Establishing a Quiet Signal

Consistent rituals are important to establish and maintain a peaceful and positive classroom or student group. Rituals give students a sense of stability and security, which in turn helps them to feel calm and competent in the classroom. One particularly effective ritual is the use of a Quiet Signal.

What is a Quiet Signal?
A Quiet Signal is a gesture that tells students when it is time to stop what they are doing and focus attention on the facilitator/teacher for the next instruction. This is especially important when transitioning between activities, cooperative games and group work which have students out of their seats and working together actively (and often noisily). Your school or program may already have its own Quiet Signal. If not, choose a signal to use consistently with your students.

One commonly used Quiet Signal is a raised hand with two fingers extended upward (“Peace & Quiet”). As soon as students notice you or a classmate using this signal, they immediately stop talking, freeze and give the Quiet Signal themselves. As other students notice, more and more hands go up, the room becomes quieter and quieter, and the ritual has accomplished its purpose. You may also want a second quiet signal in mind that can get the group quiet more immediately.

Choose a Quiet Signal for your class or group from the list to the right, or make your own.

As with any ritual, it is important to first introduce the ritual to the class and then give students a chance to practice responding to it.

CHOOSE A Quiet Signal

1. **Peace and Quiet**
   Raise your hand or two fingers in a “peace sign” and wait for silence.

2. **Silent Hand & “Shh”**
   Raise your hand above your head and cover your mouth with one finger.

3. **Rhythmic Clap**
   Clap rhythmically and have students repeat the clap.

4. **Lights Out**
   Turn out the lights in the classroom briefly.

5. **Call & Response**
   Call out a designated word or phrase and have your students respond – for example, “Peace” … “Makers.”

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Establishing a Quiet Signal:
Teaching your Quiet Signal

Here is a sample activity to help you establish your Quiet Signal with your students:

Tell students that it is important to have a Quiet Signal so that everyone in the room can know when it is time to stop what they are doing and listen for the next instruction.

Explain that you will be using the Quiet Signal when it is necessary to get every student’s attention quickly.

Explain to students that you will be using “Peace & Quiet” as your Quiet Signal and demonstrate this for your students by quietly raising your hand and making a “peace” sign above your head. Allow your students to practice the gesture once with you.

Practice your Quiet Signal by telling students to turn and talk to the person next to them, and when they hear or see the Quiet Signal, they should stop what they are doing, freeze, be absolutely quiet, and wait for instructions. After a few practice runs, remind students that whenever the Quiet Signal is used that you expect them to freeze, be quiet, and listen for instructions. You might want to practice the Quiet Signal with them randomly throughout the day to assure they understand the concept.

Teacher Tips:

• Consider involving older students in the decision making process by giving them three options and letting them vote on the Quiet Signal they like the best.
• Be sure to call out any positive behavior you see as you practice the Quiet Signal to further students’ understanding of the purpose of this ritual.
• If you notice that over time, students aren’t responding to your Quiet Signal as quickly as you would like, offer a challenge of racing against the clock. For example, if students were quiet within fifteen seconds of you giving the Quiet Signal, challenge students to get there in ten seconds next time.

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