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*Sincerely,  
Karen Haag*

## Problem Jar

Teachers know that students must talk in order to process information. However, teachers tell me that they're reluctant to let go of control of students to just to let them talk. "What will they talk about, really?" they ask. "How do I know that students will stay on task" and "How do I stop them from fussing at one another when I'm not with them?"

These management questions teachers raise are MOST important. I have two answers that helped me:

- 1) Hold [class meetings](#) about these issues.
- 2) Before you turn students loose, consider potential problems - and solutions - with students.

## The Problem Jar



That's where the Problem Jar comes in. If you've taught even a short time, you know what kinds of problems kids have working in groups. Make a list of situations you know will occur. Write each on a slip of paper and place the papers in a Problem Jar. In the first 10 days of school or before you start discussion groups bring the students together class-meeting style to consider a couple questions a day. Invite students to brainstorm solutions - with you having final say.

### Here are some situations that always occurred in my room to get you started.

- Members won't sit in a circle.
- One person is doing all the talking.
- Someone telling every one else what to do.
- Member(s) is uncooperative.
- Member(s) not taking assignment seriously.
- A friend decides not to do his/her work
- Someone is absent *the day before* and doesn't have the work done.
- Group member is absent *on the day of* discussion.
- Someone feels left out.
- Someone never discusses.
- Unable to spell a word.
- Unable to do the work.
- Pencil broke.
- You don't have materials needed.
- Your writing notebook is missing.
- We have a substitute.
- Not finished with discussion when teacher calls time.
- Not finishing consistently.
- Student left for another class.
- Somebody called you a name.
- A classmate is chewing gum.
- You don't have enough room to work. People are cramped.
- A classmate touched you on the arm.
- Teacher in conference or reading group.
- Visitors in the room.
- Fire drill.