

Classroom Management: A Guide to Primary Teachers

This reference guide provides primary school teachers with tried and tested strategies to deal with common behavioural problems prevalent in today's classrooms. Seven key student behaviours are targeted, with specific strategies identified for each. Most of these strategies are appropriate to use with individual students presenting specific behaviours, while others can be used with the entire class.



Attention Deficit

For students who have difficulty focusing and are easily distracted, the following strategies are very effective:

- 1. Catch students "being good".** Students with attention deficits are often prone to feelings of frustration and have a particular need for "a pat on the back". In order to encourage these students, try to catch them when they are on task, and then provide immediate and genuine praise. Try reminding yourself to check on students frequently and praise them for appropriate behaviour by placing a visual cue someplace you look at often (such as a smiley face near the clock or on your lesson plan book).
- 2. Present a signalling system to keep students on task.** Cue students to pay attention by walking past their desks, making eye contact and/or pausing while you are speaking. Another technique for communicating with individual students is to work out a private signal, such as scratching your head, raising your eyebrows or tugging on your ear, to alert the student to get back to work.
- 3. Use study carrels.** Make this more appealing to students by telling them that this is a private "office". Another alternative, when students are working at their desks, is to use a cardboard divider or partition to decrease distractions. Only use these strategies for short periods of time, and not at all if students feel singled out or isolated from their peers.
- 4. Assign students tasks that tap into their interests.** Students with attention problems will be more engaged if academic tasks reflect their interests and use their areas of strength. Identify students' strengths and interests (for example, have students fill out an interest inventory) and then use this information to customise the tasks.
- 5. Use a kitchen timer to keep students on task.** In this classroom version of "Beat the Clock", let students know how much time they have to complete a task. Five or 10 minutes before the timer goes off, tell them how much time is left. Make sure, however, that students do not race through the task, which may lead to careless performance.
- 6. Shorten work periods.** Students with attention deficits may be more productive if they work for two or three short periods rather than one long period. Rather than having students perform a task for 45 minutes straight, have them work for 20 minutes, take a five-minute break, and then work for an additional 20 minutes.

7. Break a task into parts. Breaking tasks into smaller, more manageable parts may give students more confidence which will enable them to complete the task successfully and maintain focus. For example, instead of assigning students a whole page of maths problems, give them two or three problems to solve. Check their performance and then give them a few more.

8. Make key information stand out to gain students' attention. When writing on the board, underline key words or write them in all capitals or in a different colour. On handouts, highlight essential information or change the colour, font or size of the type. For students prone to careless maths mistakes, try circling or highlighting operations signs.

9. Minimise the information on handouts. Students can be distracted by clutter on papers. Teach students techniques to "de-clutter" papers and focus on one question/problem at a time by folding the paper or using a piece of blank paper to cover the rest of the page. Or, make a text "window" out of cardboard that exposes only two lines of print or one maths problem at a time. When giving a test that is multiple pages long, consider handing out one page at a time.

Calling Out



In an effort to help children who blurt out answers develop self-control and patience, consider these strategies:

- 1. Seat students near you.** Place students who are prone to calling out near where you typically stand when presenting lessons. This will keep them in your sight line and help you anticipate when they are about to blurt out an answer so that you can signal them to raise their hands.
- 2. Ignore students who call out and only call on those who raise their hand.** Paying too much attention to students who call out in class will increase the chances that they will call out in the future. Try to ignore such interruptions by continuing on with the lesson and calling only on students who raise their hands. Make affirmative comments, such as: "Jason, I like the way you're raising your hand and not calling out." This conveys the message to students that they will gain more attention by raising their hands than by calling out.
- 3. Use behaviour modification.** An easy way to shape behaviour is to divide an 8 x 13cm index card into 10 boxes and tape the card to the students' desks. At the beginning of the day, set a timer for 30 minutes. After 30 minutes, initial a box on the card of students who have not called out. For students who do call out, reset the timer immediately and do not initial the card. When students have earned initials in all 10 boxes, provide them with an agreed-upon reward or privilege. Adjust the length of time for earning initials and the number of boxes needed to obtain a reward based on students' age, progress and the severity of their problems.