RTI Toolkit: A Practical Guide for Schools

When Behavior is a Barrier to Learning: Using the Response to Intervention Model to Address Challenging Student Conduct

Jim Wright, Presenter

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Introduction. The RTI Intervention Team: Teacher Referral Form: Secondary Level is to be completed by middle and high school teachers prior to the initial problem-solving meeting held for a student referred to the school's RTI Intervention Team.

Directions. When a student is first referred to the middle or high school RTI Intervention Team, teachers who work with the student are each given a copy to complete of the RTI Intervention Team: Teacher Referral Form: Secondary Level. The sections of this brief form are as follows:

- **Global Skills Rating.** The teacher rates the student's standing in the class on five dimensions: (1) Reading Skills, (2) Mathematics Skills, (3) Written Expression Skills, (4) Study/Organization/Work Skills, and (5) Classroom Conduct. On each of these items, the teacher rates the student as **Above Grade Level**, **At Grade Level**, **Somewhat Below Grade Level** or **Significantly Below Grade Level**.

- **Test/Quiz Grades.** The teacher lists up to six of the most recent test and/or quiz grades that the student achieved in the class. For each entry, the instructor notes the date of the examination, whether a test or quiz was given, and the actual grade. The form also allows the teacher the option of visually graphing the grades.

- **Concerns.** The teacher notes up to 4 significant concerns that may be preventing the student from being successful with academics and/or behaviors.

- **Strategies.** The teacher writes records any instructional or behavioral strategies that they have used in the class in an attempt to address the noted student concern.

Interpretation. The RTI Intervention Team collects Teacher Referral Forms from each of the teachers working with the student. Before meeting to discuss the student, the team compares and contrasts responses across teaching staff, looking for significant patterns. In particular, the team will note whether teachers show similarities or differences across classrooms in:

- Ratings of student academic skills, organization, and classroom conduct
- Patterns of test and quiz grades
- Concerns noted about the student
- Intervention strategies attempted

Prior to the initial problem-solving team meeting, the RTI Intervention Team uses the information from the Teacher Referral Forms to better understand the needs of the referred student and to make decisions about what additional data to collect on the student's academic skills and/or behaviors.
## Global Skills Rating
Rate the student’s standing relative to other students in his or her class on the skills listed below. (If you are unsure of the student’s abilities on a particular skill, leave it blank.)

| Reading Skills | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Mathematics Skills | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Written Expression Skills | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Study & Organizational Skills | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Classroom Conduct | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Significantly/Severely Below Grade Level | Somewhat Below Grade Level | At Grade Level | Above Grade Level

## Test/Quiz Grades
Chart the most recent test and/or quiz grades for this student.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
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</table>

Date: __/__/__ Date: __/__/__ Date: __/__/__ Date: __/__/__ Date: __/__/__ Date: __/__/__
Grade: __ __ Grade: __ __ Grade: __ __ Grade: __ __ Grade: __ __ Grade: __ __

## Concerns
List up to 3 primary concerns that you have with this student in your classroom:

1. ______________________________________________________________________
2. ______________________________________________________________________
3. ______________________________________________________________________

## Strategies
List specific strategies that you have tried in the classroom to support this student in area(s) of concern.

1. ______________________________________________________________________
2. ______________________________________________________________________
3. ______________________________________________________________________
4. ______________________________________________________________________
5. ______________________________________________________________________
Student Learning Survey

Student Name: _________________________ Classroom: ________________ Date: __________

Directions: Please complete this survey to give your teacher information about how you learn best. If you are not sure what to put for an answer, just write down your ‘best guess’.

1. What do you prefer to be called by your teacher? ________________________________

2. When is your birthday?  ____________________________________________________

3. What is your most favorite subject or school activity? ______________________________

4. What is your least favorite subject or school activity? ______________________________

5. Do you like working in groups or alone on projects? State your reason(s) why:
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

6. Organizational skills include having all of your work materials on hand in the classroom, using your work time well, and getting work assignments done and handed in on time. On a rating scale from 1 (the lowest rating) to 10 (the highest rating), how would you rate your organizational skills?
   1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10
   Not organized at all     Very organized

7. Describe your idea of the perfect classroom. What would it look like?
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

8. What are your favorite ways to learn? (Pick as many as you like)
   ___ Listening to lectures
   ___ Listening to a taped book
   ___ Doing research on the Internet
   ___ Working with a friend
   ___ Watching an educational video
   ___ Doing homework
   ___ Working as part of a group
   ___ Doing research in libraries
   ___ Other: ______________________
9. Write two words that best describe you:
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

10. What are your favorite games, activities, sports, hobbies, or other interests?
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

11. What are your favorite TV shows or movies?
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

12. Describe how you study or review for a test:
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

13. Occasionally, students can earn rewards in the class for working hard and turning in completed work. What would be some good rewards or privileges you would like to be able to earn in this classroom? (Be realistic!):
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
Schoolwork Motivation Assessment
(adapted from Witt & Beck, 1999; Witt, VanDerHeyden & Gilbertson, 2004)

Student: ______________________________ Teacher/Classroom: _______________________
Date of Assessment: ___/___/___ Person Completing Assessment: _______________________

Step 1: Assemble an incentive menu. Create a 4-5 item menu of modest incentives or rewards that students in the class are most likely to find motivating. Examples of popular incentives include:
• small prizes such as pencils or stickers,
• 5 minutes of extra free time,
• an opportunity to play a computer game,
• praise note or positive phone call to parent

Incentive / Reward Menu
Idea 1: _________________________
Idea 2: _________________________
Idea 3: _________________________
Idea 4: _________________________
Idea 5: _________________________

Step 2: Create two versions of a CBM probe or timed worksheet. Make up two versions of a structured, timed worksheet with items of the type that the student appears to find challenging. Use one of the options below:

Option 1: Create Curriculum-Based Measurement probes. The probes should be at the same level of difficulty, but each probe should have different items or content to avoid a practice effect. NOTE: CBM probes in oral reading fluency, math computation, writing, and spelling can all be used.

Option 2: Make up two versions of custom student worksheets. The worksheets should be at the same level of difficulty, but each worksheet should have different items or content to avoid a practice effect. NOTE: If possible, the worksheets should contain standardized short-answer items (e.g., matching vocabulary words to their definitions) to allow you to calculate the student’s rate of work completion.

Step 3: Administer the first CBM probe or timed worksheet to the student WITHOUT incentives. In a quiet, non-distracting location, administer the first worksheet or CBM probe under timed, standardized conditions. Collect the probe or worksheet and score.

Step 4: Compute an improvement goal. After you have scored the first CBM probe or worksheet, compute a ‘20 percent improvement goal’. Multiply the student’s score on the worksheet by 1.2. This product represents the student’s minimum goal for improvement.

Student Score on First CBM Probe or Worksheet
Multiplied by: 1.2
Yields an improvement goal of:
Step 5: Have the student select an incentive for improved performance. Tell the student that if he or she can attain a score on the second worksheet that meets or exceeds your goal for improvement (Step 3), the student can earn an incentive. Show the student the reward menu. Ask the student to select the incentive that he or she will earn if the student makes or exceeds the goal.

Step 6: Administer the second timed worksheet to the student WITH incentives. Give the student the second CBM probe. Collect and score. If the student meets or exceeds the pre-set improvement goal, award the student the incentive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Score on Second CBM Probe or Worksheet</th>
<th>Improvement goal of:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>_________________________</td>
<td>____________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compared to:

Step 7: Interpret the results of the academic motivation assessment to select appropriate interventions. Use the decision-rules below to determine recommended type(s) of intervention:

- **ACADEMIC INTERVENTIONS ONLY.** If the student fails to meet or exceed the improvement goal, an academic intervention should be selected to teach the appropriate skills or to provide the student with drill and practice opportunities to build fluency in the targeted academic area(s).

- **COMBINED ACADEMIC AND PERFORMANCE INTERVENTIONS.** If the student meets or exceeds the improvement goal but continues to function significantly below the level of classmates, an intervention should be tailored that includes strategies to both improve academic performance and to increase the student's work motivation. The academic portion of the intervention should teach the appropriate skills or to provide the student with drill and practice opportunities to build fluency in the targeted academic area(s). Ideas for performance interventions include (a) providing the student with incentives or 'pay-offs' for participation and/or (b) structuring academic lessons around topics or functional outcomes valued by the student.

- **PERFORMANCE INTERVENTIONS ONLY.** If the student meets or exceeds the improvement goal with an incentive and shows academic skills that fall within the range of ‘typical’ classmates, the intervention should target only student work performance or motivation. Ideas for performance interventions include (a) providing the student with incentives or ‘pay-offs’ for participation and/or (b) structuring academic lessons around topics or functional outcomes valued by the student.

References:


Permanent Products: Assessing the Completion, Accuracy, and Overall Quality of Student Independent Work

There are a number of reasons that students might have difficulty in completing independent classroom assignments. School staff can use a 4-step process to collect data about the student’s independent work habits, rate of on-task behavior during class assignments, and quality and accuracy of the student’s completed work (‘permanent products’).

**Step 1:** Collect data on the student’s On-Task behavior during independent seatwork. Visit the student’s classroom. Observe the student working independently on a class assignment. Using the Independent Seatwork Observation Form, track the student's rate of On-Task behavior on the assignment.

Rate of On-Task Behavior: ___________ %

**Step 2:** Analyze the student’s completed seatwork (permanent product).

- **Estimate the amount of the assignment completed by the student.** If the assignment contains discrete items (e.g., math computation problems), count up the number of items actually completed by the student. Divide this figure by the total number of items contained in the assignment and then multiply by 100. If the assignment cannot easily be divided into discrete units (e.g., a written essay), estimate the approximate amount of the assignment that the student completed.

Amount of assignment estimated to have been completed: ___________ %

- **Estimate the accuracy or overall quality of the work that the student completed.** If the assignment contains discrete items (e.g., math computation problems), divide the number of correct items by the number of items the student attempted (including partially completed items) and then multiply by 100.

Estimated accuracy of completed work: ___________ %

**OR**

If the assignment cannot easily be divided into discrete units (e.g., a written essay), use the simple quality rubric below to judge the overall quality of the work that the student actually completed:

*How would you judge the overall quality of the work produced by the student during independent seatwork? Circle your selection:*

1. Significantly below level of peers (rudimentary content, absence of ideas, and/or failure to use key strategies or steps)

2. Somewhat below level of peers (lacking content, inadequate development of ideas, and/or limited application of key strategies or steps)

3. At level of peers (e.g., average content, development of ideas, application of key strategies or steps)

4. Above peers in overall quality (e.g., strong content, ideas developed to an advanced degree, creative application of key strategies or steps)
Step 3: Compare the student’s performance on the assignment to that of a ‘typical’ classroom peer. Ask the teacher to select an ‘average’ student in the class who typically completes independent work at an acceptable level of completion, accuracy and quality. Collect that student’s completed seatwork (done during the same work period as that of your target student). Analyze the peer student’s seatwork using the same standards used with the target student.

Peer Comparison: Amount of assignment estimated to have been completed: __________ %

Peer Comparison: Estimated accuracy of completed work: __________ %

OR

Peer Comparison: Quality Rubric Rating: 1 2 3 4

Step 4: Select interventions that match the ‘root cause’ of the student’s problem with independent work. Pool the information that you have collected through direct observation of the student, analysis of the student’s work products, and a comparison of the student’s performance to that of peers. Then generate a hypothesis, or ‘best guess’, about why the student is having problems with seatwork.

Common reasons for student difficulties with independent work are:

- Carelessness
- Inattention
- Skill deficits
- Lack of motivation

Below are possible scenarios of student problems and sample interventions to consider for each scenario.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Scenarios</th>
<th>Sample Intervention Ideas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The student completes independent work quickly with time to spare—but the work contains ‘careless’ mistakes or is of poor quality. | • Provide the student with incentives to slow down and use the full time allocated to complete the assignment.  
• Require that the student use a quality checklist or rubric to review work before turning it in. If the student attempts to turn in completed work that does not meet teacher expectations, send the student back to his or her seat to continue to work on the assignment. |
| The student was off-task during much of the work session. The assignment was not completed within the time allocated. | • Use strategies to increase the student’s attention to task (e.g., teacher redirection to task, student self-monitoring of work completion). |
| The completed assignment was of poor quality and/or contained many errors. | • Review with the student the skills or strategies required for the assignment.  
• Give the student correctly completed models similar to what the student must produce for the assignment. Encourage the student to refer to these models whenever he or she is ‘stuck’.  
• Approach the student in a low-key manner periodically during independent seatwork to see if the student requires assistance.  
• Provide the student an incentive (e.g., five
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The student did not complete the assignment in the allotted time. However, the student demonstrated a high degree of quality and/or accuracy in his or her work.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boost the student’s speed by providing him or her with opportunities to practice the skills or strategies required for the assignment. Give the student feedback and encouragement as the student increases his or her working speed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

additional minutes of free time) if the student improves the quality or accuracy of the work.
Independent Seatwork Observation Form

Student Name: ______________________________________________ Date: ____________
Observer: ___________________________ Location: __________________________  Start Time: _________ End Time: ___________
Description of Activities: __________________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________________________________

This simple observation form is used to determine the amount of time that a student is on-task when completing an independent assignment in the classroom. It can be used for an observation of up to 15 minutes.

Directions: Observe the student at a time when the student is scheduled to be engaged in independent seatwork.

On-Task Behavior is coded using a momentary time-sampling procedure. At the start of each 15-second interval, the observer glances at the target child for approximately two seconds and determines if the child is on-task or off-task during the brief observation. If the child is found to be on-task (doing his or her assigned seatwork), the interval is marked with an "X." If the child is off-task, the interval remains unmarked. The observer then ignores this behavior category until the onset of the next time interval.

Use Table 1 below (‘Calculate the Rate of On-Task Behavior During the Observation Period’) to calculate the student’s time on task (engaged academic time).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Behavior</th>
<th>Number of intervals in which the On-Task behavior was observed</th>
<th>The TOTAL number of intervals in the observation period(s)</th>
<th>Rate (in decimal form) that the On-Task behavior occurred during the observation</th>
<th>Rate (in percentage form) that the On-Task behavior occurred during the observation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ON-TASK</td>
<td>Divided by</td>
<td>Equals</td>
<td>Times 100 =</td>
<td>%</td>
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</table>

Table 1: Calculate the Rate of On-Task Behavior During the Observation Period
Student On-Task Observation Form

Student Name: ___________________________________________ Date: ____________
Observer: ___________________________ Location: __________________________  Start Time: _________ End Time: ___________
Description of Activities: __________________________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Directions: Observe the student at a time when the student is engaged in independent seatwork or attending to large-group instruction. On-Task Behavior is the only behavior being recorded. It is coded using a momentary time-sampling procedure. At the start of each 15-second interval, glance at the target child for approximately two seconds and determine if the child is on-task or off-task during the brief observation. If the child is found to be on-task (attending to large-group instruction or doing his or her assigned seatwork), mark the interval with an “X.” If the child is off-task, leave the article unmarked. Then keep running notes of any student behaviors or classroom events until til the onset of the next time interval. When the observation is finished, use Table 1 below to calculate the student’s time on task (engaged academic time).

