# 'Catalytic Comments': 10 Teacher Communication Strategies to Nudge Student Behaviors in the Right Direction

Teacher verbal communication has the potential to be a powerful positive shaper of student behaviors. Here are 10 communication strategies that can nudge students to make better behavioral choices.

| 1 | **Praise: Acknowledging and shaping desired behaviors**. (Kern & Clemens, 2007) |
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| | To increase desired behavior, the teacher praises the student in clear, specific terms--and at a rate sufficient to motivate and guide the student toward the behavioral goal: (1) The teacher selects the specific desired behavior(s) to encourage through praise; (2) The teacher sets a goal for how frequently to deliver praise (e.g., to praise a student at least 3 times per class period for working on in-class assignments). (3) The teacher makes sure that any praise statements given are behavior-specific. |

| 2 | **Using teacher greetings to increase academic engagement**. (Allday & Pakurar, 2007) |
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| | A personalized greeting at the start of a class period can boost class levels of academic engagement. The teacher spends a few seconds greeting each student by name at the classroom door at the beginning of class. |

| 3 | **Emphasizing the positive in teacher requests**. ( Braithwaite, 2001) |
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| | When an instructor's request has a positive 'spin', that teacher is less likely to trigger a power struggle and more likely to gain student compliance. Whenever possible, the teacher avoids using negative phrasing (e.g., "If you don't return to your seat, I can't help you with your assignment"). Instead, the teacher restates requests in positive terms (e.g., "I will be over to help you on the assignment just as soon as you return to your seat"). |

| 4 | **Using teacher commands that promote classroom control**. (Kern & Clemens, 2007; Walker & Walker, 1991) |
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| | Teacher commands play an important role in classroom behavior management. Teacher commands are most likely to elicit student compliance when they (1) are delivered calmly, (2) are brief, (3) are stated when possible as DO statements rather than as DON'T statements, (4) use clear, simple language, and (5) are delivered one command at a time and appropriately paced to avoid confusing or overloading students. Effective teacher commands avoid both sarcasm or hostility and over-lengthy explanations that |

| | can distract or confuse students. |
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| 5 | **Pre-correction: Giving a timely reminder**. ( De Pry & Sugai, 2002) |
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| | Pre-corrections are a simple means of keeping students mindful of behavioral expectations just before they encounter situations in which they are most likely to show problem behaviors. Here is a 4-step process for using pre-corrections: (1) The teacher defines the student problem behavior(s) and identifies situations where the problem behavior(s) occur; (2) The teacher meets with the student to share information about that student's problem behaviors and the related situations or settings where they occur; (3) Teacher and student next come up with expected or acceptable replacement behaviors for the student to display in those situations; (4) Whenever the student is about to enter a problematic setting or situation,  the teacher delivers a brief pre-correction--a timely behavioral reminder to follow the behavioral rule or expectation. |

| 6 | **Maintain a high rate of positive interactions: 3 positives for every negative.** (Sprick, Borgmeier, & Nolet, 2002) |
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| | Teachers can increase the odds of building a positive relationship with any student by maintaining a ratio of at least three positive teacher-student interactions (e.g., greeting, positive conversation, high-five) for every negative (disciplinary) interaction (e.g., reprimand). |

| 7 | **Pairing criticism with affirming statements**. (Thompson & Jenkins, 1993) |
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| | In a private conference: (1) The teacher describes the problem behavior that the student should target for change; (2) The teacher describes (or encourages the student to brainstorm) appropriate behavioral alternatives; (3) The teacher praises some noteworthy aspect of the student's past classroom behavior or accomplishments, and finally (4) The teacher affirms that he or she values having the student as a part of the classroom community. |

| 8 | **Saying 'no' with preferred alternative**. ( Mace, Pratt, Prager, & Pritchard, 2011) |
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| | This strategy can reduce the non-compliance and acting-out of students who react negatively to being told that they cannot engage in a preferred activity or access a desired item.  First, the teacher creates a list of those activities or items preferred by the student that can actually be provided. Then, whenever the student requests an unavailable activity or item, the  teacher structures the 'no' statement as follows: (1) The teacher states that the student cannot engage in the requested activity or have the desired item; (2) The teacher provides the student with an explanation for why the preferred activity or item is not |

| | available; (3) The teacher offers the student an alternative preferred activity or item in place of that originally requested. |
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| 9 | Using 2-part choice statements: Clear consequences for misbehavior. ( Walker, 1997) |
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| | The teacher frames requests to uncooperative students as a two-part 'choice' statement: (1) The teacher presents the negative, or non-compliant, choice and its consequences (e.g., if a seatwork assignment is not completed in class, the student must stay after school); (2) The teacher next states the positive behavioral choice that the student is encouraged to select (e.g., the student can complete the seatwork assignment within the allotted work time and not stay after school). |

| 10 | 'Two by ten': Establishing positive teacher-student interactions. ( Mendler, 2000) |
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| | This strategy ('non-contingent teacher attention') can be helpful with students who lack a positive connection with the teacher. The instructor makes a commitment to spend 2 minutes per day for ten consecutive days ('two-by-ten') engaging the student in a positive conversation about topics of interest to that student.  NOTE: During those two-minute daily conversations, the teacher maintains a positive tone and avoids talking about the student's problem behaviors or poor academic performance. |

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