



Behaviour

About behaviour

Sometimes children may behave in ways that disrupt the class and impact their educational progress. This could involve physical actions (e.g. overly rough play, damaging equipment), the way that a child interacts with others (e.g. shouting, saying unkind things), or difficulty engaging a child in activities (e.g. not listening to teachers or following instructions, children running away).

Disruptive behaviours that might affect students can also include things like defiance and hostility towards others, temper tantrums, avoiding certain situations or refusing to talk.

Behaviour always serves a purpose. Children may engage in challenging behaviour to communicate how they are feeling, or a need or a want that is not being met. A child may be more likely to engage in challenging behaviour if they have communication, social or cognitive challenges, or if they are feeling anxious or scared.

Evidence-based strategies

Create a positive environment

- **Use lots of encouragement.** Encourage students privately and in front of others for positive behaviours such as staying focused, interacting well with others and listening to teachers to build confidence and reduce disruptive and defiant behaviour.
- **Identify positive behaviour.** When correcting a child, it can be helpful to identify a specific positive behaviour a child can use in a positive voice rather than providing negative feedback or punishment.
- **Ignore small challenging behaviours.** Small amounts of challenging behaviour can be reduced by simply ignoring them, as this removes children's motivation to continue the behaviour if attention was the intent. Ignoring minor disruptive behaviours combined with encouraging appropriate behaviour is a great way to promote positive social behaviour.



- **Focus on a child's positive qualities.** Identify a child's strengths and positive efforts, and encourage these qualities. Consider encouraging strengths that may be unrelated to a child's goal behaviours too.

Create a structured and proactive environment

- **Set clear rules.** Few rules that are short and simple work well for children. Explain the classroom rules at the start of a year or term. It can be helpful to give regular verbal and visual reminders of the rules. Rules that are displayed where children can see them and tell a child what to do rather than what not to do may be most effective. Consider asking parents to review the group rules when at home.
- **Consider seating.** Consider seating children away from distractions (e.g. windows, objects or other children). Instead, children may engage in more positive behaviours if they are sitting near friends who can model positive behaviours or are sitting where you can interact with them. Stability balls and cushions may help some children focus and stay in their seat.
- **Create a consistent daily routine.** Rules and routines help a child know what is planned for the day. This way they will know what to do if they miss instructions. Consider displaying a daily schedule which uses words and pictures where children can see it at all times. Access AllPlay Learn's class schedule.
- **Get their attention before speaking.** Eye contact, gestures, touch or verbal prompts can be used to get children's full attention before giving instructions or speaking to them.

Adapt your teaching and communication

- **Provide choices.** Giving students choices in their assignments or work may increase engagement and decrease challenging behaviours.
- **Simplify instructions and learning.** Some children may need a few short instructions that are clear and positive (e.g. tell the child what to do, rather than what not to do). Consider breaking down big tasks into smaller ones. For example, give step-by-step instructions or visual instructions (i.e. pictures).
- **Allow breaks.** When a student is restless, let them visit a quiet area in the classroom or do small movement activities. For example, ask them to touch their toes or run an errand.
- **Communicate with parents.** Talk openly with parents regularly. Involve them by sending home notes about a positive behaviour a child showed at school.



- **Match teaching to interests and abilities.** Engage students by considering what they like and can do. It may help to keep things interesting, relevant and manageable for them. Provide them with help (e.g. prompts, demonstrations, encouragement) when learning new skills and gradually reduce this help as they become more capable.
- **Think “problem situation” not “problem child”.** Shifting a view from “problem child” to “problem situation with the child” helps to improve the teacher-child relationship.

Build their skillset

- **Teach them how to seek help.** Some children may need to be taught how to seek help using positive behaviours (e.g. raising hands, waiting for their turn to speak).
- **Teach children about feelings.** Challenging behaviour can result from not being able to manage emotions. If a child has a temper tantrum, encourage them to pause, take a breath, and tell themselves to calm down. A “feelings thermometer” on the wall can help children communicate how they are feeling without using words.
- **Teach social skills.** Children can learn to get along with others through play activities. Show them how to listen, observe, communicate, help, share, give and receive encouragement, cooperate and ask to join in during play. Role-play different situations and give children feedback as they practise these skills. Access AllPlay Learn’s social skills strategies.
- **Encourage students to problem solve.** Helping students learn how to problem solve can help them persist with school work instead of getting frustrated. Help students identify a problem, think of possible solutions, choose the best solution, and think about if the solution worked.
- **Teach students how to relax.** A few minutes each day doing simple breathing and muscle relaxation exercises can be helpful for all children. Watch Elsternwick Primary School’s Story: Breathing and Relaxation on our teacher resource page.

Other considerations

Safety

- Children with challenging behaviour might engage in risky behaviours more often than other children. Some children may refuse to follow rules and instructions. This can put themselves or others in danger. Remind children of the rules to keep them safe
- Use a neutral tone when giving instructions, and tell students what to do instead of what not to do.



First aid

- Some students may engage in challenging behaviours when teachers are applying first aid. Use a neutral tone, and explain clearly and simply what you are going to do, such as when applying a band aid.

Safety drills

- Some children may engage in disruptive behaviour during a safety drill. Consider telling children in advance when a safety drill is happening. Clear and simple instructions on the procedure may help.
- Carefully monitor children who might be prone to getting overexcited, running away or getting distracted

Additional staff members

- Some students may engage in challenging behaviours with staff members if they aren't familiar with them. Talk to staff about the strategies you use, so they can also use them.

Friendships

- Some students with challenging behaviour may have trouble getting along with other students. They might find it hard to make friends, and they may be left out. Help students build social skills.

Homework

- Students with challenging behaviour might find homework difficult. A consistent homework routine at home may help. This may be doing homework in a distraction-free area at a fixed time. Consider teaching parents how to use the same encouragement system at home.
- Some children may refuse to complete work if they feel they are being forced to. Providing options and choices may help.

Excursions/Camps

- Excursions and camps may be challenging for some students as there are likely to be new distractions, and a change in routine. Consider safety when planning an excursion if a student struggles to follow instructions or is likely to be impulsive



Transitions

- A child may find moving across education settings challenging. Keep parents informed with what is happening in the transition period.
- It may be helpful to teach and practice organisation and homework skills, and time- and self-management skills.
- For more information about supporting students with disabilities when transitioning to a primary or secondary school setting access AllPlay Learn's [transition page](#).
- For children transitioning to primary school access AllPlay Learn's Story A school day, and for children transitioning to secondary school access Access AllPlay Learn's story How to be organised

Other co-occurring conditions

- Children with challenging behaviour might also experience [oppositional defiant disorder](#), [Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder \(ADHD\)](#), [intellectual disability](#), [autism](#), [anxiety](#) and [specific learning disability](#).
- Refer to information about these areas to help support the student.

Relevant resources

Visit our [resources page](#) for a range of resources that can help to create inclusive education environments for children with disabilities and developmental challenges. Some particularly relevant resources for children with behavioural issues include:

- Strengths and abilities communication checklist
- Class schedule
- Student self-monitoring form
- Problem solving guide
- AllPlay Learn Story - Going on an excursion
- AllPlay Learn Story - Waiting my turn
- AllPlay Learn Story - When my teacher is away