Table 1: Calculate the Rate of On-Task Behavior During the Observation Period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Behavior</th>
<th>Number of intervals in which the On-Task behavior was observed</th>
<th>The TOTAL number of intervals in the observation period(s)</th>
<th>Rate (in decimal form) that the On-Task behavior occurred during the observation</th>
<th>Rate (in percentage form) that the On-Task behavior occurred during the observation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ON-TASK</td>
<td>Divided by</td>
<td>Equals</td>
<td>Times 100 = % (Goal: 85 % On-Task or Higher)</td>
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</table>

Describe any notable student behaviors or other classroom events observed during the session:
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
Student On-Task Observation Summary Form

Student: ___________________________ Grade: _______ School Yr: _______

Person(s) Rating: ____________________________________________________________

Directions: In the Observation Chart below, plot the ON-TASK rate with an ‘X’ and note the date and start-time of ea observation. Then write summary details of each observation in the Data Table at the bottom of the page.

OBSERVATION CHART

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Date: _______ Date: _______ Date: _______ Date: _______ Date: _______ Date: _______

DATA TABLE

<table>
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<tr>
<th>#/Observe</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Start Time</th>
<th>End Time</th>
<th>Total Minutes</th>
<th>% ON-TASK</th>
<th>Observation Notes</th>
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Instructional Setting Rating Sheet

Date _____/_____/___ Time:__ to __:___ Room_____________ Teacher____________________

Directions: Rate the items below noting the instructional environment during your observation of the student. For each item, circle the response that best fits your observation. Add comments, particularly to explain items that receive low ratings.

1. The teacher made sure that the student was paying attention before giving instructions, directions, or asking questions:
   Not at all  Occasionally  Frequently  Nearly all of the time
2. The teacher monitored to be sure that the student understood the material being taught:
   Not at all  Occasionally  Frequently  Nearly all of the time
3. Classroom disruptions were handled immediately or prevented:
   Not at all  Occasionally  Frequently  Nearly all of the time
4. The teacher engaged the student in the lesson by asking questions that the student could answer:
   Not at all  Occasionally  Frequently  Nearly all of the time
5. Expectations for appropriate student behavior were clear (e.g., follow classroom rules, work carefully):
   Not at all  Occasionally  Frequently  Nearly all of the time
6. Interactions between the student and classmates were positive:
   Not at all  Occasionally  Frequently  Nearly all of the time
7. Interactions between the student and teacher were positive:
   Not at all  Occasionally  Frequently  Nearly all of the time
8. The student received immediate, specific, positive feedback about her or his behavior or academic performance:
   Not at all  Occasionally  Frequently  Nearly all of the time
9. The general noise level and behavior of other students in the classroom were conducive to group instruction or independent seatwork:
   Not at all  Occasionally  Frequently  Nearly all of the time
10. The student appeared to be placed in work that was instructionally appropriate:
    YES  NO

Comments:_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

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Teacher Behavior Log & Student Behavioral Scatterplot

Directions: Record each incident of problem student behavior in the behavior log below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name: ____________________________________ Observer: ______________________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time: <em><strong>;</strong></em> a.m./p.m.   Date: <em><strong>/</strong></em>/___    Location: _________________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brief narrative of incident (including persons involved, scheduled activity, triggering event(s), outcome(s));</td>
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<tr>
<td>__________________________________________________________________________________________</td>
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<td>__________________________________________________________________________________________</td>
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<tr>
<td>How long did this incident last? __________ mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How severe was the behavior in the incident? 1 Not Severe 2 Somewhat Severe 3 Very Severe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name: ____________________________________ Observer: ______________________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time: <em><strong>;</strong></em> a.m./p.m.   Date: <em><strong>/</strong></em>/___    Location: _________________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brief narrative of incident (including persons involved, scheduled activity, triggering event(s), outcome(s));</td>
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<td>How long did this incident last? __________ mins</td>
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<tr>
<td>How severe was the behavior in the incident? 1 Not Severe 2 Somewhat Severe 3 Very Severe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Behavioral Scatterplot**

**Directions:** Write the student's general daily schedule in the column labeled 'Activity/Class Schedule'. For each day during which target problems behaviors were monitored in the student's *behavioral log*, mark an 'X' in the appropriate date column at the time when the problem behavior occurred. When all behaviors have been plotted at the correct date and time of their occurrence, look for possible explanatory patterns between the activities scheduled and the behaviors observed --e.g., due to physical setting variables, academic task demands, presence or absence of adult supervision, etc.

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
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Daily Behavior Report Cards: A Convenient Behavior Monitoring Tool

Daily Behavior Report Cards (DBRCs) are behavior rating forms that teachers use to evaluate the student's global behaviors on a daily basis or even more frequently. An advantage of DBRCs is that these rating forms are quick and convenient for the teacher to complete. This section contains daily and weekly versions of a generic DBRC, as well as a progress-monitoring chart to record cumulative DBRC ratings.

**Increasing the Reliability of DBRCs.** DBRCs rely heavily on teacher judgment and therefore can present a somewhat subjective view of the student's behavior. When a teacher's ratings on DBRCs are based on subjective opinions, there is a danger that the teacher will apply inconsistent standards each day when rating student behaviors. This inconsistency in assessment can limit the usefulness of report card data. One suggestion that teachers can follow to make it more likely that their report card ratings are consistent and objective over time is to come up with specific guidelines for rating each behavioral goal. For example, one item in the sample DBRC included in this section states that "The student spoke respectfully and complied with adult requests without argument or complaint." It is up to the teacher to decide how to translate so general a goal into a rubric of specific, observable criteria that permits the teacher to rate the student on this item according to a 9-point scale. In developing such criteria, the instructor will want to consider:

- **taking into account student developmental considerations.** For example, "Without argument or complaint" may mean "without throwing a tantrum" for a kindergarten student but mean "without loud, defiant talking-back" for a student in middle school.

- **tying Report Card ratings to classroom behavioral norms.** For each behavioral goal, the teacher may want to think of what the typical classroom norm is for this behavior and assign to the classroom norm a specific number rating. The teacher may decide, for instance, that the target student will earn a rating of 7 ('Usually/Always') each day that the student's compliance with adult requests closely matches that of the 'average' child in the classroom.

- **developing numerical criteria when appropriate.** For some items, the teacher may be able to translate certain more general Report Card goals into specific numeric ratings. If a DBRC item rates a student's compliance with adult requests, for example, the teacher may decide that the student is eligible to earn a rating of 7 or higher on this item on days during which instructional staff had to approach the student no more than once about noncompliance.

**Charting Report Card Ratings.** Daily Behavior Report Card ratings can be charted over time to provide a visual display of the student's progress toward behavioral goals. The sample DBRC (daily and weekly versions) included in this section has its own progress-monitoring chart, which permits the teacher to graph student behavior for up to 4 school weeks. The instructor simply fills in the bubble each day that matches the numerical rating that he or she assigned to the student for the specific behavioral goal. As multiple points are filled in on the graph, the instructor connects those points to create a time-series progress graph. (Figure 1 contains an example of a completed progress-monitoring chart.) When enough data points have been charted, the behavior graph can be used to judge the relative effectiveness of any strategies put in place to improve the student's behavior.

**Using DBRCs as a Self-Monitoring Intervention.** DBRCs are primarily used as a behavior-monitoring tool. However, teachers may also choose to use DBRCs as part of a student self-monitoring program, in which the student rates their own behaviors each day. If teachers decide to use student behavior report cards for self-monitoring, they should first identify and demonstrate for the student the behaviors that the
The student is to monitor and show the student how to complete the behavior report card. Since it is important that the student learn the teacher's behavioral expectations, the instructor should meet with the student daily, ask the student to rate their own behaviors, and then share with the student the teacher's ratings of those same behaviors. The teacher and student can use this time to discuss any discrepancies in rating between their two forms. (If report card ratings points are to be applied toward a student reward program, the teacher might consider allowing points earned on a particular card item to count toward a reward only if the student's ratings fall within a point of the teacher's, to encourage the student to be accurate in their ratings.)

Figure 1: Example of completed DBRC progress-monitoring form

**During instructional periods, the student focused his or her attention on teacher instructions, classroom lessons and assigned work.**

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</table>

- Usually/Always
- Sometimes
- Never/Seldom

1. Usually/Always
2. Sometimes
3. Never/Seldom
Daily Classroom Behavior Report Card

Student: __________________________ Date: __________________________

Teacher: __________________________ Classroom: _______________________

Directions: Review each of the Behavior Report Card items below. For each item, rate the degree to which the student showed the behavior or met the behavior goal.

**During instructional periods, the student focused his or her attention on teacher instructions, classroom lessons and assigned work.**

Circle the degree to which the student met the behavior goal:

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**The student interacted with classmates appropriately and respectfully.**

Circle the degree to which the student met the behavior goal:

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</table>

**The student completed and turned in his or her assigned class work on time.**

Circle the degree to which the student met the behavior goal:

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</table>

**The student spoke respectfully and complied with adult requests without argument or complaint.**

Circle the degree to which the student met the behavior goal:

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## Weekly Classroom Behavior Report Card

**Student:**

________________________________________________

**Teacher:** ____________________  
**Classroom:** ____________________

### Directions:
Review each of the Behavior Report Card items below. For each item, rate the degree to which the student showed the behavior or met the behavior goal.

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<tr>
<td><strong>Behavioral Target</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>During instructional periods, the student focused his or her attention on teacher instructions, classroom lessons and assigned work.</td>
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</table>
| Select: the degree to which the goal was met:  
1...2...3...4...5...6...7...8...9  
Never/Seldom, Sometimes, Usually/Always | ____ Pts | ____ Pts | ____ Pts | ____ Pts | ____ Pts |
| The student interacted with classmates appropriately and respectfully. | | | | | |
| Select: the degree to which the goal was met:  
1...2...3...4...5...6...7...8...9  
Never/Seldom, Sometimes, Usually/Always | ____ Pts | ____ Pts | ____ Pts | ____ Pts | ____ Pts |
| The student completed and turned in his or her assigned class work on time. | | | | | |
| Select: the degree to which the goal was met:  
1...2...3...4...5...6...7...8...9  
Never/Seldom, Sometimes, Usually/Always | ____ Pts | ____ Pts | ____ Pts | ____ Pts | ____ Pts |
| The student spoke respectfully and complied with adult requests without argument or complaint. | | | | | |
| Select: the degree to which the goal was met:  
1...2...3...4...5...6...7...8...9  
Never/Seldom, Sometimes, Usually/Always | ____ Pts | ____ Pts | ____ Pts | ____ Pts | ____ Pts |

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Jim Wright, Presenter  
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Creating Reward Menus That Motivate: Tips for Teachers

Rewards are often central to effective school interventions. As possible incentives that students can earn for appropriate school performance or conduct, these reinforcers (or ‘rewards’) often serve as the motivational ‘engine’ that drives successful interventions.

Choosing rewards to use as incentives for a student intervention may seem simple and straightforward. A reinforcer, however, probably will not be successful unless it passes three important tests:

- **Acceptability Test.** Does the teacher approve of using the reinforcer with this child? Are parent(s) likely to approve the use of the reinforcer with their child?
- **Availability Test.** Is the reinforcer typically available in a school setting? If not, can it be obtained with little inconvenience and at a cost affordable to staff or parents?
- **Motivation Test.** Does the child find the reinforcer to be motivating?

Reward systems are usually most powerful when a student can select from a range of reward choices (‘reward menu’). Offering students a menu of possible rewards is effective because it both gives students a meaningful choice of reinforcers and reduces the likelihood that the child will eventually tire of any specific reward.

However, some children (e.g., those with Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) may lose interest in specific reward choices more quickly than do their typical peers. Teachers will want to regularly update and refresh reward menus for such children to ensure these reinforcers retain their power to positively shape those students’ behaviors.

**Creating a ‘Reward Deck.’** A Reward Deck is an idea that can help teachers to quickly select and regularly update student reward menus. This strategy involves 5 steps:

1. The teacher reviews a list of reward choices typically available in school settings. (Instructors can use the comprehensive sampling of possible school rewards that appears in the next section: Jackpot! Ideas for Classroom Rewards.) From this larger list, the teacher selects only those rewards that she or he approves of using, believes would be acceptable to other members of the school community (e.g., administration, parents), and finds feasible and affordable.

2. The teacher writes out acceptable reward choices on index cards-- to create a master ‘Reward Deck’

3. Whenever the teacher wants to create a reward menu for a particular student, he or she first ‘screens’ reward choices that appear in the master Reward Deck and temporarily removes any that seem inappropriate for that specific case. (For
example, the teacher may screen out the reward ‘pizza party’ because it is too expensive to offer to a student who has only minor difficulties with homework completion.

4. The teacher then sits with the child and presents each of the reward choices remaining in the Reward Deck. For each reward option, the child indicates whether he or she (a) likes the reward *a lot*, (b) likes the reward *a little*, or (c) doesn’t care for the reward. The teacher sorts the reward options into three piles that match these rating categories.

The teacher can then assemble that child’s Reward Menu using the student’s top choices (“like a lot”). If the instructor needs additional choices to fill out the rest of the menu, he or she can pull items from the student’s “like a little” category as well.

5. (Optional but recommended) Periodically, the instructor can meet with the student and repeat the above procedure to ‘refresh’ the Reward Menu quickly and easily.
### Troubleshooting Reward Programs: A Teacher’s Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Solution</th>
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| My reward program worked for a while but now it doesn't seem to be very effective. | There are several possible reasons why a reward program might begin to lose its effectiveness. You may want to experiment with changing aspects of the program until you find what is effective:  

- **The student has lost interest in the current rewards.** Some students need to be given new reward choices more frequently than do typical children. Every so often, make a point to readminister the ‘reward deck’ or a reward inventory to the student to update his or her list of preferred rewards.  
- **You have become inconsistent in administering the reward program.** Classrooms are busy places—so it is natural for the person who runs a reward program occasionally to forget to assign a point or give a reward. If the program is administered too inconsistently, though, it can stop working. Remember: a reward program is like a contract: its power depends entirely on how reliably it is enforced.  

