

# Classroom Behavior Management: A Dozen Common Mistakes and What to Do Instead

Authors: Barbetta, Patricia, Norona, Kathleen Leong, Bicar, David  
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One of our primary responsibilities as teachers is to help our students learn. It is difficult for learning to take place in chaotic environments. Subsequently, we are challenged daily to create and maintain a positive, productive classroom atmosphere conducive to learning. On any given day, this can be quite a challenge. In our attempts to face this challenge, we find ourselves making common classroom behavior management mistakes. This article is designed to present some of these common mistakes followed by suggestions as to what we should do instead. The mistakes presented are committed frequently, at many grade levels and in all types of learning environments. Each suggestion is relatively easy to implement and useful for all types of learners.

We have based our suggestions on several assumptions and beliefs. First and foremost, teachers have considerable influence over student behavior. This is particularly true if interventions begin early and are supported at home. Next, most student misbehaviors are learned and occur for a reason. It is our job to determine those reasons and teach appropriate behaviors to replace those misbehaviors. We believe that prevention is the most effective form of behavior management. That is, the most efficient way to eliminate misbehaviors is to prevent their occurrence or escalation from the beginning. Using a proactive approach also allows us to focus more on teaching appropriate behaviors rather than eliminating negative behaviors. Our experience tells us that management systems should be flexible enough to meet the changing needs of our classrooms. Finally, students, parents, and other professionals can be effective partners in behavior management.

## **Mistake #1: Defining Misbehavior by How It Looks**

When attempting to change misbehavior, we often describe it by only how it looks (e.g., calling out, hitting, getting out of seat). Defining misbehavior by how it looks only provides us with an incomplete picture of the behavior; it tells us little about why it occurred and doesn't help much in our behavior-change efforts. For example, a student who is off task is a common classroom problem. If two of our students are off task regularly, they may or may not be off task for the same reason. If they are off task for different reasons, our approaches to change their behaviors may need to differ. Actually, a strategy that will eliminate the off-task behavior of one student might worsen the off-task behavior of the other. Defining a misbehavior by how it looks tells us nothing about why it occurred and often doesn't help in our behavior-change efforts. Just because two behaviors look the same, doesn't mean they are the same.

### **Instead: Define Misbehavior by Its Function**

To develop a better strategy to manage misbehaviors, we need to ask ourselves, "What was the function of this misbehavior?" Or more simply, "What did the student gain from the misbehavior?" Though our students' misbehaviors appear to occur for no reason, they do serve a purpose, otherwise they would not occur. Although some behavior problems are the result of organic issues (e.g., hyperactivity) most misbehaviors function for one of the following reasons. For example, the two off-task students mentioned previously--one student might be off task to get our attention, whereas the other might be off task because his or her assignment was too difficult. (e.g., fewer problems to solve, clearer directions) might eliminate the off-task behaviors. Clearly, these misbehaviors serve dissimilar functions and need to be solved differently.

## **Mistake #2: Asking, "Why Did You Do That?"**

Although we are tempted, it is not a good idea to ask our students, "Why did you do that?" First, many times our students will not know the reasons why they misbehaved. Second, we often will not like their

answers. For example, if Victor is playing at his desk during our lesson and we ask him why, he may very well say, "Because this lesson is so boring." We are not likely to be pleased with that response.

**Instead:** Assess the Behavior Directly to Determine its Function

The function of a behavior is the purpose it serves the student (i.e., what the student gets from it). As stated previously, most misbehaviors serve a getting or an avoiding function. To determine a behavior's function, we need to study what is happening in the classroom before and after it occurs. This information-gathering procedure is called a functional assessment. An Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence (ABC) chart can be used as a functional assessment tool. An ABC chart has three columns on which we record the behavior and what happened before and after it. The standard way to make this chart is to separate a sheet of paper into three columns and label the first Antecedent, the second Behavior, and the third Consequence. When the misbehavior occurs, it is written down in the behavior column, then the observer records what happened immediately before (recorded in the antecedent column) and after its occurrence (recorded in the consequence column). To make data collection simpler, a modified ABC chart can be used that contains several predetermined categories of teacher or peer antecedent behavior, student responses, and consequential events (See Figure 1).

