

Behaviour

About behaviour

Sometimes students may behave in ways that disrupt the class and impact their educational progress. This could involve physical actions (e.g. damaging equipment, fighting) or the way that a student interacts with others (e.g. shouting, saying unkind things), or difficulty engaging a student in activities (e.g. not listening to teachers or following instructions, not completing work).

Disruptive behaviours that might affect students can also include things like defiance and hostility towards others, emotional meltdowns, rule breaking, or skipping school.

Behaviour always serves a purpose. Young people may engage in challenging behaviour to communicate how they are feeling, or a need or a want that is not being met. A young person 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 student, it can be helpful to identify a specific positive behaviour a student 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 a student's motivation to continue the behaviour if attention was the intent. Ignoring minor disruptive behaviours combined with praising appropriate behaviour is a great way to promote positive social behaviour.
- **Focus on a student's positive qualities.** Identify a student's strengths and positive efforts, and encourage these qualities. Consider encouraging strengths that may be unrelated to a student's goal behaviours.

Create a structured and proactive environment

- **Set clear rules.** Few rules that are short and simple work well for students. Explain the classroom rules at the start of a year or term, and review these regularly. Rules that are displayed where students can see them and that tell a student 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 students away from distractions (e.g. windows, objects or other students). Instead, students 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.
- **Create a consistent daily routine.** Rules and routines help a student know what is planned for the day. Consider using a timer/clock to help students manage their time and routines. This can be useful if students are learning to self-monitor their behaviours too.
- **Get their attention before speaking.** Eye contact, gestures, touch or verbal prompts can be used to get students' 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 students may need a few short instructions that are clear and positive (e.g. tell the student what to do, rather than what not to do). Consider breaking down big tasks into small ones. For example, give step-by-step instructions. Some students may need both written notes and verbal instructions.
- **Teach students how to relax.** A few minutes each day spent doing simple breathing and muscle relaxation exercises can be helpful for all students. You can watch an example of a breathing and relaxation exercise in a primary school setting on our primary teacher [resources page](#).
- **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 run an errand.
- **Communicate with parents.** Talk openly with parents regularly. Involve them by sending home notes about a positive behaviour a student showed at school so they can be encouraged at home.
- **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.

Build their skillset

- **Set simple and clear goals.** Consider letting students choose goals. These could be short statements that describe positive and achievable behaviours that students understand. Check that the goals set include behaviours that can be seen and counted. Update goals as they progress.
- **Teach students how to self-monitor.** Some students may respond well to a checklist of the behaviours that they would like to work on. Access AllPlay Learn's Self-monitoring form under relevant resources below



- **Teach students how to manage emotions.** Sometimes students may be angry or frustrated because they don't know what to do when they feel stressed, worried or afraid. Encouraging students to name and express their feelings in a safe environment, such as with a teacher, can help. If a student gets angry or has an emotional outburst, encourage them to recognise a feeling, pause, take a breath, and tell themselves to calm down. Get them to think about why they became emotional once they have calmed down.
- **Teach social skills.** Some students may find it hard to know how to get along with others. Consider teaching them how to be respectful, and how to join groups and have conversations (e.g. listening, letting the other person talk, waiting their turn to talk). You can access further strategies for social skills [here](#).
- **Encourage students to problem solve.** Helping students learn to problem solve can help them persist with school work instead of getting frustrated. For example, help students identify a problem, think of possible solutions, choose the best solution, and think about whether the solution worked.

Other considerations

Safety

- Students with challenging behaviour might engage in risky behaviours more often than other students. Some students may refuse to follow rules and instructions. This can put themselves or others in danger. Remind students 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.

Safety drills

- Some students may engage in disruptive behaviour during a safety drill. Consider telling students in advance when a safety drill is happening. Clear and simple instructions on the procedure may help.



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. Some students may need extra help in being assertive and making friends. 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 students 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. Explain the new structure and routine, special rules and expectations beforehand.

Other co-occurring conditions

- Students with challenging behaviour might also experience [oppositional defiant disorder](#), [ADHD](#), [intellectual disability](#), [autism](#), [anxiety](#) and [specific learning disabilities](#).
- 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 students with disabilities and developmental challenges. Some particularly relevant resources for supporting students with behavioural issues include:

- Strengths and abilities communication checklist
- Class schedule
- Student self-monitoring form
- Emotions cards
- Problem solving guide
- AllPlay Learn Story - Waiting my turn