Reflect on your actions and decide whether you may have inadvertently begun to ‘drift’ from the program. Common problems that crop up include the adult being inconsistent in assigning points for positive behaviors or deducting points for negative behaviors, failing to record assigned points on a chart or graph, neglecting to give the student a chance to redeem points for rewards, and not having agreed-upon rewards available for the student. |

| I can’t seem to find rewards that the student actually finds reinforcing. | Students vary a great deal in what kinds of activities, events, or opportunities they might find rewarding. No single reward choice appeals to every student. Here are some ideas to help you to figure out rewards that are likely to appeal even to picky students:  

- **Ask the student to write down or tell you some activities that he or she likes to do.** Use this list as a starting point to generate ideas for possible rewards.  
- **Observe the activities the student picks out during free or unstructured time.** Those |
activities that people typically do in their free time are those that they probably find appealing. If the student spends most of his or her free time ‘hanging out’ with other kids, for instance, you can probably think up socially oriented rewards for that student.

- **Ask the student’s previous teachers, parent, or other significant adult what activities or rewards the student likes.** Other people who have known the student for a significant length of time may have useful insights into what rewards the student will find motivating.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My student argues with me every time I use the reward program.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes students will verbally challenge you—insisting, for example, that you should award a point that you believe they did not earn. Here are a couple of suggestions to reduce or eliminate such arguing:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- <strong>Build a negative consequence for “arguing” into the reward program.</strong> Explain to the student that you will impose a consequence whenever the student argues or verbally challenges your decisions about the reward program. You might choose, for example, to deduct a point from the student’s total whenever he or she argues or suspend the reward program for 15 minutes (so that the student cannot earn points) whenever the student argues with you.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- <strong>Avoid becoming an active participant in the argument.</strong> It takes two to argue. As the adult, you can control student interactions by refusing to get pulled into arguments. If possible, keep your responses brief and your emotional state neutral.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- <strong>Examine the quality of your own interactions with the student.</strong> Students are most likely to argue with adults when they feel that they have been treated unfairly or ignored. Analyze your interactions with the student to be sure that you are not expressing anger or annoyance and that you do not use sarcasm. Consider offering the student positive opportunities to share his or her feelings or opinions with you (e.g., writing a letter, participating in a class meeting). Be sure that you are enforcing the terms of the reward program fairly—in particular, giving the student appropriate credit for good behaviors.</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Other school staff or parents sometimes disagree with the rewards that I choose.</th>
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<tr>
<td>A complicating factor in setting up reward programs is that other adults may disapprove of those rewards that you have selected. For instance, a principal may be unhappy with a teacher who rewards a student with gum for good behavior, because the school has a “no gum</td>
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chewing” policy.

- **Preview potentially controversial rewards with fellow staff, school administrators, and/or the student’s parents.** When in doubt, check with the school principal, other teaching staff and the student’s parent about the acceptability of a specific reward idea.

- **Try to use pro-social and pro-educational reward choices whenever possible.** No one objects to student rewards that build social or academic skills. If a student were motivated to play an educational math game on the computer as a reward, for example, this academic reward would usually be preferable to offering the student a food treat. In short, if you know that non-controversial rewards work for a student, use them.

- **Document past reward efforts.** While most students can be motivated using traditional, education-friendly rewards, you will occasionally come across students who will strive only for rewards that others might regard as less acceptable (e.g., candy, coupons to skip homework). Sometimes these ‘intervention-resistant’ students have special needs and simply do not respond to those more typical rewards that normally shape kids’ behavior. If you wish to make the case to other adults about the need to use controversial rewards with ‘intervention-resistant’ children, it may help to document that your previous attempts to use more typical rewards had been unsuccessful.

- **Educate staff about special-needs students.** You may also need to educate school staff about how a child’s special needs may cause him or her to react to rewards in a manner different from more typical students. A teacher may observe, for example, that a child with substantial cognitive deficits is motivated only by a chance to earn snacks—even though his more typical age-peers regularly select social activities as rewards. The target student’s intellectual deficits and relative emotional immaturity can help to explain why he is drawn to rewards more typical of a younger child.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I am going broke trying to buy rewards for students!</th>
<th>It can be costly to provide motivating rewards for individual students, let alone a whole classroom! Some suggestions:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <strong>Use a raffle-ticket reward system.</strong> One cost-saving idea for group rewards that can make your prizes go farther is to design an attractive paper raffle ticket, which has a space for the student’s name. Whenever the student earns a point for good behavior, have the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student write his or her name on the ticket and toss it into a fishbowl or other container. Hold regular drawings, awarding prizes to those students whose tickets are selected.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Give ‘Activity Coupons’</strong>. Many of the most effective student rewards are activities that are readily obtainable in a school setting. Make a list of all of the rewarding opportunities that you or your fellow teachers and administrators can make available as prizes. For instance, one school may identify “Reading to kindergarten students during their Story Time” or “Delivering morning announcements” as potentially motivating activities. For each activity, create an ‘Activity Coupon’ that describes the activity and the number of points required to earn it. Students can redeem good-behavior points that they have collected for any Activity Coupon that they can afford.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Build a reward program around a ‘prize box’</strong>. Like most of us, students find novelty itself to be a motivating experience. You can use a prize box to build some excitement into a reward program, without having to purchase big-ticket items. First, decorate a large sturdy box. Fill the box with inexpensive prizes that students might find motivating (e.g., small toys, stickers). (You can even supplement the contents of the prize box with fun promotional items such as key chains or pencils.) When students earn a predetermined number of points, they can draw the prize of choice from the box.</td>
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**Behavior Contracts**

The behavior contract is a simple positive-reinforcement intervention that is widely used by teachers to change student behavior. The behavior contract spells out in detail the expectations of student and teacher (and sometimes parents) in carrying out the intervention plan, making it a useful planning document. Also, because the student usually has input into the conditions that are established within the contract for earning rewards, the student is more likely to be motivated to abide by the terms of the behavior contract than if those terms had been imposed by someone else.

**Steps in Implementing This Intervention**

The teacher decides which specific behaviors to select for the behavior contract. When possible, teachers should define behavior targets for the contract in the form of positive, pro-academic or pro-social behaviors. For example, an instructor may be concerned that a student frequently calls out answers during lecture periods without first getting permission from the teacher to speak. For the contract, the teacher's concern that the student talks out may be restated positively as "The student will participate in class lecture and discussion, raising his hand and being recognized by the teacher before offering an answer or comment." In many instances, the student can take part in selecting positive goals to increase the child's involvement in, and motivation toward, the behavioral contract.

The teacher meets with the student to draw up a behavior contract. (If appropriate, other school staff members and perhaps the student's parent(s) are invited to participate as well.) The teacher next meets with the student to draw up a behavior contract. The contract should include:

- a listing of student behaviors that are to be reduced or increased. As stated above, the student’s behavioral goals should usually be stated in positive, goal-oriented terms. Also, behavioral definitions should be described in sufficient detail to prevent disagreement about student compliance.

The teacher should also select target behaviors that are easy to observe and verify. For instance completion of class assignments is a behavioral goal that can be readily evaluated. If the teacher selects the goal that a child “will not steal pens from other students”, though, this goal will be very difficult to observe and confirm.

- a statement or section that explains the minimum conditions under which the student will...
earn a point, sticker, or other token for showing appropriate behaviors. For example, a contract may state that "Johnny will add a point to his Good Behavior Chart each time he arrives at school on time and hands in his completed homework assignment to the teacher."

- the conditions under which the student will be able to redeem collected stickers, points, or other tokens to redeem for specific rewards. A contract may state, for instance, that "When Johnny has earned 5 points on his Good Behavior Chart, he may select a friend, choose a game from the play-materials shelf, and spend 10 minutes during free time at the end of the day playing the game."

- bonus and penalty clauses (optional). Although not required, bonus and penalty clauses can provide extra incentives for the student to follow the contract. A bonus clause usually offers the student some type of additional 'pay-off' for consistently reaching behavioral targets. A penalty clause may prescribe a penalty for serious problem behaviors; e.g., the student disrupts the class or endangers the safety of self or of others.

- areas for signature. The behavior contract should include spaces for both teacher and student signatures, as a sign that both parties agree to adhere to their responsibilities in the contract. Additionally, the instructor may want to include signature blocks for other staff members (e.g., a school administrator) and/or the student's parent(s).

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Troubleshooting: How to Deal With Common Problems in Using Behavior Contracts

**Q: What do I do if I find that the behavior contract fails to work?**

There may be several possible explanations why a behavior contract is ineffective:

- Students may not be invested in abiding by the terms of the contract because they did not have a significant role in its creation. If this is the case, students should be consulted and their input should be incorporated into a revised contract.

- The rewards that can be earned through the contract may not sufficiently motivate students to change their behavior. The teacher should review the list of rewards with students, note those rewards that students indicate they would find most appealing, and revise the reward list to include choices selected by the students.

- Points and rewards may not be awarded frequently enough to motivate the student. Each person reacts in his or her own way to reward systems such as behavior contracts; some must have rewards delivered at a frequent rate in order for those rewards to have power sufficient to shape these students' behavior. The instructor can try altering the contract to increase the rate at which points and rewards are given to see if these changes increase student motivation to follow the behavior contract. (NOTE: Once the behavior contract proves effective, the teacher can gradually cut back the rate of rewards to a level that is
more easily managed.)

Q: How do I respond if the student starts to argue with me about the terms of the contract?

It is not unusual--especially when a behavior contract is first introduced--for the teacher and student to have honest disagreements about the interpretation of its terms. If this occurs, the teacher will probably want to have a conference with the student to clarify the contract's language and meaning. Occasionally, though, students may continue to argue with the instructor about alleged unfairness in how the teacher enforces the contract--even after the teacher has attempted to clarify the contract's terms. If the student becomes overly antagonistic, the teacher may simply decide to suspend the contract because it is not improving the student's behavior. Or the instructor may instead add a behavioral goal or penalty clause to the contract that the student will not argue with the teacher about the terms or enforcement of the contract.
Response Effort

The amount of effort that a person must put forth to successfully complete a specific behavior has a direct impact on the frequency that the person will engage in that behavior. As the ‘response effort’ required to carry out a behavior increases, a person is generally less likely to show that behavior; conversely, as the response effort decreases, a person will be more likely to engage in that behavior. To use one example, a student will probably read more frequently if a book is stored in his or her school desk than if the child must walk to a different floor of the school building and get access to a locked cabinet whenever the student wants to read a book.

As a behavior-management tool, response effort seems like simple common sense: We engage less in behaviors that we find hard to accomplish. Teachers often forget, however, that response effort can be a useful part of a larger intervention plan. To put it simply, teachers can boost the chances that a student will take part in desired behaviors (e.g., completing homework or interacting appropriately with peers) by making these behaviors easy and convenient to take part in. However, if teachers want to reduce the frequency of a behavior (e.g., a child's running from the classroom), they can accomplish this by making the behavior more difficult to achieve (e.g., seating the child at the rear of the room, far from the classroom door).

Steps in Implementing This Intervention

The teacher selects either an undesirable behavior to decrease or a desirable behavior to increase. By varying response effort required to complete a behavior, the teacher can influence the frequency of a child's targeted behavior, making it likely to appear more often or less often. First, however, the teacher must select a behavioral target to increase or decrease.

(Optional) If necessary, the teacher breaks the behavioral target into more manageable sub-steps. Some school behavioral goals are global and consist of many sub-steps. For instance, a goal that "the student will complete all school assignments during seatwork time" could be further sub-divided into: (1) The student will organized her work materials prior to starting seatwork, (2) If she encounters a work item that she does not understand, the student will use independent problem-solving skills prior to approaching the teacher for help; and
several other key sub-steps. Breaking larger behavior goals into smaller steps will make it easier for the teacher to decide how to manipulate the response effort required to carry out each sub-step.

The teacher chooses ways to alter the response effort required to complete each selected behavior or behavior sub-step. This final step is best demonstrated through examples:

- **Increasing response effort to reduce the rate of an undesirable behavior.** Putting a physical barrier between a student and an activity, imposing a wait-time before a student can take part in an activity are examples of an increase in response effort.

  Example: A teacher finds that one of her students sits down at a computer in her room whenever he can find an opportunity to use a spelling-word program that presents lessons in a game-like format. While the teacher is happy to see that the student enjoys using the academic software, she finds that his frequent use of the computer interferes with his completion of other important school work. She has already broken down the student's behavior, "using the computer", into two sub-steps, "sitting down at the computer" and "starting the spelling software program". While observing the student, though, the teacher notes that the computer is left on in the classroom during the entire school day, making it very convenient for the student to use it at inappropriate times. The teacher decides to increase the response effort needed to use the computer by leaving it turned off when not in use. The student must now switch on the computer and wait for it to boot up before he can use it, a procedure that takes about 2 minutes. Several days later, the teacher notes that the student's rate of unauthorized computer use has dropped significantly because the 'effort' (increased wait-time) to use the computer has increased.

- **Reducing response effort to increase the rate of a desirable behavior.** Putting instructional supplies within convenient reach and having an older peer help a child to organize study materials are examples of a decrease in response effort.

  Example: The instructor wants to encourage children in his classroom to read more. After analyzing the current opportunities that children have for getting and reading books in school, the instructor realizes both that students do not have comfortable places to read in the classroom and that, with the current schedule they can get the the school library only once per week. The teacher creates a reading corner in his room, with an old but serviceable couch, reading lamps, and a shelf with paperback titles popular with his class. The teacher also arranges with the school's library media specialist to allow his students to drop by daily to check out books. By creating both a more comfortable reading location and easier access to books, the teacher is able to lower the threshold of effort needed to read. As a result, his students read more in the classroom.