A functional assessment gives us a more complete picture of the misbehavior by including the environmental antecedents and consequences in its description (Alberto & Troutman, 2003). Once we determine the function of a misbehavior ("why" it occurs), we need to teach and reinforce an appropriate replacement behavior that serves the same function as the misbehavior. For instance, if a functional assessment reveals that Olivia teases her friends at recess because it is the only time that she gets their attention, we need to teach Olivia appropriate methods to get peer attention, such as sharing or asking to be invited to join in a game. A functional assessment might reveal that changes in our teaching methods are needed. For instance, if Ricardo tends to act out during math class, a change in how or what we are teaching may be in order. The problem might be that Ricardo is missing some prerequisite math skills. By reviewing those prerequisite math skills, we could reduce his frustrations and acting out, and maximize his learning.

Many times, an ABC analysis is all that is needed to determine a functional assessment. For complex behavior problems, a more detailed, multifaceted functional assessment may be needed. At those times, we should contact a behavior-management specialist, school psychologist, or other trained professional for a more thorough assessment. Conducting a functional assessment can be time consuming. However, research shows that behavior-change programs designed from this process tend to be more effective than those begun without the comprehensive information provided by this assessment (Kamps, 2002). For additional information on conducting a functional assessment, we recommend visiting the Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice Web site at <http://cecp.air.org/fba/>.

### **Mistake #3: When an Approach Isn't Working, Try Harder**

When a management approach isn't working, our first tendency is to try harder. The problem is that we most often try harder negatively. We make loud, disapproving statements, increase negative consequences, or remove more privileges. This does not do anything to teach appropriate behavior. Instead, our increased negativity results in impaired student-teacher relationships and increases the likelihood of our students feeling defeated.

**Instead:** Try another Way

When an approach is not working, instead of trying harder, we should try another way. Some examples include verbal redirecting, proximity control, reinforcing incompatible behaviors, changing the academic tasks and providing additional cues or prompts. These approaches are more effective, simpler to use, and create a more positive classroom climate than trying harder. If two of our students, Danny and Sara, are talking in class, instead of reprimanding them, we could walk in their direction (use proximity control), make eye contact, and

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provide a nonverbal cue to get on task. This approach allows Danny and Sara to save face with their peers and promotes teacher respect.

Instead of increasing negative consequences, we should increase the frequency of contingent praise for appropriate student behavior. Teacher praise is easy to deliver and is one of the most powerful tools available to us. In fact, praise (or some type of reinforcement) should be included in all approaches to behavior change. For example, when Jamal is off task, instead of reprimanding, we should find another student who is on-task and praise that student. This will reinforce the on task student and has the added benefit of notifying Jamal of his misbehavior, without singling him out. When using praise, we should remember that it is effective when it is provided immediately (minimally before the next opportunity to perform the behavior again), specifically (by identifying the behavior as we praise), and frequently.

Our most challenging students, such as students with severe emotional and behavioral problems, often need the most reinforcement, yet they often receive the least. Descriptive research of classrooms for children with behavior disorders shows low praise rates of only 1.2 to 4.5 times per hour (Gable, Hendrickson, Young, Shores, & Stowitschek, 1983; Shores et al., 1993; Van Acker, Grant, & Henry, 1996; Wehby, Symons, & Shores, 1995). This trend needs to be changed.

Finally, when we find ourselves making more stop than start requests, we need to reverse our behavior. For example, instead of asking Sam to stop talking, ask him to work on his assignment. When he complies, provide praise. For excellent resources on practical, positive classroom management techniques, see Rhode, Jenson, and Reavis (1992) and Kerr and Nelson (2002) in the appendix.

#### **Mistake #4: Violating the Principles of Good Classroom Rules**

Classroom rules play a vital role in effective classroom management. However, rules alone exert little influence over student behavior. Too often, rules are posted at the beginning of the year, briefly reviewed once, and then attended to minimally. When this is the case, they have little to no effect on student behavior.

