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# Introduction

*Teachers have two great dreams – to work with students who try to learn,  
and to escape from the constant struggle against misbehaviour.*

– C. M. Charles, *The Synergetic Classroom*

*I've tried everything I can think of and nothing seems to work for this child. Taking away privileges seems to have no impact. I've called home; that didn't work. Visits to the principal's office don't seem to work either. I've even tried giving the child something to work towards, such as a reward, but that only changed the behaviour for a few days. After a while everything went back to the way it was before. In some ways the behaviour even got worse. It wouldn't be so bad if it weren't for the impact the child's behaviour has on all the other students in class. I've tried a bunch of interventions, but nothing seems to work!*

If you are a teacher, administrator, academic coach or parent who has worked with a challenging student, you know all too well the frustration of trying intervention after intervention only to see little or no improvement in behaviour. "I've tried that; it didn't work" is a response we often hear from teachers who are on the front lines trying to help students improve their behaviour.

We wrote this book because teaching is hard work. It's even harder when teachers have to deal with misbehaving, off-task and sometimes disrespectful students. While the vast majority of students in our classrooms are compliant, respectful and a joy to teach, those few students who exhibit difficult behaviours can wreak havoc on a classroom environment. Out of necessity, teachers often have to spend significant time and effort helping these challenging students develop the skills, attitudes and positive behaviours that will help them to be successful. It can be a challenge to find the time to assist these students while still teaching the core content curriculum.

In our work in classrooms, we have seen a pattern with the *types* of behaviours teachers most often have to address with students. Teachers commonly deal with students who:

- **blurt out** answers, comments or questions during whole-group instruction, at inappropriate times or in an inappropriate tone of voice. These students can severely disrupt the flow, energy and concentration of other students. Often these students are engaged in the content of the lesson and are eager to share, but sometimes they blurt out as a result of a desire to push the teacher's buttons or disrupt class. Regardless, these students need to learn how to control their thoughts, actions and voices.
- **side talk** during whole-group, small-group or solo activities. Much like the students who blurt out, these students often are energised, engaged and want to talk about the lesson. At other times these students want to connect with their friends or outright avoid work. These students need to learn when it is appropriate to talk and when it isn't.

- exhibit **rude or disrespectful** behaviour towards the teacher or towards their peers. Most commonly this behaviour is overt and obvious to everyone in the class. These students may use inappropriate language, have negative body language or demonstrate bullying-type behaviours towards other students. These students need to learn how to get their needs met in positive and appropriate ways.
- **zone out or lack focus** during critical learning times. These students may or may not be labelled ADHD, but they seem to lack the ability to stay focused. Though these students are not always causing overt discipline problems, the challenge of motivating them can be overwhelming. Often these students will do just fine in the immediate presence of the teacher, but once the teacher leaves their side, they zone out once again. These students need to learn how to monitor their own learning and to stay focused.
- **don't try or give up easily** when given a classroom task or assignment. Much like the students who zone out, these students are not always difficult in the sense that they distract other students. However, it can be a challenge for teachers to convince them to buy into the work and put forth effort. Some of these students have well-developed coping skills, and they have learned that if they refuse, stall or mimic, they will get out of work altogether. These students need to experience success and get feedback in order to motivate themselves to tackle classroom tasks.

Specific, practical and easy-to-use interventions for these five common classroom disruptions are the focus of this book. Unlike other books that provide a general listing of classroom management strategies, we've chosen to align interventions to these five common disruptive behaviours. These interventions focus on helping students to build the skills they need in order to be successful in the classroom.

## Why Do Students Misbehave?

Effective teachers know that in order to truly help a student change an inappropriate behaviour, they have to get to the root causes and consider the core of the problem (Waller, 2008). When confronted with an inappropriate student behaviour, the most effective teachers ask themselves one question: How can I help prevent this from happening again? Teachers should consider not only the most effective immediate consequence but also what interventions will help prevent future occurrences. Part of the process of assisting children in developing necessary skills is getting to the root of why they behave as they do. So, this all begs the question: Why do some students misbehave? Below is a partial list of reasons students may misbehave (Kottler, 2008):

- They are probing boundaries.
- They are mimicking the actions of others.
- They have a strong curiosity about something.
- They desire attention.
- They desire power.
- They are bored or frustrated.
- They have an emotional reaction to something that happened outside of the classroom.