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**Troubleshooting: How to Deal With Common Problems in Using Response Effort**
Q: *I like the concept of response effort as a behavior management approach, but I am not sure just how it would fit into my classroom routine. Is response effort only used alone or can it be combined with other intervention ideas?*

Creative teachers will probably find many uses for response effort, both alone and in combination with other interventions. Here is one idea: A teacher might identify an activity that she wants to *reduce* (e.g., student playing with small toys stored in his desk). If the teacher already has a token/reward system in place for this student, she may forbid the student from playing with toys during the school day but allow the student to redeem a certain number of points or tokens to buy opportunities to play with his toys during free periods. By redefining the undesirable activity to the status of a reward that must be purchased, the teacher has increased the response effort needed for the student to access the activity. It is likely that the student's frequency of playing with toys will drop as a result.
### Strategies for Working With Emotionally Unpredictable Students

#### Stage 1: Frustration

**Warning Signs:** The student may...
- bite nails or lips
- grimace
- mutter or grumble
- appear flushed or tense
- seem ‘stuck’ on a topic or issue

**Strategies to prevent or reduce the intensity of student frustration:**
- Antiseptic bounce: Send the student from the room on an errand or task.
- Permit student to go to quiet spot within or outside of classroom on ‘respite break’ (brief cool-down period).
- Teach the student appropriate ways to seek help when stuck on academic assignment.
- Spend 5 minutes talking through issue with student (or send student to another caring adult).
- Give student an ‘IOU’ to meet with adult to talk over issue at more convenient time.
- Teach student to recognize signs of emotional upset and to use ‘self-calming’ strategies.
- Teach the student how to negotiate with instructors about assignments or work expectations.
- Use motivation strategies to make learning more inviting (see *Finding the Spark* handout).

#### Stage 2: Defensiveness

**Warning Signs:** The student may...
- lash out verbally at others.
- withdraw (emotionally or physically).
- challenge the authority of the instructor or other adult.
- refuse to comply with adult requests or to follow classroom routines.
- project blame onto others.

**Strategies to prevent or reduce the intensity of student defensiveness:**
- Avoid discussions of “who is right” or “who is in control”.
- Approach the student privately, make eye contact, address the student in a quiet voice about his or her behavior.
- Use humor to ‘defuse’ conflict situation.
- Consider an apology if you have inadvertently wronged or offended the student.
- Impose appropriate consequences on peers if they are provoking the student through teasing, taunts, verbal challenges, or physical horseplay.
- Help the student to identify appropriate range of responses for the situation and to select one.
- Permit student some ‘leeway’ on assignment or classroom expectations (as an acknowledgement of the life- or situational stress that they might be experiencing).
- Teach the student non-stigmatizing ways to get academic help, support in the classroom.
- Direct the student to write down the main points of his or her concerns. Promise that you will read through the student’s account and meet individually to discuss the problem.
• Use effective ‘teacher commands’ to direct the student: (1) keep each command brief, (2) state command directly rather than in “Could you please...” format, (3) use businesslike tone, avoiding anger and sarcasm, (4) avoid lengthy explanations for why you are making the request, (4) repeat command once if student fails to comply, then follow up with pre-determined consequences.
• Use planned ignoring (NOTE: This strategy works best when the student lacks an audience).

Stage 3: Aggression

Warning Signs: The student may...
• make verbal threats
• use abusive language
• assume threatening posture (e.g., with fists raised)
• physically strike out at peers or adults

Strategies to react to, prepare for or respond to student verbal or physical aggression:
• Remove other students or adults from the immediate vicinity of student (to protect their safety, eliminate an audience)
• Adopt a ‘supportive stance’: step slightly to the side of the student and orient your body so that you face the student obliquely at a 45- to 90-degree angle.
• Respect the student’s ‘personal space.’ Most people interpret the distance extending outward from their body to a distance of 2-1/2 to 3 feet as a bubble of ‘personal space.’ To both ensure your physical safety and reduce the student’s sense of threat, always stand at least a leg’s length away from the student.
• Use supportive ‘paraverbal’ and non-verbal communication. Children are adept at ‘reading’ our moods and feelings through non-verbal signals such as facial expressions, and body language. Maintain a calm tone of voice and body posture to project acceptance and support for the student.
• Do not block the door. Unless you have a compelling reason to do so (e.g., with very young children), try not to block the upset child’s access to the door as you approach the student. The student may interpret a blocked exit as a threat and attempt to go around or even through you to escape.
• Deliver a clear statement of choices. Here is a 3-step approach for making requests to upset students:

1. Give the student two clear choices with clear consequences. Order the choices so that the student hears the teacher-preferred choice last e.g., "John, you can refuse to participate in the math assignment and be written up for detention or you can start the math assignment now and not be written up." Make sure above all that you can enforce any consequences that you present to the student.

2. If the student fails to comply in a reasonable amount of time to Step 1, state clearly and firmly what you want the student to do. Include a time limit for student compliance and specify a location if necessary. For example, a teacher may tell the student, “John, I want you to return to your desk [location] now [time-frame] and begin your math assignment [requested behavior].”
3. If the student still fails to comply with your request, enforce alternative consequences that you have selected in advance.

- Put together a classroom crisis plan. Instructors who plan their responses to possible crisis situations are much more able to respond quickly and appropriately if and when such events occur. You can take charge of crisis planning by becoming familiar with your school's crisis plan, talking with staff whose rooms are near yours about how you can mutually help one another out in the event of a crisis, and teaching your students how they should respond (e.g., by evacuating the classroom in an orderly fashion) if a crisis situation occurs.

References


Working With Defiant Kids: Communication Tools for Teachers

Teachers cite conflicts with defiant and noncompliant students as being a primary cause of classroom disruption. In many schools, staff believe that student misbehavior is so pervasive that it seriously interferes with effective instruction. This article outlines important communication tools that teachers can use to defuse (or even prevent!) confrontations with students.

Why do classroom conflicts between teachers and students seem to occur so frequently? Conflicts are social power struggles and must always involve at least two parties. As conflicts between students and teachers appear to be so widespread, it might help to examine what factors tend to push each party into these power struggles.

- **Students** who are prone to conflict often do poorly in school. They may act out in part to mask their embarrassment about their limited academic skills. These students may also lack basic prosocial strategies that would help them to work through everyday school difficulties. For example, students may become confrontational because they do not know how to ask for help on a difficult assignment, lack the ability to sit down with a peer and calmly talk through a problem, or are unable to negotiate politely with a teacher to get an extension on an assignment.

Students can also sometimes adopt defiance toward teachers as a deliberate strategy—because, in the past, this confrontational behavior seems to have ‘paid off’ for them in the form of reduced expectations for schoolwork or improved social standing with peers. The longer that a student has engaged in habitual confrontational behavior, the more time and energy a teacher will probably need to invest in specific strategies to turn that behavior around.

- **Teachers** who get pulled into power struggles with students may not realize that they are often simply reacting to student provocation. For each step that the student escalates the conflict (e.g., raising his or her voice, assuming a threatening posture), the teacher matches the step (e.g., speaking more loudly, moving into the student’s personal space). In other words, a teacher allows the student to control the interaction.

Furthermore, if an instructor has already decided that a student is generally defiant, the teacher may be overly quick to jump to conclusions, interpreting any ambiguous behavior on the part of the student (e.g., muttering in frustration during a test) as intended to be deliberately confrontational (Fisher et al., 1991). The instructor may then reprimand or criticize the student, triggering a confrontation.

What is the most important point to keep in mind when working with a defiant or noncompliant student? The cardinal rule to keep in mind in managing conflicts with students is to stay outwardly calm and to maintain a professional perspective. For example, it is certainly OK to experience anger when a student deliberately attempts to insult or confront you in front of the
Working With Defiant Kids: Teacher Communication Tools

Jim Wright

www.interventioncentral.org

entire classroom. If you react with an angry outburst, though, the student will control the interaction, perhaps escalating the conflict until the student engineers his or her desired outcome. If you instead approach the student in a business-like, neutral manner, and impose consistent, fair consequences for misbehavior, you will model the important lesson that you cannot be pulled into a power struggle at the whim of a student.

Instructors who successfully stay calm in the face of student provocation often see two additional benefits:
1. Over time, students may become less defiant, because they no longer experience the ‘reward’ of watching you react in anger;
2. Because you now deal with student misbehavior impartially, efficiently and quickly, you will have more instructional time available that used to be consumed in epic power struggles.

How do I deliver a teacher command in a way that will minimize the chance of a power struggle? You can increase the odds that a student will follow a teacher command by:

- approaching the student privately and using a quiet voice
- establishing eye contact and calling the student by name before giving the command
- stating the command as a positive (do) statement, rather than a negative (don't) statement.
- phrasing the command in clear and descriptive terms (using simple language that is easily understood) so the student knows exactly what he or she is expected to do (Walker & Walker, 1991).

There are several ways that you might use to deliver a teacher command. The table below presents two sequences for teacher commands, one brief and one extended (Thompson, 1993; Walker & Walker, 1991). Your choice of which to use will depend on your own personal preference and your judgment about how a particular student will respond to each:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Command Sequence (Brief)</th>
<th>Teacher Command Sequence (Extended)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1. Make the request.</strong> Use simple, clear language that the student understands. If possible, phrase the request as a positive (do) statement, rather than a negative (don't) statement. (E.g., “John, please start your math assignment now.”) Wait a reasonable time for the student to comply (e.g., 5-20 seconds)</td>
<td><strong>1. Make the request.</strong> Use simple, clear language that the student understands. If possible, phrase the request as a positive (do) statement, rather than a negative (don't) statement. (E.g., “John, please start your math assignment now.”) Wait a reasonable time for the student to comply (e.g., 5-20 seconds)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2. [If the student fails to comply] Repeat the request.</strong> Say to the student, “You need to...” and restate the request. (E.g., “John, you need to start your math assignment now.”) Take no other action. Wait a reasonable time for the student to comply (e.g., 5-20 seconds)</td>
<td><strong>2. [If the student fails to comply] Repeat the request as a 2-part choice.</strong> Give the student two clear choices with clear consequences. Order the choices so that the student hears a pre-selected negative consequence as the first choice and the teacher request as the second choice. (E.g., “John, you can refuse to participate in the math assignment and receive a referral to the principal’s office, or you can...”</td>
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Are there other effective communication strategies that I can use with defiant students?
There are a number of supportive techniques that teachers can use to establish rapport and convey their behavioral expectations clearly to students, including:

- **Active listening.** Active listening, or paraphrasing, is the act of summarizing another person's ideas, opinions, or point of view in your own words. Students who are chronically hostile and confrontational often believe that nobody truly listens to them. When upset, they frequently interrupt the teacher because they believe that the instructor does not understand their point of view.

  Active listening is powerful because it demonstrates beyond a doubt that you have not only heard the student's comments but that you have grasped his or her opinions so clearly that you can repeat them back to the satisfaction of the speaker. Note, though, that active listening does not imply that you necessarily agree with the student's point of view. Rather, it shows that you fully comprehend that viewpoint. Students tend to view teachers who practice active listening as being empathic, respectful, and caring individuals.

  Here are some statements you can use when paraphrasing student comments:

  - “Let me be sure that I understand you correctly…”
  - “I want to summarize the points that you made, so that I know that I heard you right…”
  - “So from your point of view, the situation looks like this…”

  Once you have finished summarizing the student's point of view, give that student the opportunity to let you know how accurately he or she thinks you paraphrased those views: “Does what I just said sound like your point of view?” And don't be surprised if the student clarifies his or her position at this point. (Well, teacher, I don't think that you really meant to pick on me when I walked into class late, but when you called me by name and drew attention to me, I got really embarrassed!”) Though a simple communication technique, active listening can transform a potential classroom conflict into a productive student/teacher conversation.
One final tip about active listening: when a student is quite upset and talking very quickly, you can safely interrupt him or her, take control of the conversation, and still seem supportive by using an active listening phrase (Thompson, 1993). For example, you might interrupt a student by saying, "Whoa, just a minute! You've covered a lot of ground. Let me just try to sum up what you said so that I know that I am understanding you!"

- **I-centered statements.** When we tell oppositional students that they are engaging in inappropriate behaviors, we run the risk of having them challenge the truth of our statements or of taking offense at being criticized for their conduct. An instructor’s use of *I-centered statements* can reduce the potential that teacher criticism will lead to student confrontation. Because I-centered statements reflect only the instructor’s *opinions* and *viewpoints*, they are less incendiary and open to challenge than more global statements that pin blame for misbehavior on the student.

For example, rather than telling a student, “You are *always* disrupting class with your jokes and fooling around!,” you may say, “Zeke, I find it difficult to keep everybody’s attention when there are other conversations going on in the classroom. That’s why I need you to open your book and focus on today’s lesson.”

- **Pairing of criticism with praise (Thompson, 1993).** Sometimes you have no choice but to let a student know directly and bluntly that his or her classroom behaviors are not acceptable. Many oppositional students, though, have experienced a painful history of rejection in personal relationships and lack close ties with adults.

No matter how supportively you present behavioral criticism to these students, they may assume that you are in fact rejecting them as individuals and react strongly to this perceived rejection. One strategy to reassure the student that you continue to value him or her as a person is to (a) describe the problem behavior that you would like to see changed, (b) clearly outline appropriate behavioral alternatives (b) praise the student about some other aspect of his or her behavior or accomplishments, and finally (c) state that you value having the student as a part of the classroom community.

Here is a demonstration of this communication strategy:

1. **Description of problem behavior:** “Trina, you said disrespectful things about other students during our class meeting this morning. You continued to do so even after I asked you to stop.”
2. **Appropriate behavioral alternative(s):** “It’s OK to disagree with another person’s ideas. But you need to make sure that your comments do not insult or hurt the feelings of others.”
3. **Specific praise:** “I am talking to you about this behavior because know that you can do better. In fact, I have really come to value your classroom comments. You have great ideas and express yourself very well.”
4. **Affirmation statement:** “You are an important member of this class!”

**What are some conflict ‘pitfalls’ that I should watch out for?** Communication is never easy, especially when you work with students who can be defiant. You can maximize your chances for successful communication, though, if you:
Avoid a mismatch between your words and nonverbal signals. Students are quick to sense when a speaker’s body language and tone of voice convey a different message than his or her words. If the student reads your nonverbal signals as being disrespectful or confrontational, conflict may result. If a teacher speaks politely to a student, for example, but has his fists clenched and uses a sarcastic tone, that student is likely to discount the instructor’s words and focus instead on his nonverbal signals. Be sure that you convey sincerity by matching your verbal message with your nonverbal cues.

Take time to plan your response before reacting to provocative student behavior or remarks. It is easy to react without thinking when a student makes comments or engages in behavior that offends or upsets you. If you let anger take over, however, and blurt out the first thing that comes to mind, you may end up making “the greatest speech that you’ll ever live to regret” (Thompson, 1993, p. 32). A teacher’s angry response can escalate student misbehavior, resulting in a power struggle that spirals out of control. When provoked, take several seconds to collect your thoughts and to think through an appropriate, professional response before you take action.

Do not become entangled in a discussion or argument with a confrontational student (Walker & Walker, 1991). Some students are very skilled at dragging teachers into discussions or arguments that turn into power struggles. When you must deliver a command to, confront, or discipline a student who is defiant or confrontational, be careful not to get ‘hooked’ into a discussion or argument with that student. If you find yourself being drawn into an exchange with the student (e.g., raising your voice, reprimanding the student), immediately use strategies to disengage yourself (e.g., by moving away from the student, repeating your request in a business-like tone of voice, imposing a pre-determined consequence for noncompliance).