**Instead:** Follow the Guidelines for Classroom Rules

There are several rules for rule setting that, when followed, help create orderly, productive classrooms that teach appropriate social skills along with the academic curriculum. To be more effective, our classrooms should have four-to-six rules that could govern most classroom situations. Too many rules can make it difficult for students to comply and for teachers to enforce. Along with other professionals (e.g., Gathercoal, 1997; Paine, Radicchi, Rosellini, Deutchman, & Darch, 1983), we see benefits to students actively participating in rule setting. When students play an active role, they begin to learn the rules, and they are more inclined to have rule ownership. The rules become their rules, not our rules. To include students, conduct several short rule-setting meetings the first few days of school. For these meetings to be effective, we need to share with our students the rule-making guidelines (e.g., the rules need to be stated positively, they have to be observable and measurable, consequences need to be realistic). With guidelines in place, students often select rules similar to the ones we would have selected. Without guidelines, students are inclined to make too many rules, make rules that are too stringent, and make those that are not specific enough.

Classroom rules should be simple, specific, clear, and measurable. The degree of rule simplicity depends on the age and ability levels of our students. For younger students, we may want to include pictures in the rule posters. Rules are specific when they are clear and unambiguous. For example, the rule "bring books, paper, and pencils to class" is much clearer than the rule "be ready to learn." Clearly stated rules are easily observed and measured. The classroom rules should be posted.

Another characteristic of effective rules is that they are stated positively. Positively stated rules are "do" rules. Do rules provide information as to how to behave and set the occasion for teacher praise? An example is

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"Raise your hand for permission to talk." Conversely, negatively stated rules or "don't" rules tell students what not to do and encourage us to attend to student rule breaking. An example of a don't rule is "Don't call out."

Some teachers develop subrules that correspond with each of the major classroom rules. For example, a classroom rule might be, "Follow classroom expectations." One of the corresponding subrules for line behavior could be "Keep your hands and feet to yourself." Once the subrules are set, we need to teach or role play appropriate behavior by having mini-lessons ( 3-5minutes) several times a day for the first few weeks of school. Some teachers continue to review subrules prior to each activity or periodically, depending on their students' needs. A simple, quick way to review is to have a student volunteer to read the posted subrules prior to each major activity.

We consistently need to carry out the consequences and noncompliance of our classroom rules or they will mean very little. If our students follow the rules for group work at the learning center, we should verbally praise them and provide additional reinforcement as needed (e.g., stickers, extra free time). On the other hand, if the classroom consequence for fighting with a peer is the loss of recess, then we must make certain that we follow through. We need to make clear the consequences for following and not following the rules (Babyak, Luze,& Kamps, 2000).

We often need reminders to praise our students throughout the school day. One way is to place a sign in the back of the room that says, "Have you praised your students lately?" Each time we notice the sign, we should praise a student or the group for following one of the classroom rules. Another way is to keep a running tally of our praise comments on an index card or on a card clipped to a string that hangs from our necks (similar to those used with many school identification cards).

To summarize, the guidelines for classroom rules include the following: (a) develop 4-6 measurable, observable, positive classroom rules and include students in rule development; (b) teach the rules and subrules directly; (c) post the rules and review them frequently; and, (d) be sure to carry out the consequences for rule compliance and noncompliance.

### **Mistake #5: Treating All Misbehaviors as "Won't Dos"**

When students misbehave, it often seems as though it is exclusively a motivational issue. At times, this is true. On those occasions, we need to increase the reinforcement for appropriate behavior and eliminate it for inappropriate behavior. However, several misbehaviors are due to a lack of appropriate skills not a lack of motivation. We call these behaviors "can't dos."

**Instead:** Treat Some Behaviors as "Can't Dos"

"Can't dos" occur because of lack of skills not lack of motivation or reinforcement. We should deal with "can't do" misbehaviors the same way that we deal with student's academic mistakes. When students make repeated errors during our lessons, we make changes in how we teach (e.g., provide more examples, allow students to practice more), and provide more intensive instruction. Our improved lessons make us more proactive teachers, decreasing the likelihood of chronic, academic errors being repeated. This preventative approach is referred to as precorrection (Colvin, Sugai, & Patching, 1993). In contrast, when students chronically misbehave, we are more inclined to remain reactive, provide only correction procedures (simply tell them that they are misbehaving), and increase the intensity of our negative consequences. We would be more effective in solving chronic misbehaviors if we moved into the precorrective mode.

