

An overview of the key principles of classroom management

School resources

Most teachers tend to go into the teaching profession because they believe they can positively impact the lives of children and youth. While teachers can and do make a difference in students' lives, the process can be complex, especially when confronted with behaviour. Student problem behaviour, along with school discipline, has consistently been reported as one of the top concerns among teachers¹ as one of the greatest demands on time², causing teachers to experience increased rates of stress and burnout³ and, in some cases, leading to their decision to leave education⁴. When teachers are not able to effectively manage their classroom, students experience poorer outcomes⁵. Therefore, to support all teachers and students in achieving maximum benefit from the learning experience, it is critical to create a positive and productive educational environment for overall success. The purpose of this guide is to introduce evidence-based classroom practices for classroom management, such as those associated with Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports (PBIS), as an approach to establishing an effective classroom management system.

Why is behaviour important?

In practice, behaviour management often tends to be informal, reactive, and only provided on an 'as-needed' basis. Relying on reactive, consequence-oriented practices creates a negative climate, which can result in lower educational expectations and higher rates of problem behaviour, and lead to pessimistic teacher perceptions of students⁶. Most teachers agree that good behaviour and classroom management enhance good academic teaching and student engagement, and these experiences are supported by a growing body of evidence^{7,8}. Understanding the complexity of the association between academic and social behaviour success is important. For example, teaching students to read does not teach them how to behave appropriately. Similarly, teaching social skills does not teach students how to read. However, students who experience preventive behaviour support (social skills instruction) are more likely to be comfortable in school, academically engaged, and benefit from academic instruction. Similarly, when students experience academic success, they are more likely to learn and display appropriate social behaviours. Establishing safety and connection to the school environment can be accomplished with an effective classroom management system that consists of dynamic teaching, relationship building, and positive social behaviour.

What is classroom management?

Classroom management is defined as a teacher's method for maintaining order in the classroom that is conducive to student achievement. This method typically consists of evidence-based strategies that are implemented during classroom-wide, small group, and intensified when instructing individual students. However, implementing strategies independent of an established structure such a management system or framework can be less impactful and less efficient in achieving a teacher's desired outcome. The effectiveness of classroom strategies is maximised when:

- strategies are implemented within a school-wide multi-tiered behavioural framework, such as PBIS
- classroom and school-wide expectations and systems are directly linked
- classroom strategies are merged with effective instructional design, curriculum, and delivery
- classroom-based data are used to guide decision-making⁹.

One of these approaches, **Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports (PBIS)**ⁱ, focuses on important outcomes of students and teachers, invests in the adoption of evidence-based practices matched to student needs across a continuum of supports, commits to data-based problem-solving to guide instruction, and provides a multi-tiered framework that organises support to teachers and families through high-quality implementation¹⁰. While typically implemented school-wide, the goal of PBIS in the classroom is to establish positive social cultures that maximise the impact of effective academic instruction by differentiating support practices to meet the needs of all students. Rather than simply stopping the problem behaviour from occurring (a more traditional approach), PBIS reduces the occurrence of problem behaviour by changing the environment (prevention), explicitly teaching new skills, and responding to behaviour differently. By doing this, PBIS enables schools to create positive, predictable, and safe learning environments and improve the quality of life for students, families, and teachers.

Research has shown that implementing PBIS practices in the classroom results in more positive classroom outcomes such as improved academic engagement, enhanced social skills, positive classroom climate, less problem behaviour, and decreased need for administrative or crisis support. Evidence-based **practices, systems** to support implementation, and **data** to guide decision making are core elements in PBIS implementation. The culture or context that may influence and impact implementation and outcomes is important to consider such as local environments (the neighbourhood or city), personal characteristics (such as race or nationality), learning histories (family, social routines, customs, experiences and so on), and language (dialect, vocabulary). While classroom PBIS practices are most effective when they are embedded within a school-wide system, teachers can still establish and implement PBIS as their classroom management system even if student behaviour is not supported school-wide¹¹.

Practices for effective classroom management

Effective classroom management encompasses the structure and organisation of the entire classroom environment and is critical to achieving desired outcomes. This includes implementing effective environmental, behavioural, curricular, and instructional practices to maximise student learning, increase student engagement and build safe, predictable, and nurturing environments for all students. While teachers have flexibility and freedom to design their classroom to best meet their unique, personal style of teaching and ensure the classroom environment is responsive to the needs of all students, careful consideration should occur when developing a classroom management system. Below is a summary of five evidence-based practices that, when implemented with fidelity (as designed) have shown to lead to fewer disruptions, improved student behavioural and academic outcomes, and more time spent teaching¹².