Do not try to coerce or force the student to comply. It is a mistake to use social pressure (e.g., reprimands, attempting to stare down students, standing watch over them) or physical force to make a confrontational student comply with a request (Walker & Walker, 1991). The student will usually resist and a power struggle will result. In particular, adults should not lay hands on a student to force compliance--as the student will almost certainly view this act as a serious physical threat and respond in kind.

What are proactive steps that I can take to head off or minimize conflict with students? The best way to handle a student conflict is to prevent it from occurring altogether: Some ideas to accomplish this are to:

Offer the student face-saving exit strategies. According to Fisher, et al. (1993), “face-saving reflects a person’s need to reconcile the stand he takes in a negotiation or agreement with his principles and with his past words and deeds” (p. 29). When a potential confrontation looms, you can give a student a face-saving way out by phrasing your request in a way that lets the student preserve his or her self-image even as the student complies.

A teacher, for example, who says to a student, “Rashid, take out your book now and pay attention--or I will send you to the office!” backs the student into a corner. The student
cannot comply without appearing to have done so merely to avoid the threatened
disciplinary consequence (that is, prompt compliance would probably result in Rashid’s
losing face with his peers). The teacher might instead use this face-saving alternative:
“Rashid, please take out your book now and pay attention. We need to make sure that
you do well on the upcoming test so that you continue to be eligible to play on the lacrosse
team. They need your talent!”

*Act in positive ways that are inconsistent with the student’s expectations (Fisher, et al.,
1991).* Because they have experienced so many disappointments in school,
confrontational students may believe that teachers do not take a personal interest in them
or value their classroom contributions. You can surprise these students and begin to forge
more positive relationships by showing through your actions that you do indeed value
them. You might, for example, occasionally bring in articles from popular magazines on
topics that you know will interest the student, set aside time for weekly individual
conferences to be sure that the student understands and is making progress on all
assignments, or take a couple of minutes each day to engage the student in social
conversation. Each small ‘random act of kindness’ will probably not instantly change a
teacher-student relationship. Over time, however, such acts will demonstrate your
empathy and caring--and are likely to have a cumulative, powerful, and positive impact on
the student.

*Select fair behavioral consequences in advance (Walker & Walker, 1991).* When you are
face-to-face with a confrontational student, it can be a challenge to remain impartial and
fair in choosing appropriate consequences for misbehavior. Instead, take time *in advance*
to set up a classwide menu of positive consequences for good behaviors and negative
consequences for misbehavior. Be sure that all students understand what those
consequences are. Then be consistent in applying those consequences to individual cases
of student misbehavior.

*Avoid making task demands of students when they are upset.* Students will be much more
likely to become confrontational if you approach them with a task demand at a time when
they are already frustrated or upset. When possible, give agitated students a little
breathing room to collect themselves and calm down before giving them commands
(Walker & Walker, 1993).

**References**


The Good Behavior Game is an approach to the management of classrooms behaviors that rewards children for displaying appropriate on-task behaviors during instructional times. The class is divided into two teams and a point is given to a team for any inappropriate behavior displayed by one of its members. The team with the fewest number of points at the Game's conclusion each day wins a group reward. If both teams keep their points below a preset level, then both teams share in the reward. The program was first tested in 1969; several research articles have confirmed that the Game is an effective means of increasing the rate of on-task behaviors while reducing disruptions in the classroom (Barrish, Saunders, & Wolf, 1969; Harris & Sherman, 1973; Medland & Stachnik, 1972).

The process of introducing the Good Behavior Game into a classroom is a relatively simple procedure. There are five steps involved in putting the Game into practice.

**Steps in Implementing This Intervention**

**Step 1: Decide when to schedule the Game.** The teacher first decides during what period(s) of the school day the Game will be played. As a rule of thumb, instructors should pick those times when the entire class is expected to show appropriate academic behaviors. Blocks of time devoted to reading, math, content instruction, and independent seatwork would be most appropriate for putting the Game into effect.

**Step 2: Clearly define the negative behaviors that will be scored during the Game.** Teachers who have used the Good behavior Game typically define three types of negative behavior that will be scored whenever they appear during the Game. Those behaviors are:

- leaving one's seat,
- talking out,
• engaging in disruptive behavior.

Out-of-seat behavior is defined as any incident in which a student leaves his or her seat without first getting permission from the teacher. Related behaviors, such as "scootching" one's seat toward another desk are usually scored as out-of-seat. Instructors often build in certain exceptions to this rule. For example, in some classrooms, children can take a pass to the bathroom, approach the teacher's desk for additional help, or move from one work site to another in the room without permission as long as these movements are conducted quietly and are a part of the accepted classroom routine. Children who leave their seats intending to complete an allowed activity but find that they cannot (e.g., walking toward the teacher's desk and then noticing that another student is already there) are not scored as being out of their seat if they quickly and quietly return to their desk.

Talking-out behavior is defined as any incident of talking out loud without the permission of the instructor. Permission is gained by raising one's hand and first being recognized by the teacher before speaking. Any type of unauthorized vocalization within the hearing of the instructor is scored as talking out, including shouts, nonsense noises (e.g., growling, howling, whistling), whispers, and talking while one's hand is raised.

Disruptive behavior consists of any movement or act that is judged by the teacher to be disruptive of classroom instruction. For example, knocking on a table, looking around the room, tearing up paper, passing notes, or playing with toys at one's desk would all be scored as disruptive behaviors. A good rule of thumb would be to regard as disruptive behavior any action that does not fall under another category but is perceived by the teacher as annoying or distracting.

Step 3: Decide upon suitable daily and (perhaps) weekly rewards for teams winning the Game.

Teachers will need to choose rewards that they feel will effectively motivate students to take part in the Game. Most often, instructors use free time as a daily reward, since children often find it motivating. To cite a single example, one teacher's reward system included giving her daily 4th-grade Game winners the privilege of wearing a "victory tag," putting a star next to their names on a "Winner's Chart," lining up first for lunch, and getting 30 minutes of time at the end of the day to work on fun, educationally related topics.

When choosing rewards, instructors are advised to consider using reinforcers that fit naturally into the context and mission of a classroom. For example, allowing winners to play quietly together at the end of the school day may help to promote social skills, but dispensing material rewards (e.g., comic books) to winners would probably be less likely to contribute directly to educational and social goals. Of course, if both teams win on a given day or a given week, the members of those teams all receive the same rewards.

Step 4: Introduce the Game to the class.

Once behaviors have been selected and clearly defined by the teacher, the next step is to
introduce the Game to the class. Ideally, time should be set aside for an initial group discussion. The teacher mentions that the class will be playing a game and presents a schedule clearly setting forth the instructional times during which the game will be in effect.

The teacher next divides the classroom into two teams. For ease of recording, it is usually recommended that the instructor divide the class down the center of the room into roughly equal halves. Some teachers have used three teams successfully as well. To build a sense of team spirit, students may be encouraged to name their groups.

The children are informed that certain types of behavior (i.e., leaving one's seat or talking without permission, and engaging in disruptive behaviors) will earn points for the team to which they belong. Students are also told that both teams can win if they earn no more than a certain number of points (e.g., 4 points maximum per day). If both teams happen to exceed 4 points, then the team with the lowest total at the end of the day is the winner. In case of a tie, both teams earn the reward. The instructor is the final judge of whether a behavior is to be scored. (As an option, students can also be told that the team with the fewest number of points at the end of the week will win an additional reward.)

It is a good idea when introducing the Game to students to clearly review examples of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. After all, it is important that all children know the rules before the Game begins. To more effectively illustrate those rules, children may be recruited to demonstrate acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, or the teacher may describe a number of behaviors and ask the class to decide with a show of hands whether such behaviors are to be scored or not.

**Step 5: Put the Game into effect.**

The instructor is now ready to start the Game. During those times that the game is in effect in the classroom, the teacher continues to carry out his or her usual instructional practices. The only alteration in the routine is that the instructor is also noting and publicly recording any negative points incurred by either team. Instructors might want to post scores on the blackboard or on a large piece of paper visible to everyone in the room. If working with children in a small group, the instructor can record negative behaviors on a small note pad and later transfer them to the blackboard. Teachers can also choose to publicly announce when another point has been earned as a reminder to the class about acceptable behavior. It is helpful to keep a weekly tally of points for each team, especially if teams are competing for weekly as well as daily rewards.

Care should be taken to be as consistent as possible in scoring negative behaviors. Winning teams should be praised as well as rewarded for their efforts, with that praise tied when possible to specifically observed behaviors. Instructors may want to alter the Game somewhat as necessary (e.g., changing rewards or more carefully defining acceptable and unacceptable behaviors with students). Obviously, any alteration of the Game, no matter how small, should be shared with the classroom before being put into effect.

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**Troubleshooting: How to Deal With Common Problems in Using the 'Good Behavior Game'**
Q: **What should I do if a small number of students try to sabotage the game for other children by deliberately acting out and earning penalty points for their team?**

If a small number of students are earning a large number of points during the Game, consider forming them into a separate team. While not the norm, occasionally a single student or small group of children may be tempted to undermine the Game by deliberately incurring a large number of penalty points for their teams. (Such children may find the resulting negative social attention of other members of their team to be its own reward!) A simple remedy for this problem is to modify the Game by making those disruptive students into a separate team. The Game will continue unchanged, except that your room will now have three teams rather than two competing for rewards.

Q: **I have used the Good Behavior Game for a while and have found it to be effective. But lately it doesn't seem to have the same impact on my students. What do you recommend?**

If the Good Behavior Game appears to be losing effectiveness over time, be sure that you are consistently noting and assigning team points for inappropriate behaviors and that you are avoiding verbal arguments with students. It is very important that points be assigned consistently when you witness inappropriate behavior; otherwise, the Game may not bring about the expected behavioral improvement among your students. Teachers using the Game sometimes find it helpful to have another adult familiar with the Good Behavior Game observe them and offer feedback about their consistency in assigning points and success in avoiding negative verbal exchanges with students.

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References


Reducing Problem Behaviors Through Good Academic Management: 10 Strategies

Students who are confrontational or non-compliant frequently have poor academic skills, a low sense of self-efficacy as learners, and a very negative attitude toward school (Sprick, et al., 2002). Misbehavior often stems from academic deficits. Educators who work with these behaviorally challenging learners, however, often make the mistake of overlooking simple academic strategies that have been shown to shape student behavior in powerful and positive ways (Penno et al., 2000). Here are ten research-based ideas on academic management that no teacher of difficult-to-manage students should be without!

1. **Be sure that assigned work is not too easy and not too difficult.** It is surprising how often classroom behavior problems occur simply because students find the assigned work too difficult or too easy (Gettinger & Seibert, 2002). When assignments are too simple, the student may become bored and distracted. When work is too hard, the student is likely to feel frustrated and upset because he or she cannot complete the assignment. As a significant mismatch between the assignment and the student’s abilities can trigger misbehavior, teachers should inventory each student’s academic skills and adjust assignments as needed to ensure that the student is appropriately challenged but not overwhelmed by the work.

2. **Offer frequent opportunities for choice.** Teachers who allow students a degree of choice in structuring their learning activities typically have fewer behavior problems in their classrooms than teachers who do not. (Kern et al., 2002). Providing choices gives students a sense of autonomy and voice in their learning. It should also be remembered that no teacher could possibly anticipate each student’s idiosyncratic learning needs in every situation. If students are offered choice in structuring their academic activities, however, they will frequently select those options that make their learning easier and more manageable. In sum, students who exercise academic choice are more likely to be active, motivated managers of their own learning and less likely to simply act out due to frustration or boredom.

As an example of choice at the group level, an instructor may let the entire class vote on which of two lessons they would prefer to have presented that day. Choice can be incorporated into individual assignments too. In independent seatwork, for example, a student might be allowed to choose which of several short assignments to do first, the books or other research materials to be used, the response format (e.g., writing a short essay, preparing an oral report), etc. One efficient way to promote choice in the classroom is for the teacher to create a master menu of options that students can select from in various learning situations. An instructor, for example, may teach the class that during any independent assignment, students will always have a chance to (1) choose from at least 2 assignment options, (2) sit where they want in the classroom, and (3) select a peer-buddy to check their work. Student choice then becomes integrated seamlessly into the classroom routine.
3. **Select high-interest or functional learning activities.** Kids are more motivated to learn when their instructional activities are linked to a topic of high interest (Kern et al., 2002). A teacher who discovers that her math group of 7th-graders loves NASCAR racing, for example, may be able to create engaging math problems based on car-racing statistics. Students may also be energized to participate in academic activities if they believe that these activities will give them functional skills that they value (Miller et al., 2003). One instructor assigned to work with a special-education classroom of high school boys with serious behavior problems related that she had great difficulty managing the class—until she realized that each of them wanted to learn to drive. So the teacher brought in copies of the state driver's education manual and that became the instructional text. The students were much better behaved because they were now motivated learners working toward the pragmatic real-world goal of learning to drive (R. Sarsfield, personal communication).

4. **Instruct students at a brisk pace.** A myth of remedial education is that special-needs students must be taught at a slower, less demanding pace than their general-education peers (Heward, 2003). In fact, a slow pace of instruction can actually cause significant behavior problems, because students become bored and distracted. Teacher-led instruction should be delivered at a sufficiently brisk pace to hold student attention. An important additional benefit of a brisk instructional pace is that students cover more academic material more quickly, accelerating their learning (Heward, 2003).

5. **Structure lessons to require active student involvement.** Here is a powerful concept in behavior management: it is very difficult for students to be actively engaged in academics and to misbehave at the same time! When teachers require that students participate in lessons rather than sit as passive listeners, they increase the odds that these students will become caught up in the flow of the activity and not drift off into misbehavior (Heward, 2003). Students can be encouraged to be active learning participants in many ways. A teacher, for example, may call out questions and have the class give the answer in unison (‘choral responding’); pose a question, give the class ‘think time’, and then draw a name from a hat to select a student to give the answer; or direct students working independently on a practice problem to ‘think aloud’ as they work through the steps of the problem. Students who have lots of opportunities to actively respond and receive teacher feedback also demonstrate substantial learning gains (Heward, 1994).