The following are seven major precorrection steps:

- Step 1. Identify the context and the predictable behavior (where and when the misbehavior occurs);
- Step 2. Specify expected behavior (what we want instead);

- Step 3. Systematically modify the context (e.g., changes in instruction, tasks, schedules, seating arrangements);
- Step 4. Conduct behavior rehearsals (have students practice the appropriate behavior);
- Step 5. Provide strong reinforcement such as frequent and immediate teacher praise;
- Step 6. Prompt expected behaviors; and
- Step 7. Monitor the plan (collect data on student performance).

Let's apply this step to a traditional classroom behavior problem--calling out during teacher-led instruction. The misbehavior occurs during guided instruction (Step 1). The behavior that we want instead is for our students to raise their hands and wait to be called on (Step 2). To accomplish this goal, we could verbally remind our students to raise their hands prior to each question and no longer respond to our students' call outs. Also, we could model hand-raising as we ask the question to prompt students to do the same (Steps 3 and 6). Before our teacher-led lessons, we could have a short review of the rules for appropriate hand-raising (Step 4). When our students raise their hands appropriately, we should praise immediately and frequently and perhaps give them bonus points on the classroom management system (Step 5). Finally, to determine if our plan is effective, we should tally how often students appropriately raise their hands (Step 7).

Although initially more time consuming, precorrection procedures allow us to be more proactive than reactive and to reduce or eliminate behavior problems before they become well established. This, in turn, increases the amount of time that we have to reinforce appropriate behavior.

#### **Mistake #6: Lack of Planning for Transition Time**

When planning our teaching day, planning for transitions often gets overlooked. Yet, a significant amount of class time is spent transitioning from one subject to another or from one place to another. Without proper planning, transitioning can be one of the most frustrating times of the day for teachers. These times seem to invite behavior problems. Why? At times students are not ready for the transition. Inconsistent expectations cause transition problems. Furthermore, because we are often transitioning with the students, our attention is diverted away from them, making transitions longer and inviting even more misbehavior.

**Instead:** Appropriately Plan for Transition Time

Successful transitioning requires just as much planning as effective academic instruction, but the time is worth it. When transitions are done quickly and quietly, it allows lessons to start on time and can set a positive tone for the lesson, whereas unplanned, poorly done transitions can waste valuable time and cause negative student--teacher interactions.

Transition problems can be reduced significantly by following a few practical procedures. First, it is best that our transition expectations are consistent, meaning the same rules apply for each type of transition. Consistency begins by developing transition rules with our students (e.g., quietly put materials away, keep your hands and feet to yourself.)

Once we have developed our transition rules, we should teach them to our students. We can do this by having brief lessons at the beginning of the school year followed by frequent reviews. It is a good idea to post the transition rules, and have a student volunteer to read them before transitioning. We should consistently provide readiness signals or cues for pending transitions. We can do this by letting our students know that in 5 minutes the next activity will begin and that it is time to finish the task at hand. We need to follow that statement by praising students as we see them finishing their tasks. It is important not to move to the next step of the transitioning process until everyone has followed the previous steps. For example, if we ask our students to return to their seats and get out their math books, everyone needs to have followed those directions before we begin our math lesson. For groups that have a difficult time switching gears, such as many students with learning disabilities or behavior disorders, providing a 30-second group silence at their seats prior to beginning

the next activity promotes calmness before moving on. This is particularly useful when students are returning from a highly stimulating activity, such as physical education.

Many students respond positively to transition timing games. To do this, first set a time goal (e.g., everyone should be in line within 20 seconds). Using a stopwatch, time their transition and then praise individual students or the group for meeting the goal. When transitions involve leaving the classroom, prior to leaving, we should have our students take out the materials for the lesson that is going to be conducted on their return. This will facilitate getting started when they return to the classroom.

Our role as teachers during transitions should be to monitor students' performance and to praise appropriate behavior. To do this, we must have our materials prepared ahead of time. When needed, we should use students to gather materials or equipment, allowing us to better attend to our students and provide praise.

### **Mistake #7: Ignoring All or Nothing at All**

Ignoring can be a valuable tool in reducing misbehaviors when used with behavior-building strategies. However, it's difficult for many of us to determine which behaviors to ignore and which to give attention. We tend to take ignoring to extremes by ignoring almost all misbehaviors or none at all. Neither approach is effective.