ⁱ To learn more about PBIS, these evidence-based PBIS classroom practices provide consistent and ongoing social, behavioural, and academic supports for all students within any classroom setting and helps establish an effective classroom management system.

Centre on PBIS: <https://www.pbis.org/topics/classroom-pbis>

Florida PBIS Project: <http://flpbis.cbcs.usf.edu/tiers/classroom.html>

Northeast PBIS Network: <https://nepbis.org/classrooms-training-materials/>

Maximise structure: this involves designing effective, safe, and supportive classroom environments to promote a positive teaching and learning experience for all students. Specific practices to maximise structure in the classroom include:

- effectively designing the physical environment
- active supervision and proximity
- developing predictable classroom routines or procedures.

Teaching expectations, routines and procedures: these are essential in creating a classroom culture based on a vision for success. Establishing a common language for expected behaviour with explicit instruction that includes teacher-student involvement builds ownership of the shared expectations and relationships, enhances predictability, and creates a positive classroom climate.

Actively engaging students: this includes providing high rates of opportunities to respond with instructional pacing (the time students are directly engaged in the learning process), and has shown to increase positive behaviour and decrease inappropriate behaviour. This practice also increases the time students are directly engaged in the learning process and delivers ongoing feedback on both student learning and the effectiveness of the teaching strategy.

- **Acknowledging appropriate** behaviour: this serves as a teaching tool that results in the likelihood that desired behaviour will occur more often and helps create a safe, positive, supportive classroom environment. Practices to acknowledge appropriate behaviour include:
 - behaviour-specific praise
 - prompts and pre-correction
 - 5:1 positives to corrections
 - group contingencies.

Responding to inappropriate behaviour: this can prevent the escalation of problem behaviour, create opportunities for students to learn or practice expectations, maintain instructional time, and minimise the potential of mistakenly rewarding inappropriate behaviour. Effective responses to inappropriate behaviour include:

- error correction and redirection
- planned ignoring
- time out from reinforcement
- rewarding around the student.

Systems to support effective classroom management

It is ideal when school leadership puts systems in place to support teachers' implementation of positive classroom practices. These systems may include the structure and supports that leadership teams provide to enhance teachers' implementation of evidence-based practices with fidelity, and are derived from data collected across classrooms and schools. Establishing consistency within and across classrooms with clearly communicated operational procedures can assist in identifying professional development needs and prevent problem behaviours if students change classroom teachers throughout the day. System-wide support for classroom implementation of frameworks such as PBIS at the school level is provided by:

- documentation of priority
- available supportive resources
- alignment and integration with other initiatives to prevent duplication and enhance efficiency of resources
- clear expectations and explicit training about classroom practices
- ongoing coaching and performance feedback provided to teachers¹³.

While not all schools may be invested in establishing practices such as PBIS system-wide, teachers can certainly establish this positive classroom management system on a smaller scale and collect data to guide strategies used within their own classrooms.

Data to guide effectiveness of classroom management

Data are useful for both teachers monitoring the progress of their individual students and leadership teams when examining school outcomes and determining resources (such as curricula and personnel). Data refer to objective (specific, observable, measurable) information about students, teachers, or schools that are an active, dynamic part of decision making to help determine whether to continue, adopt, or modify classroom practices and systems. In education, data are typically used to guide instruction and intervention by

- assessing how well core features of a practice or system are being implemented (fidelity)
- evaluating progress toward desired goals (outcomes)
- guiding a problem-solving process if adequate fidelity or outcomes are not observed
- informing an action plan for improvement.

Classroom teachers may consider data collection methods such as self-assessment of current classroom practices to develop effective classroom management systems as well as counting, timing, sampling and so on to determine individual student progress. Schools may examine overall student outcomes (such as academic achievement) and fidelity as the types of data used in the problem-solving process. The four-step problem-solving processⁱⁱ guides effective decision making that can be applied to individual students, small groups, classrooms, or across an entire school setting. These data help in both selecting and measuring strategies, and it is critical to consider the local norms and values to ensure selected strategies are equitable and support all individual students¹⁴.

ii (1) problem identification – what is the problem? (2) problem analysis – why is the problem occurring? (3) identify classroom strategies – what am I going to do about it? (4) evaluation – are the interventions selected working?

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PREPARED FOR THE EDUCATION HUB BY



Heather Peshak George

Heather Peshak George is a Research Professor at the University South Florida who co-directs Florida's PBIS Project and the National Center on PBIS and is past-President of the international Association for Positive Behavioral Support (APBS). She completed her MS in Clinical Psychology and her PhD in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in Special Education, School Psychology and Reading. She has extensive experience in providing training and support in PBIS at the national and international levels and thanks her two teenagers for the daily reminders to bridge the research-to-practice gap.