6. **Incorporate cooperative-learning opportunities into instruction.** Traditional teacher lecture is frequently associated with high rates of student misbehavior. When misbehavior occurs in a large-group format, it also can have a large negative impact: one acting-out student who gets into a power-struggle with the lecturing instructor will interrupt learning for the entire class. There is evidence, though, that when students are given well-structured assignments and placed into work-pairs or cooperative learning groups, behavior problems typically diminish (Beyda et al., 2002). Furthermore, if a behavior problem should occur while cooperative groups are working together, the teacher is often able to approach and privately redirect the misbehaving student without disrupting learning in the other groups (Beyda et al., 2002).

Even positive teacher practices can be more effective when used in cooperative-learning settings. When instructors teaching in lecture format take the time to give extended feedback and provide coaching to individuals, other students can become disengaged and off-task. If students are working in pairs or small groups, though, teacher feedback given to one group or individual does not interrupt learning for the other groups.
7. **Give frequent teacher feedback and encouragement.** Praise and other positive interactions between teacher and student serve an important instructional function, because these exchanges regularly remind the student of the classroom behavioral and academic expectations and give the student clear evidence that he or she is capable of achieving those expectations (Mayer, 2000).

Unfortunately, in most classrooms, educators tend to deliver many more reprimands than they do praise statements. This imbalance is understandable: after all, teachers are under pressure to devote most of their class time to deliver high-quality instruction and tend to interrupt that instruction only when forced to deal with disruptive behavior. A high rate of reprimands and low rate of praise, however, can have several negative effects. First, if teachers do not regularly praise and encourage students who act appropriately, those positive student behaviors may wither away through lack of recognition. Second, students will probably find a steady diet of reprimands to be punishing and might eventually respond by withdrawing from participation or even avoiding the class altogether. A goal for teachers should be to engage in at least 3 to 4 positive interactions with the student for each reprimand given (Sprick, et al., 2002). Positive interactions might include focused, specific praise, non-verbal exchanges (e.g., smile or ‘thumbs-up’ from across the room), or even an encouraging note written on the student’s homework assignment. These positive interactions are brief and can often be delivered in the midst of instruction.

8. **Provide correct models during independent work.** In virtually every classroom, students are expected to work independently on assignments. Independent seatwork can be a prime trigger, though, for serious student misbehavior (DuPaul & Stoner, 2002). One modest instructional adjustment that can significantly reduce problem behaviors is to supply students with several correctly completed models (work examples) to use as a reference (Miller et al., 2003). A math instructor teaching quadratic equations, for example, might provide 4 models in which all steps in solving the equation are solved. Students could refer to these models as needed when completing their own worksheets of similar algebra problems. Or an English/Language Arts teacher who assigns his class to compose a letter to their U.S. Senator might allow them to refer to three ‘model’ letters while they write.

9. **Be consistent in managing the academic setting.** Picture this (not-uncommon) scenario: A teacher complains that her students routinely yell out answers without following the classroom rule of first raising their hand to be recognized. She invites an observer into the classroom to offer her some ideas for reducing the number of call-outs. The observer quickly discovers that the teacher often ignores students who have raised their hand and instead accepts answers that are blurted out. Because she is inconsistent in enforcing her classroom rules, the teacher is actually contributing to student misbehavior!

As a group, students with challenging behaviors are more likely than their peers to become confused by inconsistent classroom routines. Teachers can hold down the level of problem behaviors by teaching clear expectations for academic behaviors and then consistently following through in enforcing those expectations (Sprick et al., 2002). Classrooms run more smoothly when students are first taught routines for common learning activities—such as participating in class discussion, turning in homework, breaking into cooperative learning groups, and handing out work materials—and then the teacher consistently enforces those same routines by praising students who follow them, reviewing those routines periodically, and reteaching them as needed.

10. **Target interventions to coincide closely with ‘point of performance’.** Skilled teachers employ many strategies to shape or manage challenging student behaviors. For instance, a teacher may give a
‘pre-correction’ (reminder about appropriate behaviors) to a student who is about to leave the room to attend a school assembly, award a ‘good behavior’ raffle-ticket to a student who displayed exemplary behavior in the hallway, or allow a student to collect a reward that she had earned for being on time to class for the whole week.

It is generally a good idea for teachers who work with a challenging students to target their behavioral and academic intervention strategies to coincide as closely as possible with that student’s ‘point of performance’ (the time that the student engages in the behavior that the teacher is attempting to influence) (DuPaul & Stoner, 2002). So a teacher is likely to be more successful in getting a student to take his crayons to afternoon art class if that teacher reminds the student just as the class is lining up for art than if she were to remind him at the start of the day. A student reward will have a greater impact if it is given near the time in which it was earned than if it is awarded after a two-week delay. Teacher interventions tend to gain in effectiveness as they are linked more closely in time to the students’ points of performance that they are meant to influence.

References


Finding the Spark: More Ideas for Building Student Motivation

Teachers can feel overwhelmed when faced with students who are unmotivated to learn. The task becomes less daunting, though, when teachers realize that they can boost student motivation in five important ways: by (1) making positive changes to the learning environment, (2) fostering a sense of community in the classroom, (3) enhancing the interest of classroom activities, (4) responding to individual learning challenges, and (5) building in additional outcomes/pay-offs for learning. Here are some ideas:

Learning Environment
The setting in which we work can encourage us to give our best effort or discourage us from even trying to perform. Ideas to motivate by influencing factors in the student's environment:

- Reduce distractions in the classroom.
- Create a consistent room arrangement, with predictable materials and routines.
- Let students choose their seat location and study partners.
- Enlist students to come up with rules and guidelines for effective classroom learning.
- Create a memory-friendly classroom. Post assignments and due dates, written steps for multi-step tasks, etc.
- Use a mix of verbal and environmental cues to keep students focused and on-task.
- Hold class in different locations occasionally (“within-building field trip”). For example, think about ‘swapping’ classrooms with another teacher on a given day.
- Ask for student advice on how to make the classroom a more inviting and useful learning environment.

Classroom Community
We define ourselves in relation to others through social relationships. These connections are a central motivator for most people. Ideas to motivate by fostering a sense of a learning community:

- Be as inviting a person as possible by actively listening to students and acknowledging their contributions.
- Greet students at the classroom door. ‘Check in’ briefly with students at the start and end of a work period.
- Ask students to complete a learning-preferences questionnaire.
- Assign ‘study buddies’ who help each other to get organized, start work projects, encourage one another, and provide peer feedback.
- Train students to be peer editors or evaluators of others’ assignments.
- Hold weekly 5-minute ‘micro-meetings’ with the group or class. Check in with the group about topics or issues important to them. Record important points brought up and get back to students if necessary.
- Keep ‘dialog journals’. Have students write daily or weekly comments in a journal to be kept in class. Respond to student comments with short comments of your own.
- Circulate through the classroom. Be interactive and visible to kids. Use words of praise and encouragement.

**Academic Activities**

*Motivated students are engaged in interesting activities that guarantee a high success rate and relate to real-world issues.*

Ideas to motivate through selection and development of learning activities:

- Use humor.
- Keep miscellaneous work supplies on hand (e.g., paper, pencils, etc.) for students to borrow.
- Set a timer (e.g., for 60 seconds) and challenge students to finish routine tasks or transition between activities before timer runs out.
- Set up academic ‘culminating event’ fieldtrips. On these fieldtrips, have students use skills learned in class (e.g., drafting questions in social studies to be used in an interview with a member of city government).
- Invite interesting guest speakers into the classroom to speak on academic topics. Prepare index cards with review questions and answers based on material covered in class. Have guest speaker ‘quiz’ teams; award points to teams based on their mastery of material.
- Offer students meaningful choice in setting up their assignments (e.g., selection of work materials, type of activity).
- Select fun, imaginative activities for reviewing academic material. In order to get students to assemble material for a research paper, for example, you might send them to the library on a fact-finding ‘scavenger hunt.’
- Encourage active student participation.
- Use motivating ‘real-world’ examples for review, quiz, or test items.
- Keep instructions and assignments short. Have students repeat instructions back.
- Celebrate student achievement.
- Celebrate mistakes as opportunities for learning.
- Prior to assignments, have students set their own short-term work or learning goals. Periodically, have students rate their own progress toward their self-selected goals.
- Structure work period so that more difficult activities are in the middle, with easier tasks at the start and end.
- Liven potentially dull student review activities by conducting them as class-wide or small-group drills. Use a game format to maintain interest.
- Use novel, interesting materials for instruction.
- Allow students to set their own pace for completing work.
- Select activities that make a community contribution. Students may, for instance, work on writing skills by publishing a monthly newsletter for the 7th grade.

**Learning Challenges**

*Every learner presents a unique profile of strengths and weaknesses. We unlock motivation when we acknowledge and address unique learning profiles.*

Ideas to motivate by accommodating challenges to learning:
Avoid ‘stigmatizing’ as low performers those students who require remedial academic support.
Lead students through the first part of an assignment as a group before having them complete it independently.
If an assignment requires use of new or difficult terms or concepts, first pre-teach or preview this material.
Make the classroom a ‘safe’ setting in which in which students can identify and work on their own skill deficits.
Give students credit and recognition for effort on assignments as well as for mastery of content.
Be honest in telling students how challenging a topic or activity is likely to be to master. Never downplay the difficulty of an assignment!
Use a ‘think-aloud’ approach when introducing a skill or strategy.
Select academic activities that guarantee a high degree of student success.
Allow students to take a brief break when tired or frustrated.
Help students to get organized and started on an activity.
Have students keep a schedule of work assignments and due dates.
Encourage students to use memory aids such as notes and lists.
Assist students in breaking large, multi-step tasks into smaller subtasks. Have students write those subtasks down as a personal ‘to-do’ list.
Teach students to use a notebook organizer.
Give reminders of upcoming transitions between activities.
Help students to highlight key information to be remembered.
Provide frequent review of key concepts.
Periodically remind students of timeline of upcoming assignments.

Outcomes/Payoffs for Learning

Learning is a motivating activity when the learner can count on short- or long-term payoffs for mastering the material being taught.

Ideas to motivate by arranging or emphasizing payoffs to the student for successful learning:

- Reward student effort along with quality of completed work. (One way to do this is to use frequent encouragement for good effort along with praise for finished work.)
- Build in short-term rewards (e.g., increased free time, pencils, positive note home) for student effort, work completion.
- Create high-visibility location for displaying student work (e.g., bulletin board, web site). Encourage students to select their own best work to be posted.
- Have students monitor their own progress in accuracy/work completion. For example, have students create graphs charting homework assignments turned in. Tie student-monitored performance to reward programs.

Acknowledgements
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Motivating Ideas About Student Motivation

Often, a key to unlocking students’ motivation to learn is to prompt them to change their attitudes about their own abilities as learners. Here are some ideas (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002) for helping difficult-to-teach students to think like empowered learners.

**Assessing Students’ Ideas About Academic Self-Efficacy.** *Self-efficacy* is the student’s view of his or her own abilities specific to learning. (This term should not be confused with *self-esteem*, which represents the student’s global view of his or her self-worth.)

Teachers can tap students’ impressions of self-efficacy by asking them to ‘think aloud’ about their abilities in the academic area of interest. Instructors will find the information that they have collected to be most useful if students are encouraged to:

- talk about their perceived strengths and weaknesses as learners in particular subject areas
- give examples (with details) about specific successes and failures that they have experienced on academic assignments
- present strategies (if any) that they typically use to complete a range of common academic tasks (e.g., undertaking a term paper, completing a chemistry lab exercise, doing homework)
- disclose their routine for preparing for quizzes and tests.

As a student articulates attitudes toward learning and describes techniques that he or she uses as an independent learner, the teacher can use this information to identify whether a low sense of academic self-efficacy may be holding the student back. The teacher can also diagnose possible gaps in the student’s study skills and take steps to help the student to remediate those gaps.

**Motivating Students: ‘Catch’ vs. ‘Hold’ Factors.** When working with difficult-to-teach students, teachers should expect that they must first *catch* the learners’ attention before they can *hold* these students’ focus on a learning task.

‘Catch’ factors are those that grab the student’s attention. Fun academic activities (e.g., reviewing quiz material in a Jeopardy-game format) and educational computer games with eye-catching graphics are examples of educational experiences with high ‘catch’ potential. ‘Hold’ factors are those that encourage the student to invest time and effort in a learning activity. Activities commonly tend to ‘hold’ students when they provide ongoing natural rewards for continued participation. A student who likes to interact with peers, for example, might have his or her attention ‘held’ by a cooperative-learning activity, while the student who has an intense interest in NASCAR racing may put substantial effort into a math lesson if the lesson ‘catches’ the student’s interest by allowing him or her to compute useful racing statistics.

Teachers wishing to capture and maintain students’ attention over time can structure learning activities so that they start with high-interest ‘catch’ features, then transition to include more
sustainable ‘hold’ features. A teacher may decide to review math vocabulary with the class, for example, by first sending students individually around the school on a ‘scavenger hunt’ to collect examples of math vocabulary posted on walls and bulletin boards (‘catch’ activity). Once the students have returned to the classroom, the teacher might organize them into groups, have each group compile a master-list of their math vocabulary words, and define the math operation(s) to which each word is linked (‘hold’ activity).

**How Attributions About Learning Contribute to Academic Outcomes.** Attribution theory suggests that people regularly make ‘attributions’ about events and situations in which they are involved that in turn help them to explain and make sense of those happenings. The attributions that one makes about one’s academic skills are not objective facts; rather, they are highly subjective, personal interpretations colored by one’s personal biases and past learning history. One useful framework for analyzing attributions examines the student’s belief about whether a given learning event or situation is stable, occurs within or outside of the student, and can be controlled by the student. (See Attribution Theory table.)

**Attribution Theory: Dimensions Affecting Student Interpretation of Academic Successes & Failures** (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The situation or event is…</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Unstable (changes often)</td>
<td>• Stable (can be counted on to remain relatively unchanged)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Internal (within the student)</td>
<td>• External (occurring in the surrounding environment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Uncontrollable (beyond the ability of the student to influence)</td>
<td>• Controllable (within the student’s ability to influence)</td>
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</table>

A student's faulty attributions can undercut his or her academic success. For example, a student who says that she failed a math quiz because she is ‘stupid and can never learn math’ (stable, internal, uncontrollable) will probably be very unmotivated to attempt future math problems without considerable support and encouragement. Teachers can learn a great deal of useful information when they encourage students to share their attributions about academic events at which they were successful or unsuccessful. When appropriate, the teacher may even work with the student to reshape attributions to be more positive, adaptive, and realistic.

To revisit our example of the math student who attributes poor academic performance to her ‘stupidity’ in math, the teacher may point out specific math strategies that the student has mastered (internal, stable, controllable) or demonstrate how the student can improve learning by increasing the structure of her homework time and setting (external, stable, controllable).