#### **Instead: Ignore Wisely**

First, not all behaviors should be ignored. We should only ignore the behaviors motivated for our attention. For example, if Larry is playing his favorite computer game instead of doing math, ignoring him will not work because his behavior is not motivated by our attention. His motivation is playing on the computer. However, when behaviors are attention seeking we need to ignore continuously (every single time). As soon as we begin to ignore our student's misbehavior, he or she will seek it elsewhere, most likely from peers. It can be difficult for peers to ignore misbehaviors. Therefore, ignoring misbehavior should be a classroom rule that receives powerful reinforcement. Also, we need to plan for the misbehavior to get worse (happen more often and more intensely) before it improves. When this happens, we must continue to ignore.

Ignoring must be used in combination with behavior-building strategies, such as reinforcement of appropriate behaviors, teaching replacement behaviors, and reinforcing peers. Ignoring teaches students what not to do, but does not teach them what they should do instead. For example, a preschool student, Monica, has a tendency to tug at our clothing or yell to get our attention. In this scenario, we should ignore these misbehaviors. In addition, we need to teach Monica appropriate ways to gain our attention (e.g., raising her hand, saying "excuse me") and praise her each time she uses these replacement behaviors. To add to the effectiveness, we could also praise peers who, in her presence, appropriately seek our attention.

There are occasions when ignoring is inappropriate. These include when there are concerns for observational learning of misbehaviors, when our students are engaging in extreme or dangerous behaviors, and, as stated earlier, when the misbehavior is not attention seeking.

### **Mistake #8: Overuse and Misuse of Time Out**

Time out occurs when a teacher removes a student for a specific time from a chance to receive reinforcement. There are several time-out strategies ranging from brief in-class ignoring to placing a student in a secluded area. We are tempted to overuse time out because it results in a reprieve from problematic students. At times, we misuse time out by inadvertently reinforcing misbehaviors while using the procedure.

#### **Instead: Follow the Principles of Effective Time Out**

Time out can be an effective tool but only when used appropriately (Turner & Watson, 1999). First, we must remember that time out is not a place. Instead it is a process whereby all opportunities to get reinforced are withdrawn. Consequently, for it to work, the time-in area (the activity) must be more reinforcing than the time-out area. Ways to make the time-in area more reinforcing include changing the activity, our instructional techniques, and increasing our praise. For example, Trevor constantly disrupts the language arts lesson by throwing paper or talking to peers, resulting in frequent time outs in the hall. Time out would only be effective if the language-arts lesson is more stimulating than what is going on in the hall, which often is not the case. A better method would be to make the language-arts lesson highly stimulating by using cooperative learning, hands-on activities, and frequent student responding. If we still need to use time out with Trevor, we need to find a less stimulating, designated time-out area, such as a partitioned corner of the room.

For mildly disruptive misbehavior, time outs should be done in class. In-class time out involves the removal of all forms of reinforcement for a brief period of time. One type of in-class time out is planned ignoring, which involves the brief removal of social reinforcers, such as attention or verbal interaction. This involves looking away from the student, refraining from any interaction, or remaining quiet. A second form of in-class time out is the brief removal of the student from an activity by being placed on the outskirts (i.e., a few steps back) but still able to "look" into the more reinforcing time-in setting.

When misbehaviors are more severe, we may need to send our students to out-of-class time out. The out-of-class time out area should be a quiet, nonintimidating, reinforcement-free room with no other purpose. It should not be a highly stimulating, reinforcing place like the office area, other classrooms, or the hallway. If possible, we should use the same place for each time out. Despite our frustrations, we should administer time out with a calm, neutral tone of voice. We should also give our students a brief explanation for the time out to help build an association between the misbehavior and the time-out consequence. Time outs should last for only brief, reasonable periods of time (from a few seconds for in-class to several minutes for out-of-class time outs) and should be monitored occasionally to make certain the student is not receiving reinforcement. We should collect data to assess the overall effectiveness of time out. Finally, time out should always be used with precorrective, behavior-building strategies and reinforcement.

### **Mistake #9: Inconsistent Expectations and Consequences**

Students are often given mixed signals as to what is expected and what will happen if they do not meet these expectations. Inconsistent expectations cause student confusion and frustration. Inconsistent consequences maintain misbehaviors and can even cause the behavior to occur more frequently or intensely. In addition, we find ourselves constantly reminding and threatening which, in turn, enhances our frustration.

