



# How To: Handle Common Classroom Problem Behaviors Using a Behavior Management Menu

Teachers who can draw on a range of responses when dealing with common classroom misbehaviors are more likely to keep those students in the classroom, resulting in fewer disruptions to instruction, enhanced teacher authority, and better learning outcomes for struggling students (Sprick, Borgmeier, & Nolet, 2002). A good organizing tool for teachers is to create a classroom menu that outlines a range of response options for behavior management and discipline. Teachers are able to assert positive classroom control when they apply such a behavior management menu consistently and flexibly--choosing disciplinary responses that match each student's presenting concerns (Marzano, Marzano, & Pickering, 2003).

This document groups potential teacher responses to classroom behavior incidents into 8 'menu' categories: (1) Behavior reminder, (2) academic adjustment, (3) environmental adjustment, (4) warning, (5) time-out, (6) response cost, (7) behavior conference, and (8) defusing strategies. Teachers can use these categories as a framework for organizing their own effective strategies for managing student problem behaviors.

## 1. Behavioral Reminder

**Description:** A behavioral reminder is a brief, neutral prompt to help the student to remember and follow classroom behavioral expectations (Simonsen, Fairbanks, Briesch, Myers, & Sugai, 2008).

**When to Use:** This strategy is used when the student appears to be distracted or otherwise requires a simple reminder of expected behaviors.

**Examples:** Here are examples of behavioral reminders:

- The teacher makes eye contact with the student who is misbehaving and points to a classroom rules chart.
- The teacher approaches the off-task student to remind him/her of the specific academic task the student should be doing.
- The teacher proactively provides behavioral reminders just when the student needs to use them.

## 2. Academic Adjustment

**Description:** An academic adjustment is a change made to the student's academic task(s) to improve behaviors. Such changes could include the amount of work assigned, provision of support to the student during the work, giving additional time to complete the work, etc. (Kern, Bambara & Fogt, 2002).

**When to Use:** Academic adjustments can be useful when the teacher judges that the student's problem behaviors are triggered or exacerbated by the required academic task(s).

**Examples:** Here are examples of academic adjustments:



- The teacher pre-teaches challenging vocabulary to the student prior to a large-group discussion.
- The teacher adjusts the difficulty of the assigned academic work to match the student's abilities ('instructional match').
- The teacher allows the student additional time to complete an academic task.

### 3. Environmental Adjustment

**Description:** An environmental adjustment is a change made to some aspect of the student's environment to improve behaviors (Kern & Clemens, 2007).

**When to Use:** This strategy is used when the teacher judges that an environmental element (e.g., distracting activities, proximity of another student) is contributing to the student's problem behavior.

**Examples:** Here are examples of environmental adjustments:

- The teacher moves the student's seat away from distracting peers.
- The teacher collects distracting objects from a student (e.g., small toys, paperclips) during a work session.
- The student is given a schedule of the day to prepare her for upcoming academic activities.

### 4. Warning

**Description:** A warning is a teacher statement informing the student that continued misbehavior will be followed by a specific disciplinary consequence (Simonsen, Fairbanks, Briesch, Myers, & Sugai, 2008).

**When to Use:** A warning is appropriate when the teacher judges (a) that the student has control over his or her behavior and (b) that a pointed reminder of impending behavioral consequences may improve the student's behavior. Whenever possible, it is recommended that proactive strategies such as providing behavioral reminders or eliminating environmental/academic triggers be tried before using warnings.

**Examples:** Here are examples of warnings:

- The teacher tells the student that if the problem behavior continues, the student will lose the opportunity for free time later that day.
- The student is warned that continued misbehavior will result in the teacher's calling the parent.

### 5. Time-Out

**Description:** Time-out (from reinforcement) is a brief removal of the student from the setting due to problem behaviors (Yell, 1994).



**When to Use:** Time-out from reinforcement can be effective in situations when the student would prefer to be in the classroom setting rather than in the time-out setting. Time-out sessions should typically be brief (e.g., 3-10 minutes). Because time-out is a punishment procedure, the teacher should first ensure that appropriate, less intrusive efforts to improve student behavior (e.g., behavior reminders, warnings, elimination of behavioral triggers) have been attempted before using it. If a teacher finds that a student does not improve behaviors despite several repetitions of time-out, other behavior management strategies should be tried instead.

**Preparation:** If time-out is to occur within the classroom, the teacher should identify the time-out location in advance and ensure that students placed there can be easily observed but are sufficiently removed from the current classroom activity. If the time-out location is out of the classroom, the teacher should arrange with other adults in advance (e.g., participating teachers whose classrooms may be time-out locations) to work out details for students to enter and exit time-out and for supervising students during time-out.

**Examples:** Here are examples of time-out from reinforcement:

- The teacher sends a student to a study carrel in the corner of the classroom for 5 minutes for misbehavior.
- The teacher sends a misbehaving student to a neighboring classroom for 10 minutes, where the student is to sit alone and complete classwork.

## 6. Response Cost

**Description:** Response cost is the taking away of privileges or other valued elements ('cost') in response to student misbehavior (DuPaul & Stoner, 2002)

**When to Use:** Response cost can be an effective response to misbehavior, provided that the student actually values the privilege or element being taken away. Because response cost is a punishment procedure, the teacher should first ensure that appropriate, less intrusive efforts to improve student behavior (e.g., behavior reminders, warnings, elimination of behavioral triggers) have been attempted before using it.