School-Wide Strategies for Managing...
DEFIANCE / NON-COMPLIANCE
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Students who are defiant or non-compliant can be among the most challenging to teach. They can frequently interrupt instruction, often do poorly academically, and may show little motivation to learn. There are no magic strategies for managing the behaviors of defiant students. However, research shows that certain techniques tend to work best with these children and youth: (1) Give the student positive teacher recognition. Even actions as simple as greeting the student daily at the classroom door or stopping by the student’s desk to ask ‘How are you doing?’ can over time turn strained relationships into positive ones. (2) Monitor the classroom frequently and intervene proactively to redirect off-task students before their mild misbehaviors escalate into more serious problems. (3) Avoid saying or doing things that are likely to anger or set off a student. Speak calmly and respectfully, for example, rather than raising your voice or using sarcasm. (4) When you must intervene with a misbehaving student, convey the message to the student that you will not tolerate the problem behavior—but that you continue to value and accept the student. (5) Remember that the ultimate goal of any disciplinary measure is to teach the student more positive ways of behaving. Punishment generally does not improve student behaviors over the long term and can have significant and lasting negative effects on school performance and motivation. (6) Develop a classroom ‘crisis response plan’ to be implemented in the event that one or more students display aggressive behaviors that threaten their own safety or the safety of others. Be sure that your administrator approves this classroom crisis plan and that everyone who has a part in the plan knows his or her role. One final thought: While you can never predict what behaviors your students might bring into your classroom, you will usually achieve the best outcomes by remaining calm, following pre-planned intervention strategies for misbehavior, and acting with consistency and fairness when intervening with or disciplining students. Here are other ideas for managing defiant or non-compliant students:

Allow the Student a 'Cool-Down' Break (Long, Morse, & Newman, 1980). Select a corner of the room (or area outside the classroom with adult supervision) where the target student can take a brief 'respite break' whenever he or she feels angry or upset. Be sure to make cool-down breaks available to all students in the classroom, to avoid singling out only those children with anger-control issues. Whenever a student becomes upset and defiant, offer to talk the situation over with that student once he or she has calmed down and then direct the student to the cool-down corner. (E.g., "Thomas, I want to talk with you about what is upsetting you, but first you need to calm down. Take five minutes in the cool-down corner and then come over to my desk so we can talk.")

Ask Open-Ended Questions (Lanceley, 2001). If a teacher who is faced with a confrontational student does not know what triggered that student's defiant response, the instructor can ask neutral, open-ended questions to collect more information before responding. You can pose 'who', 'what', 'where', 'when', and 'how' questions to more fully understand the problem situation and identify possible solutions. Some sample questions are "What do you think made you angry when you were talking with Billy?" and "Where were you when you realized that you had misplaced your science book?" One caution: Avoid asking 'why?' questions (e.g., "Why did you get into that fight with Jerry?") because they can imply that you are blaming the student.

Assign a Reflective 'Processing' Essay After Misbehavior (Boynton & Boynton, 2005; Mayer & Ybarra, 2004; Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995). The student who gets into a conflict must write and submit to the teacher a brief 'process' plan outlining how they will improve their behavior. At minimum, the plan would state: (1) the role the student played in the conflict, (2) the part that other participants may have taken in the incident, (3) the student's suggestions for finding the best resolution to the problem, and (4) how the student can act in the future to prevent the conflict from recurring.
NOTE: Some teachers use a pre-printed structured questionnaire containing these 4 items for the student to complete.

**Do Not Get Entangled in Arguments** *(Walker & Walker, 1991)*. The careful teacher avoids being dragged into arguments or unnecessary discussion when disciplining students. When you must deliver a command to, confront, or discipline a student who is defiant or confrontational, be careful not to get 'hooked' into a discussion or argument with that student. If you find yourself being drawn into an exchange with the student (e.g., raising your voice, reprimanding the student), immediately use strategies to disengage yourself (e.g., by moving away from the student, repeating your request in a business-like tone of voice, imposing a pre-determined consequence for noncompliance).

**Emphasize the Positive in Teacher Requests** *(Braithwaite, 2001)*. 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, avoid using negative phrasing (e.g., "If you don't return to your seat, I can't help you with your assignment"). Instead, restate 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").

**Expand the Range of Classroom Behavior Interventions** *(Sprick, Borgmeier, & Nolet, 2002)*. The teacher who has developed an array of in-class consequences for minor misbehaviors can prevent students from being sent to the principal's office or to in-school detention. First, list those common misbehaviors that you believe should typically be handled in the classroom (e.g. being late to class, talking out). When finished, categorize your list of misbehaviors into 3 groups: ‘Level 1’ (mild) misbehaviors, ‘Level 2’ (medium) misbehaviors, and ‘Level 3’ (more serious) misbehaviors. Then, list next to each level of problem behaviors a range of in-class consequences that you feel appropriately match those types of misbehavior. For example, you may decide that a ‘soft’ reprimand would be a choice to address Level 1 misbehaviors, while a phone call to the parent would be a choice for Level 3 misbehaviors. NOTE: In-class consequences are intended for minor misbehaviors. You should notify an administrator whenever students display behaviors that seriously disrupt learning or pose a risk to the safety of that student or to others.

**Give Praise That is Specific and Does Not Embarrass the Student** *(Sprick, Borgmeier, & Nolet, 2002)*. Defiant students can respond well to adult praise but only when it is sincere and specific, and is not embarrassing. Ideally, the teacher should deliver praise as soon as possible after the positive behavior. Praise should be specific and descriptive—because vague, general praise can sound fake and does not give the student any useful information about how their behavior meets or exceeds the teacher’s expectations. For older students who tend to dislike being praised in a highly public manner, the teacher can use a more indirect or low-key approach (e.g., writing a note of praise on the student’s graded assignment, praising the student in a private conversation, calling the student’s parent to praise the student).

**Give Problem Students Frequent Positive Attention** *(Sprick, Borgmeier, & Nolet, 2002)*. Teachers should make an effort to give positive attention or praise to problem students at least three times more frequently than they reprimand them. The teacher gives the student the attention or praise during moments when that student is acting appropriately—and keeps track of how frequently they give positive attention and reprimands to the student. This heavy dosing of positive attention and praise can greatly improve the teacher’s relationship with problem students.

**Have the Student Participate in Creating a Behavior Plan** *(Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995)*. Students can feel a greater sense of ownership when they are invited to contribute to their behavior management plan. Students also tend to know better than anyone else what triggers will set off their problem behaviors and what strategies they find most effective in calming themselves and avoiding conflicts or other behavioral problems.
Increase 'Reinforcement' Quality of the Classroom (Dunlap & Kern, 1996; Mayer & Ybarra, 2004). If a student appears to be defiant or non-compliant in an effort to escape the classroom, the logical solution is to make the classroom environment and activities more attractive and reinforcing for that student. Unfortunately, the student who fails repeatedly at academics can quickly come to view school as punishment. Some ideas to increase motivation to remain in the classroom are to structure lessons or assignments around topics of high interest to the target student, to increase opportunities for cooperative learning (which many students find reinforcing), and to adjust the target student’s instruction so that he or she experiences a high rate of success on classwork and homework.

Keep Responses Calm, Brief, and Businesslike (Mayer, 2000; Sprick, Borgmeier, & Nolet, 2002). Because teacher sarcasm or lengthy negative reprimands can trigger defiant student behavior, instructors should respond to the student in a 'neutral', business-like, calm voice. Also, keep responses brief when addressing the non-compliant student. Short teacher responses give the defiant student less control over the interaction and can also prevent instructors from inadvertently 'rewarding' misbehaving students with lots of negative adult attention.

Listen Actively (Lanceley, 1999; Long, Morse, & Newman, 1980). The teacher demonstrates a sincere desire to understand a student's concerns when he or she actively listens to and then summarizes those concerns. Many students lack effective negotiation skills in dealing with adults. As a result, these students may become angry and defensive when they try to express a complaint to the teacher—even when that complaint is well founded. The instructor can show that he or she wants to understand the student's concern by summing up the crucial points of that concern (paraphrasing) in his or her own words. Examples of paraphrase comments include 'Let me be sure that I understand you correctly...', 'Are you telling me that...?,' 'It sounds to me like these are your concerns...'. When teachers engage in 'active listening' by using paraphrasing, they demonstrate a respect for the student's point of view and can also improve their own understanding of the student's problem.

Offer the Student a Face-Saving Out (Thompson & Jenkins, 1993). Students sometimes blunder into potential confrontations with their teachers; when this happens, the teacher helps the student to avoid a full-blown conflict in a manner that allows the student to save face. Try this face-saving de-escalation tactic: Ask the defiant student, "Is there anything that we can work out together so that you can stay in the classroom and be successful?" Such a statement treats the student with dignity, models negotiation as a positive means for resolving conflict, and demonstrates that the instructor wants to keep the student in the classroom. It also provides the student with a final chance to resolve the conflict with the teacher and avoid other, more serious disciplinary consequences. Be prepared for the possibility that the student will initially give a sarcastic or unrealistic response (e.g., "Yeah, you can leave me alone and stop trying to get me to do classwork!"). Ignore such attempts to hook you into a power struggle and simply ask again whether there is any reasonable way to engage the student's cooperation. When asked a second time, students will often come up with workable ideas for resolving the problem. If the student continues to be non-compliant, however, simply impose the appropriate consequences for that misbehavior.

Proactively Interrupt the Student’s Anger Early in the Escalation Cycle (Long, Morse, & Newman, 1980; Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995). The teacher may be able to 'interrupt' a student's escalating behaviors by redirecting that student's attention or temporarily removing the student from the setting. If the student is showing only low-level defiant or non-compliant behavior, you might try engaging the student in a high-interest activity such as playing play an educational computer game or acting as a classroom helper. Or you may want to briefly remove the student from the room ('antiseptic bounce') to prevent the student's behavior from escalating into a full-fledged confrontation. For example, you might send the student to the main office on an errand, with the expectation that-by the time the child returns to the classroom-he or she will have calmed down.
Project Calmness When Approaching an Escalating Student (Long, Morse, & Newman, 1980; Mayer, 2000; Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995). A teacher’s chances of defusing a potential confrontation with an angry or defiant student increase greatly if the instructor carefully controls his or her behavior when first approaching the student. Here are important tips: Move toward the student at a slow, deliberate pace, and respect the student’s private space by maintaining a reasonable distance. If possible, speak privately to the student, using a calm and respectful voice. Avoid body language that might provoke the student, such as staring, hands on hips, or finger pointing. Keep your comments brief. If the student’s negative behaviors escalate despite your best efforts, move away from the student and seek additional adult assistance or initiate a crisis-response plan.

Relax Before Responding (Braithwaite, 2001). Educators can maintain self-control during a tense classroom situation by using a brief, simple stress-reduction technique before responding to a student’s provocative remark or behavior. When provoked, for example, take a deeper-than-normal breath and release it slowly, or mentally count to 10. As an added benefit, this strategy of conscious relaxation allows the educator an additional moment to think through an appropriate response—rather than simply reacting to the student's behavior.

Reward Alternative (Positive) Behaviors (Mayer & Ybarra, 2004; Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995). The instructor can shape positive behaviors by selectively calling on the student or providing other positive attention or incentives only when the student is showing appropriate social and academic behaviors. The teacher withholds positive attention or incentives when the student misbehaves or does not engage in academics.

State Teacher Directives as Two-Part Choice Statements (Walker, 1997). When a student’s confrontational behavior seems driven by a need for control, the teacher can structure verbal requests to both acknowledge the student’s freedom to choose whether to comply and present the logical consequences for non-compliance (e.g., poor grades, office disciplinary referral, etc.). Frame requests to uncooperative students as a two-part statement. First, present 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). Then state the positive behavioral choice that you would like the student to select (e.g., the student can complete the seatwork assignment within the allotted work time and not stay after school). Here is a sample 2-part choice statement, ‘John, you can stay after school to finish the class assignment or you can finish the assignment now and not have to stay after class. It is your choice.’

Use a ‘Buddy Teacher’ for Brief Student Breaks (Boynton & Boynton, 2005). Sending a mildly non-compliant student on a short visit to a neighboring classroom can give both the teacher and student a needed break. Arrange with an instructor in a nearby room for either of you to send a student to the other’s room whenever you need a short respite from the student. Set aside a seating area in each classroom for student visitors. NOTE: These timeouts should be used only sparingly and should NOT be used if the student appears to find the breaks rewarding or to seek them as a way to avoid work.

Use Non-Verbal and Para-Verbal Behaviors to Defuse Potential Confrontations (Braithwaite, 2001; Long, Morse, & Newman, 1980; Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995). When interacting with defiant or confrontational students, teachers can use non-verbal and para-verbal techniques such as non-threatening body language, soft tone of voice, or strategic pauses during speech, to reduce tensions. For example, if a student is visibly agitated, you may decide to sit down next to the student at eye level (a less threatening posture) rather than standing over that student. Or you might insert a very brief ‘wait time’ before each response to the student, as these micro-pauses tend to signal calmness, slow a conversation down and help to prevent it from escalating into an argument.

Use ‘Soft’ Reprimands (Sprick, Borgmeier, & Nolet, 2002). The teacher gives a brief, gentle signal to direct back to task any students who is just beginning to show signs of misbehavior or non-
compliance. These ‘soft’ reprimands can be verbal (a quiet word to the student) or non-verbal (a significant look). If a soft reprimand is not sufficient to curb the student’s behaviors, the teacher may pull the student aside for a private problem-solving conversation or implement appropriate disciplinary consequences.

**Validate the Student’s Emotion by Acknowledging It** *(Lanceley, 1999)*. When the teacher observes that a student seems angry or upset, the instructor labels the emotion that seems to be driving that student’s behavior. 'Emotion labeling' can be a helpful tactic in deescalating classroom confrontations because it prompts the student to acknowledge his or her current feeling-state directly rather than continuing to communicate it indirectly through acting-out behavior. A teacher, for example, who observes a student slamming her books down on her desk and muttering to herself after returning from gym class might say to the student, "You seem angry. Could you tell me what is wrong?" Once a powerful emotion such as anger is labeled, the teacher and student can then talk about it, figure out what may have triggered it, and jointly find solutions that will mitigate it. Emotion labeling should generally be done in a tentative manner ("John, you sound nervous…", "Alice, you appear frustrated…"), since one can never know with complete certainty what feelings another person is experiencing.