**Instead:** Have Clear Expectations That Are Enforced and Reinforced Consistently

Expectations are clear when they are identifiable and consistent. Reviewing expectations and rehearsing rules help build routines and minimize the potential for problems. We can do this by asking our students to read the expectations prior to each activity. When we have temporary expectation changes (e.g., changes in rules due to a guest being present or special school event), we must inform our students.

Expectations are pointless if they are not backed up with reinforcement for compliance and reasonable negative consequences for noncompliance. For rule compliance, positive consequences should be applied continuously at first (every time the student is appropriate) and then intermittently (every so often). For example, if "following teacher's directions" is the classroom rule, then we should provide some form of positive consequence, perhaps praising the students for following directions quickly and appropriately. At first, praise should be delivered each time the student follows teacher directions. Once the teacher establishes the behavior (in this case, following teacher directions), we can move to an intermittent praise schedule. On the other hand, negative consequences (punishment procedures) are most effective when applied continuously. For instance, if our classroom consequence for verbal aggression toward a peer is the loss of recess privileges, then each time

one of our students is verbally aggressive we should apply that negative consequence. Of course, to effectively deal with this verbal aggression, we also need to implement additional precorrective methods, such as teaching appropriate expressions of anger, peer mediation, prompting and providing praise for socially, appropriate interactions.

### **Mistake #10: Viewing Ourselves as the Only Classroom Manager**

Managing classroom behavior may be more challenging today than ever before. Many teachers face larger class sizes, more students who come from stressful, chaotic homes, and increased diversity in students' abilities and cultures (Grossman, 2004). Yet, many of us are determined to manage classroom behavior ourselves. After all, collaborating with others takes time and energy to build rapport and come to a consensus on behavior-change priorities and strategies. It's tempting just to forge ahead. Although, going at it alone may seem like a good idea in the short-run, in the long run, we are more likely to burn out and lose our effectiveness.

**Instead:** Include Students, Parents, and Others in Management Efforts

Fortunately, there are many others who can assist in our behavior management efforts, including students, their peers, fellow teachers, administrators, parents, and other school personnel. One effective way to include students in their own behavior change programs is the use of self-monitoring. With self-monitoring, a student helps regulate his or her own behavior by recording its occurrence on a self-monitoring form. To help ensure accuracy of self-monitoring, we should occasionally collect the data ourselves and compare our recordings with those of our student. If our student accurately self-monitored, we should reinforce his or her accuracy. In addition, we should hold brief, occasional student-teacher conferences to review the student's progress. For more information on self-monitoring, see Alberto and Troutman (2003) or Webber, Scheuerman, McCall, and Coleman (1993). Also, go to <http://www.coe.missouri.edu/%26sim;vrcbd> to learn about KidTools, a computer-based program used to help students create and use a variety of self-monitoring materials. KidTools contains easy-to-use templates used to create personalized self-monitoring forms, including point cards, countoons, self-management cards, make-a-plan cards, and contracts. To use this program, students enter information about target behaviors into a template and print out the card for immediate use in the classroom.

The power of the peer group can be used to produce positive changes in student behavior. Peers can serve as academic tutors and can monitor and reinforce each other's behaviors. Also, group-process, conflict resolution, or peer mediation meetings can be used in which students provide each other with behavior management suggestions (e.g., "Ignore him when he calls you names"), praise each other for behaving appropriately, and help each other resolve a current classroom behavior problem (Barbetta, 1990; Smith & Daunic, 2002). To help facilitate group cohesiveness, we can use group-oriented contingencies in which the class earns its level of privileges and reinforcers as a group.

We should also include other adults in behavior management. Fellow teachers can provide support in several ways. One way is to schedule regular meetings where we share behavior management solutions. Occasionally, we may need some extra support from a colleague, particularly if we work with students with emotional disorders. During those days, we shouldn't hesitate to ask a colleague to stop by during his or her planning period and provide us with some additional support or a short break. If we find ourselves in a teaching situation with one or more volatile students, we should develop a support plan with a teacher in a classroom nearby (Lindberg & Swick, 2002). This plan could include an agreement that our colleague will cover our room in the event we have to escort a disruptive student out of the room or contact the principal or school security. Another example of how we can support each other is by playing an active role in school-wide behavior management (Lindberg & Swick). As we move throughout the school grounds (e.g., hallway, cafeteria, auditorium, playground), we should be aware of all students' behaviors (not just our own students) and prompt and provide praise or negative consequences as appropriate.