**Preparation:** Prior to implementing response cost, the teacher may want to create a series of 'privileges' in the classroom that students find motivating and do not want to lose (e.g., point systems for good behavior; free time).

**Examples:** Here are examples of response-cost:

- Because of misbehavior, a student loses access to classroom free time at the end of the day.
- A student is given 5 good-behavior points at the start of class--and then has one deducted for each incident of misbehavior.

## 7. Behavior Conference

**Description:** A behavior conference is a brief meeting between teacher and student to discuss the student's problem behavior(s) (Fields, 2004). While the structure and content of a behavior conference will vary based on circumstances, it will typically include some or all of the following elements:



1. *Description of the problem behavior.* The teacher describes the student's behavior and explains why it is presenting a problem in the classroom.
2. *Open-ended questions and student input.* The teacher asks open-ended questions to fully understand what factors are contributing to the problem behavior.
3. *Problem-solving.* Teacher and student discuss solutions to the problem behavior and agree to a plan.
4. *Disciplinary reminder.* If appropriate, the teacher concludes the conference by informing the student of the disciplinary consequence that will occur if the problem behavior continues.

**When to Use:** The behavior conference is a useful tool for the teacher who:

- wishes to better understand reasons of the student problem behavior before acting.
- wants to model that it is better for the student to communicate his or her needs to the teacher through discussion than by engaging in acting-out behaviors.

**Examples:** Here are examples of a behavior conference:

- A teacher approaches the desk of a student who appears upset to explore what triggered that student's current emotional distress and to figure out how best to respond to the situation.
- A non-compliant student is taken aside by the teacher for a brief in-class conference, in which the teacher establishes that the student is in control of her behavior, states the behavioral expectations for the classroom, and informs the student that she will be given a disciplinary referral if her behaviors do not improve immediately.

## 8. Defusing Techniques

**Description:** Defusing techniques are any teacher actions taken to calm a student or otherwise defuse a situation with the potential for confrontation or emotional escalation (Daly & Sterba, 2011).

**When to Use:** When the teacher judges that the student's negative emotions are a significant contributor to the problem behaviors, defusing techniques are appropriate to stabilize the situation.

**Examples:** Here are examples of defusing techniques:

- The teacher temporarily removes academic work from a student who is reacting negatively to the assignment.
- The teacher encourages a student to sit in a quiet corner of the room for a few minutes to collect herself before conferencing with the teacher.
- The teacher sends a student to the guidance counselor to discuss the issue(s) causing him anger.



## Behavior Management Menu: Middle School Example

A 7th-grade English teacher, Mrs. Stevenson, decides to develop a behavior management menu to help her to respond more flexibly and effectively to common student misbehaviors in her classroom. Once that menu is in place, Mrs. Stevenson is able to manage two different student situations with success:

*Episode 1: Francine.* A student, Francine, is in a morning section of class, whispering to two of her friends sitting nearby. Mrs. Stevenson can see that the whispering is beginning to distract students in proximity to Francine.

- *Behavioral Reminder.* The teacher makes eye contact with Francine while teaching and puts a finger to her lips to signal that the student should stop talking and attend to instruction.
- *Environmental Adjustment.* When Francine continues to talk to peers, the teacher moves her to a seat near the front of the room, away from her friends and close to the teacher.
- *Warning.* Francine continues to clown at her desk, making faces and whispering comments to no one in particular. The teacher approaches her desk and tells Francine quietly that if she continues to talk and distract other students, she will need to stay after class for a teacher conference, which will probably make her late for lunch. Francine's behaviors improve immediately.

*Episode 2: Jay.* A student, Jay, walks into English class after lunch one day appearing visibly upset. When Mrs. Stevenson directs the class to pull out a homework assignment for review, Jay sits in his seat looking flushed and angry. He does not take out his work.

- *Behavioral Reminder.* The teacher approaches Jay and quietly asks that he pull out his homework. She then returns to the front of the room.
- *Behavior Conference.* The teacher sees that Jay is still not getting out his homework. She gives the class a 5-minute assignment to review their homework before submitting and uses that time to meet briefly with Jay in the hallway. She asks open-ended questions and discovers that Jay is angry about an incident that occurred at lunch.
- *Defusing Techniques.* Based on information gathered during the behavior conference, the teacher decides that Jay needs to meet with a mental health staff member to talk through and resolve his issue from lunch. She issues Jay a pass. Ultimately, he meets for 20 minutes with the school psychologist, calms down, and is able to return to class.

### References

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## Classroom Behavior Incident: Teacher Response Plan

**Directions:** Complete this form to document strategies used to manage individual students' problem classroom behaviors.

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Person Completing Form: \_\_\_\_\_ Classroom: \_\_\_\_\_

	<i>Behavior Management Strategy</i>	<i>Details. Include a description of each strategy used.</i>
1	Behavioral Reminder	
2	Academic Adjustment	
3	Environmental Adjustment	
4	Warning	
5	Time-Out	
6	Response Cost	
7	Behavioral Conference	
8	Defusing Techniques	

Narrative of Incident [Optional]: \_\_\_\_\_

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