- They feel their dignity is threatened.
- They have difficulty handling disagreements.
- They have egocentric personalities.
- They lack self-control (they are impulsive).
- There are unclear directions or expectations.
- They lack basic academic or cognitive skills.
- They have a low tolerance for frustration.
- Home or peer pressure reinforces the behaviour.
- They have underlying emotional, physical, psychological or learning disorders.

And let's not forget that sometimes it is just plain fun to misbehave a little. As you work with students who break rules, misbehave or disrupt class, it is important to spend time thinking about why they misbehave. When considering appropriate classroom interventions, *why* a student does something is every bit as important as *what* he or she is doing. It is critical to understand the causes of the misbehaviour so that you can use the appropriate intervention. When you don't consider the question of why, it is possible that the intervention could actually make the behaviour worse.

## Dealing with Challenging Behaviours

It is important to remember that, in many cases, the students who are challenging in the classroom are the ones who have problems of their own outside the classroom. When dealing with challenging behaviours, effective teachers first and foremost think about how they can provide the student with structures, interventions and supports so that the student learns skills to improve in the future. We know that punishment alone rarely teaches a child the skills necessary to act appropriately in the future (Tileston, 2004). The effective teacher isn't first concerned with punishment but rather considers how to provide the structure so that the behaviour doesn't happen again.

To work effectively with challenging students, teachers need to have a plan to address misbehaviours when they occur. In the majority of classrooms, it is not a matter of *if* some students will misbehave but *when*. Therefore, teachers should have a plan that consists of specific interventions for when those times arise. Before implementing specific interventions for the five common classroom disruptions, teachers should consider some simple, yet profound assumptions. When working with challenging students, it is important to remember these key ideas:

- **All behaviour happens for a reason.** Although children may not be able to clearly express what is going on in their minds, there is usually some sort of payoff for a negative behaviour. In order to help students grow, teachers must help students become aware of the problem; they also need to make students full partners in the process of finding a solution. Students who have interventions and strategies *done to* them often rebel because they have no voice in the process. Teachers shouldn't see correcting inappropriate behaviour solely as a teacher responsibility. The frustration of "I've tried that; it didn't work" often results from the teacher trying dozens of interventions without including the child in the process.

- **Avoid becoming defensive about a child's behaviour.** Rarely does a student plot to make the teacher's life miserable. He or she usually doesn't enter the classroom with a plan to cause chaos or to disrupt the lesson. More often than not, the student is trying to get his or her needs met, albeit in inappropriate ways. Although it is natural to be irritated or concerned by a student's behaviour, once the teacher or adult takes the behaviour as a personal attack, he or she becomes part of the problem. Keep your cool, remain the adult and don't take the child's behaviour personally.
- **Change the mindset.** If children came to us as they *should* be, there would be no reason to have teachers in the first place. As teachers, we learn a great deal from our most challenging students. For some, finding solutions may take a different way of thinking about difficult students; they need caring and patient adults to teach them social and behavioural skills as much as they need teachers to help them master content knowledge. The students with the most challenging behaviours need the very best teachers.
- **Maintain student dignity.** For some students, it is more honourable to act bad than appear stupid. Maintaining student dignity involves valuing the child and addressing his or her behaviour without making judgments about character, background or personality. Many traditional discipline methods such as name on the board, sarcasm, intimidation and threats directly attack a student's dignity.

## Before Implementing the Interventions

All students, whether they exhibit positive or negative behaviours, will thrive in a classroom environment in which the teacher has the basics of good classroom management in place. The teacher must establish the foundations of a positive classroom environment before utilising the specific interventions for the five common disruptions. The interventions in this book do not replace whole-group rules, procedures and processes. Rather, the interventions outlined here are designed to enhance a good classroom management plan. Without the basics of an effective, comprehensive plan in place in a classroom, the specific interventions may not live up to their potential to help students. When developing a classroom management plan, remember that all students need the following:

- positive, clear and consistently enforced rules and procedures
- explicit, clear directions for activities, participation and outcomes
- a quality, challenging curriculum that meets their instructional needs
- positive, frequent and timely feedback about their progress towards meeting instructional goals
- well-planned, engaging and interactive lessons and activities that are relevant to their lives
- a caring, patient and respectful teacher who is committed to helping students develop social and emotional skills as well as content knowledge

## 5-Step Plan for Dealing with Difficult Student Behaviour

When dealing with any challenging student behaviour, whether the ones listed here or others, it is helpful to have a process to work through as you implement the interventions. The following 5-Step Plan will assist you as you engage students with specific interventions.