**References**


Hyperactive students tend to have a very high energy level, act impulsively and can be behaviorally distracting. They may fidget, play with objects, tap pencils so loudly against their desk that kids from across the room look over at them, or blur out answers to teacher questions before the instructor is even finished asking them. When working with students who are hyperactive or impulsive, teachers should keep in mind that these students are very often completely unaware that others view their behavior as distracting or annoying. Teachers working with such children can greatly increase their own effectiveness by clearly communicating behavioral expectations to students, by encouraging and rewarding students who behave appropriately, and by being consistent and fair when responding to problem student behaviors. Here are teacher ideas for managing impulsive or hyperactive students who display problem motor or verbal behaviors:

**Adopt a 'Silent Signal'** *(U.S. Department of Education, 2004)*. You can redirect overactive students in a low-key manner by using a silent signal. Meet privately with the student and identify for the student those motor or verbal behaviors that appear to be most distracting. With the student's help, select a silent signal that you can use to alert the student that his or her behavior has crossed the threshold and now is distracting others. Role-play several scenarios with the student in which you use the silent signal and the student then controls the problem behavior. When you are able to successfully use the 'silent signal' during instruction, be sure to praise the student privately for responding appropriately and promptly to your signal.

**Allow Discretionary Motor Breaks** *(U.S. Department of Education, 2004)*. When given brief 'movement' breaks, highly active students often show improvements in their behaviors. Permit the student to leave his or her seat and quietly walk around the classroom whenever the student feels particularly fidgety. Or, if you judge that motor breaks within the classroom would be too distracting, consider giving the student a discretionary pass that allows him or her to leave the classroom briefly to get a drink of water or walk up and down the hall.

**Encourage Acceptable Outlets for Motor Behavior** *(U.S. Department of Education, 2004)*. If the student distracts other students by playing with objects, substitute an alternative motor behavior that will not distract others. Give the student a soft 'stress ball' and encourage the student to squeeze it whenever he or she feels the need for motor movement. Or if the setting is appropriate, allow the student to chew gum as a replacement motor behavior.

**Have the Student Monitor Motor Behaviors and Call-Outs** *(DuPaul & Stoner, 2002)*. Students can often change problem behaviors when they pay attention to those behaviors. Have the student monitor his or her motor behaviors or call-outs. First, choose a class period or part of the day when you want the student to monitor distracting behaviors. Next, meet privately with the student to discuss which of that student's behaviors are distracting. Then, together with the student, design a simple distractible behavior-rating form with no more than 3 items (For a student who calls out frequently, for example, a useful rating item might be "How well did I observe the rule today of raising my hand and being called on before giving an answer? Poor – Fair – Good"). Have the student rate his or her behaviors at the end of each class period. Make an effort to praise the student (a) for being accurate in rating behaviors, and (b) for any improvements that you see in the student's behaviors over time.

**Ignore Low-Level Motor Behaviors** *(Sprick, Borgmeier & Nolet, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2004)*. Selective ignoring can be an effective teacher response to minor fidgeting or other motor
behaviors. If the student's 'fidgety' behaviors are relatively minor and do not seriously derail classroom instruction, the teacher should simply not pay attention to them.

**Remove Unnecessary Items From the Student's Work Area** *(U.S. Department of Education, 2004).* Students who tend to distract themselves and others by playing with objects behave better when their work area is uncluttered. Take away (or direct the student to put away) any items that the student does not need for the work assignment but might be tempted to play with (e.g., extra pens, paper clips).

**Schedule Group 'Stretch Breaks'** *(Brock, 1998).* You can increase the focus of your entire class and appropriately channel the motor behaviors of fidgety students by scheduling brief 'stretch breaks.' At their simplest, stretch breaks consist of having students stand next to their desks, stretch their arms, take a deep breath, and exhale slowly before resuming their seats. Or you can be creative, having students take part in different movements during each break (e.g., "OK class. It's time for a stretch break. Stand by your desk, arms over your head. Then take 3 steps back and 3 steps forward..."). NOTE: When using stretch breaks, be sure that you select movements that all of your students are physically able to accomplish without difficulty.

**Seat the Student Next to Distraction-Resistant Peers** *(Kerr & Nelson, 1998).* One useful strategy for managing low-level motor behaviors is to seat the student next to peers who can generally ignore those behaviors. Rearrange seating in the classroom so that the student is sitting near peers who are good behavior models and are not readily distracted by that student's minor fidgety movements or playing with objects.

**Select a 'Supportive Peer'** *(DuPaul & Stoner, 2002).* Handpick a classmate who has a good relationship with the student but is not easily drawn off-task and appoint that student as a 'helper peer.' Meet privately with the student and the helper peer. Tell the peer that whenever he or she notices that the student's verbal or motor behavior has risen to the level of distracting others, the peer should give the student a brief, quiet, non-judgmental signal (e.g., a light tap on the shoulder) to control the behavior. Role-play several scenarios so that the peer knows when he or she can ignore the student's low-level motor behaviors and when the peer should use a signal to alert the student to more distracting behaviors.

**Structure Instructional Activities to Allow Interaction and Movement** *(DuPaul & Stoner, 2002; Sprick, Borgmeier & Nolet, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2004).* Students with high energy levels may be more likely to engage in distracting behavior when they are forced to sit through long periods of lecture or independent seatwork. Instead, offer students frequent opportunities for more movement by designing instruction to actively engage them as learners (e.g., cooperative learning). An additional advantage of less formal, more spontaneous learning activities is that when the overactive child does happen to display motor behaviors in this relaxed setting, those behaviors are less likely to distract peers.

**Use 'Response Cost'** *(DuPaul & Stoner, 2002; Martens & Meller, 1990).* A strategy to reduce distracting verbal or motor behaviors is to use 'response cost': first awarding points or tokens and then deducting those points or tokens whenever the behavior distracts other students. Here is a simple version that you can use in your classroom: Award the student a certain number of 'behavior points' (e.g., 5) at the start of each class period and write a series of tally marks on the blackboard that corresponds to this number. Privately inform the student that each time that he or she engages in verbal or motor behaviors that obviously distract other students (e.g., cause them to comment on the behavior), you will silently go to the board and erase one point from the student's total. At the end of each class period, the student is allowed to keep any 'behavior points' that remain. Let the student know that he or she can collect points across multiple days and eventually redeem a certain number of collected 'behavior points' for prizes or privileges (e.g., extra free time).
Use Brief Reminders About Appropriate Behavior and Conduct (DuPaul & Stoner, 2002; Sprick, Borgmeier & Nolet, 2002). Provide students with brief reminders of expected behaviors at the 'point of performance', when they will most benefit from it. Consider using structured prompts such as the following for students who tend to blurt out answers: "When I ask this question, I will give the class 10 seconds to think of your best answer. Then I will call on one student." Or you can remind students who have difficulty moving through hallways as part of a group, "Remember to keep hands to self and to walk quietly on the right as we walk to art class."

References


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School-Wide Strategies for Managing...
OFF-TASK / INATTENTION
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Students who have chronic difficulties paying attention in class face the risk of poor grades and even school failure. Inattention may be a symptom of an underlying condition such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. However, teachers should not overlook other possible explanations for student off-task behavior. It may be, for example, that a student who does not seem to be paying attention is actually mismatched to instruction (the work is too hard or too easy) or preoccupied by anxious thoughts. Or the student may be off-task because the teacher’s lesson was poorly planned or presented in a disorganized manner. It is also important to remember that even children with ADHD are influenced by factors in their classroom setting and that these students’ level of attention is at least partly determined by the learning environment. Teachers who focus on making their instruction orderly, predictable, and highly motivating find that they can generally hold the attention of most of their students most of the time. Here are some ideas to consider to boost rates of student attending and on-task behavior:

Capture Students’ Attention Before Giving Directions (Ford, Olmi, Edwards, & Tingstrom, 2001; Martens & Kelly, 1993). Gain the student's attention before giving directions and use other strategies to ensure the student's full understanding of them. When giving directions to an individual student, call the
student by name and establish eye contact before providing the directions. When giving
directions to the whole class, use group alerting cues such as ‘Eyes and ears on me!’ to gain the
class's attention. Wait until all students are looking at you and ready to listen before giving
directions. When you have finished giving directions to the entire class, privately approach any
students who appear to need assistance. Quietly restate the directions to them and have them
repeat the directions back to you as a check for understanding.

**Class Participation: Keep Students Guessing** *(Heward, 1994).* Students attend better during
large-group presentations if they cannot predict when they will be required to actively participate.
Randomly call on students, occasionally selecting the same student twice in a row or within a
short time span. Or pose a question to the class, give students ‘wait time’ to formulate an answer,
and then randomly call on a student.

**Employ Proximity Control** *(Ford, Olmi, Edwards, & Tingstrom, 2001; Gettinger & Seibert, 2002; U.S. Department of
Education, 2004).* Students typically increase their attention to task and show improved compliance
when the teacher is in close physical proximity. During whole-group activities, circulate around
the room to keep students focused. To hold an individual student’s attention, stand or sit near the
student before giving directions or engaging in discussion.

**Give Clear Directions** *(Gettinger & Seibert, 2002; Gettinger, 1988).* Students will better understand
directions when those directions are delivered in a clear manner, expressed in language the
student understands, given at a pace that does not overwhelm the student, and posted for later
review. When giving multi-step directions orally, write those directions on the board or give to
students as a handout to consult as needed. State multi-step directions one direction at a time
and confirm that the student is able to comply with each step before giving the next direction.

**Give Opportunities for Choice** *(Martens & Kelly, 1993; Powell & Nelson, 1997).* Allowing students to
exercise some degree of choice in their instructional activities can boost attention span and
increase academic engagement. Make a list of ‘choice’ options that you are comfortable offering
students during typical learning activities. During independent seatwork, for example, you might
routinely let students choose where they sit, allow them to work alone or in small groups, or give
them 2 or 3 different choices of assignment selected to be roughly equivalent in difficulty and
learning objectives.

**Instruct at a Brisk Pace** *(Carnine, 1976; Gettinger & Seibert, 2002).* When students are appropriately
matched to instruction, they are likely to show improved on-task behavior when they are taught at
a brisk pace rather than a slow one. To achieve a brisk pace of instruction, make sure that you
are fully prepared prior to the lesson and that you minimize the time spent on housekeeping items
such as collecting homework or on transitions from one learning activity to another.

**Make the Activity Stimulating** *(U.S. Department of Education, 2004).* Students require less conscious
effort to remain on-task when they are engaged in high-interest activities. Make instruction more
interesting by choosing a specific lesson topic that you know will appeal to students (e.g., sports,
fashion). Or help students to see a valuable ‘real-word’ pay-off for learning the material being
taught. Another tactic is to make your method of instruction more stimulating. Students who don’t
learn well in traditional lecture format may show higher rates of engagement when interacting with
peers (cooperative learning) or when allowed the autonomy and self-pacing of computer-
delivered instruction.

**Pay Attention to the On-Task Student** *(DuPaul & Ervin, 1996; Martens & Meller, 1990).* Teachers who
selectively give students praise and attention only when those students are on-task are likely to
find that these students show improved attention in class as a result. When you have a student
who is often off-task, make an effort to identify those infrequent times when the student is
appropriately focused on the lesson and immediately give the student positive attention.
Examples of teacher attention that students will probably find positive include verbal praise and encouragement, approaching the student to check on how he or she is doing on the assignment, and friendly eye contact.

Provide a Quiet Work Area (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Distractible students benefit from a quiet place in the classroom where they can go when they have more difficult assignments to complete. A desk or study carrel in the corner of the room can serve as an appropriate workspace. When introducing these workspaces to students, stress that the quiet locations are intended to help students to concentrate. Never use areas designated for quiet work as punitive 'time-out' spaces, as students will then tend to avoid them.

Provide Attention Breaks (DuPaul & Ervin, 1996; Martens & Meller, 1990). If students find it challenging to stay focused on independent work for long periods, allow them brief 'attention breaks'. Contract with students to give them short breaks to engage in a preferred activity each time that they have finished a certain amount of work. For example, a student may be allowed to look at a favorite comic book for 2 minutes each time that he has completed five problems on a math worksheet and checked his answers. Attention breaks can refresh the student—and also make the learning task more reinforcing.

Reduce Length of Assignments (DuPaul & Ervin, 1996; U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Students’ attention may drift when completing overly long assignments. For new material, trim assignments to the minimum length that you judge will ensure student understanding. When having students practice skills or review previously taught material, break that review into a series of short assignments rather than one long assignment to help to sustain interest and engagement.

Schedule Challenging Tasks for Peak Attention Times (Brock, 1998). Many students with limited attention can focus better in the morning, when they are fresh. Schedule those subjects or tasks that the student finds most difficult early in the day. Save easier subjects or tasks for later in the day, when the student's attention may start to wane.

Select Activities That Require Active Student Responding (Gettenger & Seibert, 2002; Heward, 1994). When students are actively engaged in an activity, they are more likely to be on-task. Avoid long stretches of instructional time in which students sit passively listening to a speaker. Instead, program your instructional activities so that students must frequently 'show what they know' through some kind of active [visible] response. For example, you might first demonstrate a learning strategy to students and then divide the class into pairs and have students demonstrate the strategy to each other while you observe and evaluate.

Transition Quickly (Gettenger & Seibert, 2002; Gettenger, 1988). When students transition quickly between educational activities and avoid instructional 'dead time', their attention is less likely to wander. Train students to transition appropriately by demonstrating how they should prepare for common academic activities, such as group lecture and independent seatwork. Have them practice these transitions, praising the group for timely and correct performance. Provide additional 'coaching' to individual students as needed. During daily instruction, verbally alert students several minutes before a transition to another activity is to occur.

Use Advance Organizers (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). One strategy to improve on-task behavior is to give students a quick overview of the activities planned for the instructional period or day. This 'advance organizer' provides students with a mental schedule of the learning activities, how those activities interrelate, important materials needed for specific activities, and the amount of time set aside for each activity. All students benefit when the teacher uses advance organizers. However inattentive students especially benefit from this overview of learning activities, as the advance organizer can prompt, mentally prepare, and focus these students on learning right when they most need it.
Use Preferential Seating (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Seating the student near the teacher is one tried-and-true method to increase on-task behavior. Preferential seating simply means that you seat the student in a location where he or she is most likely to stay focused on what you are teaching. Remember that all teachers have an 'action zone', a part of the room where they tend to focus most of their instruction. Once you have analyzed your 'action zone' as a teacher, place the student's seat somewhere within that zone. Of course, the ideal seating location for any particular student will vary, depending on the unique qualities of the target student and of your classroom. When selecting preferential seating, consider whether the student might be self-conscious about sitting right next to the teacher. Also, try to select a seat location that avoids other distractions. For example, you may want to avoid seating the student by a window or next to a talkative classmate.

References


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