

## Chapter 3

### Behavioral Challenges

Proactive and intentional planning can deter many potential behavior issues—but not all of them. When behavioral challenges do occur, it’s important for teachers to react consistently and appropriately. Below are some additional strategies for managing classroom behaviors.

- 1. Actively Supervise** - As managers and facilitators, teachers should be present and engaged with the classroom community. During lessons and activities, they can move around the room, check in on students, ask questions, and offer feedback. Circulating the classroom lets teachers observe and interact with a variety of students. Often, this allows them to intervene before behavior issues escalate (Terada, 2019).

Consider how teachers and students will move through the classroom when placing desks, tables, or other furniture. Can the teacher easily circulate and approach every student? If there are areas that are difficult to traverse, think of ways to rearrange the furniture or move students closer. Proximity can be a highly effective management tool. If the teacher is able to walk up to each students’ desk, they can often deter challenging behaviors.

If an issue does arise, the teacher can make eye contact with the student, move closer to the student, use hand signals (such as a finger to the lips to prompt the desired behavior), restate the classroom expectations (or ask the student to), or redirect them. Teachers should also offer praise and recognize appropriate behaviors as they circulate (Emmer et al., 2003). According to one study, nonverbal cues, such as smiling and making eye contact with students, can boost “students’ positive feelings toward the teacher and the course material while improving behavior” (Terada, 2019, para. 19).

- 2. Use Appropriate Levels of Assertiveness** - When disruptions occur, it's crucial for the teacher to remain in control of the situation. Teachers can accomplish this by speaking clearly; using appropriate body language (stand up straight, face the student, appear non-threatening); remain calm, but firm; and use the appropriate tone and facial expressions to match the situation and content of the message. It's important to address the behavior while also de-escalating the situation (Marzano & Marzano, 2003).

Marzano found that students show a strong preference for teachers who exhibit higher levels of classroom dominance, as opposed to more permissive teachers (2003). Again, higher levels of dominance doesn't mean the teacher is forceful or controlling. Rather, they provide clear guidelines for student behavior and hold everyone accountable to those expectations.

- 3. Create a Behavior Management Plan** - Consider common issues that arise in the classroom and create a plan for dealing with them. What will you do if students are talking out of turn? How will you handle late arrivals? How will you respond to conflicts? Be sure to match the consequence with the behavior and enforce consequences without emotion. Ex. *You did this and the consequence is this* (We Are Teachers, 2023). Address the behavior rather than the student so it's clear that the behavior is unacceptable, but the student is still valued.
- 4. Be Honest When Things Go Wrong** - If many students are struggling with a concept or making the same mistake, it's important to acknowledge this. Recognize that they are confused and discuss how to find a solution. Be honest when behavior challenges occur and help students refocus. Ex. If some students are disrupting group reading time by talking, the teacher can pause and say: *I want to acknowledge those students who are*

*following along quietly as we read.* The teacher can then point to the class rule and explain the desirable behavior. The teacher might add: *Let's use this time to refocus our brains and move on.*

- 5. Change the Tone** - If students are frustrated, distracted, or exhibiting other negative emotions, teachers can try shifting the tone of the room. They might do this by offering positive comments, compliments, feedback, or reflection time.
- 6. Repair Conflicts** - If a student misbehaves, let them know that everything is forgiven and the next day will be a fresh start.

Teachers who proactively and intentionally plan how to manage their classrooms can set the tone for student behavior and establish a healthy, productive classroom environment. In the opening example, the second grader teacher wasn't sure how to handle her students' energy and excitement. But once she redirected their energy to the task, students were actively engaged and eager to complete the work. Rather than ignoring the teacher's directions and disrupting the lesson, students learned to be courteous and minimize their chatter. This completely changed the dynamics of the classroom and paved the way for more productive learning.