Step 1. Label the problem behaviour.

- The student has a problem with ...

Step 2. Describe the problem behaviour.

- Who is involved?
- What kinds of behaviours are exhibited?
- When does the problem behaviour occur?
- Are there any indicators or signs that the behaviour is about to occur?

Step 3. Ask why.

- Ask yourself (the teacher, parent, adult) why this behaviour might be happening.
- If appropriate, ask the student to explain his or her ideas or thoughts about the behaviour and the solution.

Step 4. Brainstorm specific interventions.

- Utilise peers and print resources for additional ideas.
- Narrow the interventions to between three and five. Refer to steps 2 and 3 when considering interventions.
- Don't duplicate or continue use of previously used interventions that have been unsuccessful.

Step 5. Implement specific interventions.

- Create a timeline for implementation.
- Communicate with parents, the student, the school administration and any adult who may be impacted by the intervention(s).
- Reflect on a weekly basis and adjust as needed.
- Provide specific feedback to the student throughout the process.



## How to Use This Book

As a result of our work with classroom teachers, we have aligned the interventions in this book specifically to the five most common classroom disruptions: *students who blurt out in whole group*, *students who side talk*, *students who are rude or disrespectful*, *students who zone out or lack focus* and *students who don't try or give up easily*. The descriptions of the interventions that follow in this book have each of the five common behaviours listed at the top of the page. The behaviour(s) aligned to that specific intervention is highlighted with a white border. Although we have chosen to align specific interventions to these common behaviours, with adjustments or modifications the ideas listed here can be used to address other behaviours as well. This is particularly true when a student exhibits behaviour in more than one area. After all, it is common for the student who blurts out comments to also side talk at inappropriate times. Therefore, view these interventions as a menu of ideas rather than a checklist of requirements. Some students will respond very well to certain interventions and not so well to others. When working with students, it is essential to have numerous, effective interventions prepared and ready to go. This book is designed to be a resource of ideas to refer to often as you work to find the right interventions for your students. The following Intervention Matrix serves as a reference to help you identify effective solutions for common classroom disruptions. There is also an Index of Interventions by Behaviour on page 79 that outlines the strategies by the five common disruptions.

## Intervention Matrix

Intervention	Page #	Blurting Out in Whole Group	Side Talking	Rude/Disrespectful Behaviour	Zoning Out/Lack of Focus	Doesn't Try/Gives Up Easily
A Head Start	1				X	X
Advance Organisers	2				X	X
Apologise	3			X		
Attention Signal	4	X	X	X	X	X
Audio Recording	5	X	X	X		
Be Brief, Be Positive, Be Gone	6			X	X	X
Be the Model	7	X	X			
Bean Bag	8	X			X	X
Behaviour Contracts	9			X		X
Behaviour Tracking	10	X	X			
Check-In Statements	11				X	X



## Overview

**Checklists** can serve as a type of road map to help students determine which tasks and assignments need to be accomplished and in what order. Many students are motivated by the ability to track their accomplishments and check off items as they complete them.

## Putting It All Together

Provide the student with a blank **Checklist** form and explain that the student will be tracking his or her accomplishments during the day or lesson. Together, the teacher and student review the tasks, assignments or work that needs to be completed, and the teacher provides a specific time frame for each task. The teacher helps guide the student to list, copy or brainstorm the tasks that need to be completed in order to meet the expectations of the assignment. As tasks or jobs are completed, the student checks them off the list.

## Tips and Variations

- Remember to provide students with time to update their **Checklists** and celebrate their accomplishments. **Checklists** can easily be turned into **Victory Lists** and used to **Communicate with Home**.
- Consider guiding students to place the easiest tasks or jobs at the beginning of the list. This helps build momentum and motivation.
- Some students benefit from the use of multiple **Checklists** for organising different types of tasks or areas of study. **Colour Codes** are an effective way to support the use of multiple **Checklists**.