



Responding to inappropriate behaviour: Practices for effective classroom management

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Creating a safe, positive, supportive classroom environment is critical for students and teachers to achieve maximum benefit from the learning experience and the consequences following behaviour can have an effect on future behaviour. The way in which we respond to inappropriate behaviour can prevent the escalation of problem behaviour, create opportunities for students to learn or practise expectations, maintain instructional time, and minimise the potential of mistakenly rewarding inappropriate behaviour. Since no single strategy will work for all students or in all situations, teachers need a tool kit of behavioural strategies to meet the different functions, intensity, and rates of inappropriate behaviour. The purpose of this guide is to describe some evidence-based classroom practices that is part of an effective classroom management system that promotes learning.

What does it mean to respond to inappropriate behaviour?

Despite all of our best efforts to prevent problems, teachers need to be prepared to de-escalate and address challenging behaviour that does not meet our classroom expectations. The intensity of problem behaviours can vary greatly (e.g., low level off-task behaviour such as doodling during instruction vs. high level violent behaviour that poses a safety concern for the student and others) and teachers need to be prepared by establishing a continuum of culturally responsive strategies to respond to inappropriate behaviour. The goal is to prevent problem behaviour before it occurs, yet there are times when the behaviour becomes so severe or intense that it may require a crisis response. It is important to have a plan for identifying 'crisis events' with clear responding procedures that enhance de-escalation and the safety of the student and others. Some effective responses to inappropriate behaviour with examples are described below¹.

Error correction and redirection are strategies used to discourage inappropriate behaviour (errors) by interrupting and refocusing students to the desired expectations and established procedures (redirection). When these strategies are direct, immediate and end with the student displaying the correct response, they are highly effective in decreasing undesired behaviours and increasing future success rates². These responses can help students regulate or 'quiet' their stress response, relate to an empathetic adult, and teach them to identify triggers and reason logically.

- Error correction is neutral, brief feedback that targets inappropriate behaviour and describes the desired behaviour a student should demonstrate instead: for example, 'Harrison, please return to your seat and be respectful by waiting until instruction is over to sharpen your pencil'.
- Redirection is a neutral, brief reminder about the expectation and rule, followed by positive feedback when a student engages in the appropriate behaviour: for example, 'Sam, please be responsible and clean up your area', followed by 'Thank you, Sam, for being responsible and cleaning up your things' after Sam cleans up.

Planned ignoring is the conscious decision not to recognise, attend to, or engage a student who is demonstrating minor disruptive behaviours (such as blurting out, repeated requests for assistance, pencil tapping, noises, or tongue clicking) and should only be used when the function of the behaviour is to get attention. Planned ignoring results in the student not receiving the desired attention (reward,

acknowledgement) for the behaviour and is intended to help students decrease their attention-seeking behaviour and maintain instruction with minimal interruption.

Time out from reinforcement is the brief removal of either a preferred activity/item or the student from a desired place/environment due to inappropriate behaviour. For example, if John continually calls out during math bingo (a preferred activity), he is required to 'sit and watch' but cannot participate for five minutes. If Sarah continually distracts her friends at her art table (a preferred place), she is moved to a different table with other peers to complete her project.

Rewarding around the student uses the power of rewards to redirect a student engaged in inappropriate behaviour. A reward may be behaviour-specific praise, acknowledgment, recognition, or reinforcement. The teacher reinforces (rewards) a student engaged in appropriate behaviour who is in close proximity to the target student engaged in inappropriate behaviour. The reward serves as a prompt to the target student not following the expectations and procedures and is delivered as soon as the target student exhibits the desired behaviour. For example, the teacher ignores Shawna drawing on her paper but praises (rewards) a student sitting next to her by saying 'I like the way Peter has his book out and is following along with the lesson. Thank you for being responsible and on-task'. Once Shawna refocuses, the teacher rewards her on-task behaviour.

It is ideal when school leadership supports and endorses a school-wide system that establishes consistent practices within and across classrooms for a cohesive approach to learning that benefits all.

References

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