advice from the Pros

- Building Relationships with Students (Grades K-8)
www.nea.org/tools/29469.htm
Tips for establishing orderly behavior through positive teacher-student relationships.
- Find Out Who Your Students Are (Grades 9-12)
www.nea.org/tools/16049.htm
A high school counselor says know your students.
- Educators Speak Out on Social Media Boundaries With Students
<http://neatoday.org/2011/04/28/why-cant-we-be-friends-social-media-boundaries-between-teachers-and-students/>
How much social media is too much? Teachers weigh in.
- Friendships (K-8)
www.education.com/topic/social-development-friendship/
Helping students develop social skills.

Activities Teachers Do with Students	Activities Teachers Do with Friends
Watch them compete in school sports	Invite them to watch you compete in your bowling league
Eat lunch in the school cafeteria with them	Go out to dinner with them
Play double-dutch on the playground at recess	Play tennis with them on the weekend
Contact them through the school's electronic system for homework or feedback	Become Facebook friends
Discuss NBA playoffs with them	Go to a basketball game with them
Visit their home to talk with parents	Invite them to your home



The Victim, the Bully, and the Bystander

Last year, at least six students took their own lives after enduring the seemingly endless abuse of bullies. And for every one of those children whose sad story made national headlines, there are hundreds, thousands, of kids who get kicked, poked, and teased to tears every day.

You know it's a problem. And you know it's your problem. In a nationwide survey, 98 percent of National Education Association members said they feel it's their duty to stop bullying when they see or hear it.

But do you know what to do?

First, check out the resources at "NEA's Bully Free: It Starts with Me," Campaign against bullying, launched in March 2011 and praised by the White House.

www.nea.org/NEABullyfree

Second, take the bully free pledge in which you promise to be a caring adult who will listen and respond to victims.

www.nea.org/home/Bullyfree-Take-the-Pledge.html

Third, if you're an NEA member, ask your state association to help bring NEA's bullying prevention and intervention training to your school or local association. NEA's trained cadre will share the latest research around bullying, cyberbullying, sexual harassment, and sexting.

Here are six other tips on how to deal with bullying in your school:

- **Take complaints seriously**—If a student comes to you with a complaint about being bullied, don't dismiss it as "just

teasing." Listen to the student, and tell the student you will take the appropriate action.

- **Report the alleged bullying**—Inform your principal of all the bullying cases you know of. If the bullying seems to be based on the student's race, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation, immediately report the complaint to the authority in your district designated to investigate discriminatory incidents. Check back with the student to find out if the school system has contacted him or her about the steps it is taking.
- **Reassure, do not judge**—If a bullied student comes to you for help, reassure the student that you care about him or her and will do what you can. Do not, however, question the student about why he or she is being bullied. It is the behavior of the bully that matters. Keep the information confidential.

- **Get the student appropriate professional help**—If a student seems to be in emotional or psychological distress, offer to help the student get in touch with a counselor, social worker, or school psychologist right away. Be supportive, but don't give advice beyond your expertise. If the student seems in imminent physical danger, alert the school administration immediately.
- **Stand up and speak out for students in need**—Learn about bullying and how to stop it. Share what you've learned with colleagues. Advocate for bullied students.
- **Do something**—If you witness a student being harassed and humiliated by another student, intervene—but get more support if necessary. Everyone involved—victim, perpetrator, and witnesses—needs to know this is unacceptable behavior.



Resources from NEA's Bully Free Website

- How to Intervene in a Bullying Incident
www.nea.org/home/53358.htm
- How to Identify Bullying
www.nea.org/home/53359.htm
- Rights Watch—Confronting the Bullies
www.nea.org/home/43496.htm
- 6 Tips for Educators When Dealing with Harassment or Bullying of GLBT Students
www.nea.org/tools/6-Tips-Harrassment-of-GLBT-Students.html

More Tools & Resources

General Resources

- Breaking the Attention-Seeking Habit by school psychologist and administrator Jim Wright.
www.interventioncentral.org/behavioral-interventions/challenging-students/breaking-attention-seeking-habit-power-random-positive
- You're In Control, Right?
www.nea.org/home/17605.htm
New teacher? No sweat—check out this article for tips on behavior management.
- Effective Teaching with Harry and Rosemary Wong.
www.effectiveteaching.com/
The Wongs have a wealth of teaching resources on this website, including a classroom management e-course, books, and CDs.
- You Can Handle Them All: Discipline Help (Grades K-12)
www.disciplinehelp.com/teacher/
This website describes in depth the causes and effects of 124 varieties of misbehavior and how you can address them.
- School-wide Positive Behavior Support: SWPBS for Beginners (Grades K-12)
www.pbis.org/school/swpbis_for_beginners/default.aspx
This web area defines School-wide Positive Behavior Support and how to bring it to your school.
See also the site's wealth of videos:
www.pbis.org/swpbs_videos/default.aspx

- Stop. Think. Act: Social & Emotional Learning (Grades K-5) Video
www.youtube.com/watch?v=W34KiYJ6W5k&feature=related
Learning Matters explores how to teach young students about managing emotions and acting with respect.
- Daniel Goleman: A View on Emotional Intelligence
www.edutopia.org/daniel-goleman-emotional-intelligence
In this online interview, Goleman discusses ways to ready children for success.

The Chatterbox and the Clown

- Works4Me: Can We Talk? (Grades K-5)
www.nea.org/tools/tips/Can-We-Talk.html
Patricia Pason uses interview exercises to get her students talking in appropriate ways.
- Respectful Discussions (Grades 9-12)
www.nea.org/tools/16256.htm
In this article, student teacher Katie La Pointe gives her students practice in expressing their opinions using "Accountable Talk."
- Article: Do You Have a Chatty Class? (Grades K-5)
www.responsiveclassroom.org/blog/do-you-have-chatty-class
Responsive Classroom, a research-backed approach to elementary education, offers this blog of reminders for dealing with chatty students.
- Lesson Plan: Respectful Listening (Grades 3-5)
<http://charactercounts.org/lesson-plans/character-education-lesson.php?id=18>

The Time Gobbler

- Easy Transitioning for Little Ones (K-3)
www.nea.org/tools/tips/easy-transitioning-for-little-ones.html

Tips for keeping students focused while switching activities.

- It's My Life from PBS Kids (K-6)
<http://pbskids.org/itsmylife/school/time/index.html>
This website can help your Time Gobblers become better time managers.

The Short Fuse

- Breaking Up Fights (Grades 6-12)
www.nea.org/tools/14115.htm
Techniques for defusing fights.
- Roughly Speaking—Students and Abusive Language (Grades 6-12)
www.nea.org/tools/roughly-speaking-students-and-abusive-language.htm
Whoa—what's that you heard in the hall? How to curb the profanity.

The Victim, the Bully, and the Bystander

- StopBullying.gov
Learn the warning signs of bullying. See the U.S. government bullying site.
www.stopbullying.gov
- NEA Health Information Network (NEA HIN)
Learn about cyberbullying with NEA HIN's bNetS@vvv website.
www.neahin.org/bnetsavvy/
- Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN)
Create a bully-free, harassment-free classroom for your gay students with the GLSEN Safe Space kit.
<http://safespace.glsen.org/>
- Parent Teacher Association (PTA):
Find resources for planning a "Connect for Respect" event in your school.
www.pta.org/content.cfm?ItemNumber=3003