When including administrators in behavior management, we tend to make two mistakes that are at opposite ends of the support spectrum (Lindberg & Swick, 2002). We either send students to them too frequently or we wait too long to get them involved. It is best to resolve as many behavior problems in our class and only involve administrators for more serious situations, such as physical aggression.

Parents and teachers who work actively together make a powerful team. Most parents can provide useful information about their child (i.e., medications, allergies, issues at home). Some parents can assist in our behavior management efforts at home by providing their child additional prompting and reinforcement. Although, there are many benefits to working with parents, some teachers are reluctant due to the challenges that often exist. The potential benefits, however, make it worthwhile in most situations, and there are many ways to increase parent-teacher team effectiveness (See Jones & Jones, 2002 in appendix). As teachers, it is our responsibility to build productive and positive parent-teacher partnerships. We can do this by contacting parents when their child does well, treating them with respect during conferences, maintaining positive and on-going communication, and validating any concerns they may have.

School counselors, psychologists, and other professionals can be invaluable resources. We should seek out their assistance when needed for support, guidance, and additional strategies.

### **Mistake #11: Missing the Link between Instruction and Behavior**

At times there is a direct link between our lessons and student misbehavior. Perhaps our lesson is too easy or difficult, ineffective, or nonstimulating, which can lead to student misbehavior (Center, Deitz, & Kaufman, 1982).

**Instead:** Use Academic Instruction as a Behavior Management Tool

The first line of defense in managing student behavior is effective instruction. Good teachers have always known this and research supports this notion (Evertson & Harris, 1992). Jones (1991) found that when teachers demystify learning, achievement and behavior improve dramatically. Examples of how to demystify learning include students establishing his or her learning goals, students monitoring his or her own learning, involving students in developing classroom rules and procedures, and relating lessons to students' personal lives and interests.

Effective teaching practices include (but are not limited to) instruction that is fast paced, includes high rates of active student responding, involves modeling new behaviors, and provides guided practice and positive and corrective feedback (Evertson & Harris 1992; Sugai & Tindal, 1993). Effective instructional strategies include the use of response cards, guided notes, and peer tutoring (Heward, 2003; Heward et al., 1996; Miller, Barbetta, & Heron, 1994). Consistent use of these strategies, and others that share the characteristics of effective instruction, helps create highly effective learning environments, which, in turn, reduces the likelihood of behavior problems.

### **Mistake #12: Taking Student Behavior Too Personally**

When students misbehave, it often feels like a personal attack, and for good reason. Some of our students are very good at making it feel personal. When we take students' misbehavior personally, we tend to lose our objectivity, look for quick management fixes that rarely work, and get emotionally upset, which takes time and energy away from our teaching.

**Instead:** Take Student Misbehavior Professionally, Not Personally

When we take misbehavior professionally, we view behavior management as our responsibility. Professionals know the importance of having a sound management system in place that deals with classwide issues and individual student problems. Professionals have realistic expectations for improvement in behavior

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and know that there are no quick fixes with lasting effects. Most importantly, confident professionals ask for assistance when it is needed.

Although handling misbehaviors may be more challenging than teaching academics, there are many effective strategies we can use that will make our classroom days more pleasant and less chaotic. When we are more effective, we're calmer and less likely to react personally to student misbehavior. Although some student misbehavior may appear to be targeted toward us, these behaviors may be an outcome of their own wants and needs, lack of skills, or emotional difficulties and frustrations. The time and energy wasted being upset at our students' misbehavior is better spent celebrating our students' success.

## **Conclusion**

This article briefly reviewed common behavior management mistakes that we make as teachers and provided numerous strategies as to what to do instead. We believe these suggestions will be useful in the context of developing and implementing a comprehensive behavior management plan. By no means do these suggestions represent a complete list of effective strategies. For more thorough information on some of the recommended strategies, refer to the reference list.