



# **BEHAVIOUR SOLUTIONS:**

**Ways To Manage  
Challenging Students**

**Dave Vizard**

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**By Dave Vizard**

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## **NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION**

A key tool in our locker to managing badly behaving students is an understanding of body language. The body language we display will have a real impact on how successful we are in managing behaviour. If we are talking tough, does our body language confirm or contradict this? Is there a congruence between our verbal and non-verbal communication? We can also read the body language in students to provide us with clues to do with what they are really thinking.

To demonstrate the power of body language in managing behaviour let us look at Strategy Elicitation. Elicitation is the technique for assisting someone else to move from one state to another. Through Neuro-Linguistic Programming researchers have tried to identify the strategies used by teachers who are successful in managing behaviour. They have attempted to identify the internal and external actions of successful staff and have tried to get other staff to replicate the same actions. They have found that successful staff are very aware of the power of non-verbal communication. When settling groups they will identify a group of 4 or 5 influencers and leaders in the class and engage them in eye contact, giving non-verbal clues that they want them to settle. These clues are also effective in controlling poor behaviour. The sequence in which the member of staff looks at the group of 4 or 5 is critical, as is the duration of the stare and the teacher's position in the room. The sequence of nonverbal cues is important. Anyone observing this opening must replicate the sequence accurately. Any changes in sequence duration or type of non-verbal signals and they will not have the same level of success.

Some of the key areas relating to non-verbal communication are listed below.

### **EYE CONTACT**

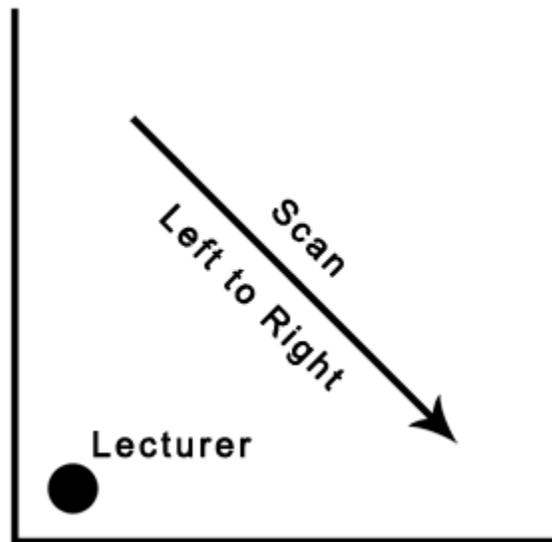
In eliciting the strategies used by successful staff one key area relates to eye contact.

- When initially meeting and greeting students at the classroom doorway at the beginning of each lesson we need to have firm eye contact with them.
- At the start of the lesson we need to scan the whole group with firm eye contact. Using eye contact can engage student attention and will indicate your awareness of all students. I would also engage in longer eye contact with students who are the influencers in the group.
- Do not give off any frightened or passive messages e.g. staring into the distance, looking to the ground. This eye dip movement is a submissive gesture.
- Avoid the eye shuttle where you flick your eyes from side to side without head movement. This is a startle response and also a submissive gesture where a person is taking in everything happening around them and can look like they are looking for escape routes.
- When moving around the room a sideways glance towards a student can be controlling as it will generate an attitude of doubt or suspicion.

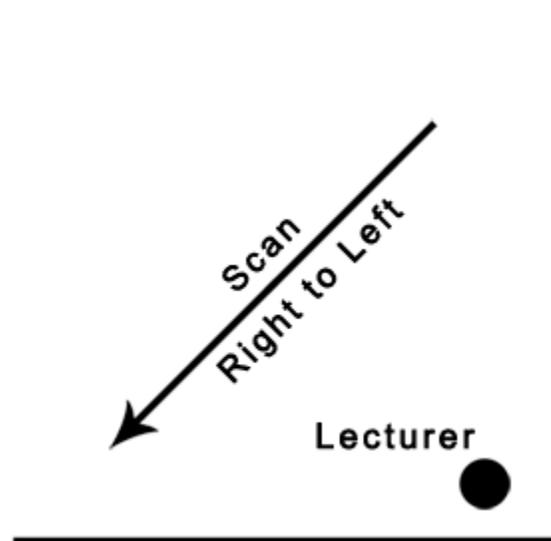
- If a student is misbehaving get into the student's line of sight and establish eye contact with a stare (by doing this you will establish a clear message that you expect the student to change their behaviour). Give your direction and then move away to allow them take-up time to conform. In these circumstances try to avoid unnecessary extended eye contact.
- Remember that people in conversation look at each other between 30% and 60% of the time. Any longer than that can be seen as unsettling, embarrassing or threatening. A longer stare may be needed with some students. When talking we maintain eye contact for 40% of the time, we have to glance away to think of the next point. When listening we engage in eye contact for over 75% of the time. Moving around the room and moving into student space with a look is effective in managing behaviour for 90% of the time.

## POSITIONING

- During opening of lesson
  - When speaking to the whole group stand in a position where you can scan or '**lighthouse**' the whole group.  
It is important psychologically for you to be able to see the whole group.
  - Think about your power position. This relates to whether you are left or right handed. Right handed teachers are right eye dominant and would be in their 'power position' if they stood in a position in the room where they can scan the room from left to right.



- Left handed teachers are left eye dominant and would be in their 'power position' if they stood in a position in the room where they can scan the room from right to left.



- Patrolling
  - It is essential that you patrol your territory frequently – you should avoid having no-go areas in your learning environment. Visit all areas of the room.
  - When settling a group when they begin to work it may be best to patrol your classroom moving around the perimeter of the room. This will keep the maximum number of students in your gaze whilst they are settling into their task.
  - A good position to stand is at the back of the room for periods of time. The students, without the aid of wing mirrors on their desks are put at a psychological disadvantage.
- Proximity
  - When teaching it may be necessary to move around the room and move into areas where problem behaviours may be developing. Going towards a student and putting your hand on their desk but without stopping talking to the group can have a powerful effect.
  - Standing behind a student who is not working and slightly in their personal space bubble without saying anything can be powerful.
  - If notes are being passed around, stand next to the student holding it and saying nothing. The likely outcome is that the note will be put away.
- Physical Closeness
  - Each individual has a personal space bubble of between 15 and 46 cm. If anyone goes inside of this space we can feel threatened. Just think about the last time you went on a crowded bus or train. When a person becomes angry, this space is likely to increase so it is important when dealing with students that we try not to invade their personal space bubble.

- Level
  - Standing over a student whilst they are seated can put you at a psychological advantage but it is probably better to avoid this as it can be very intimidating.  
  
Sitting at the same level, or even better, crouching at a slightly lower level can lead to more effective communication and reduce the likelihood of increasing conflict.
- Posture
  - Try to stand upright when working with a class of students during the formal parts of the lesson and when dealing with disciplinary matters. Avoid at all costs standing and stooping slightly with your head down and leg bent as it creates an impression of a lack of confidence.
- Bodily Orientation
  - The angle and direction in which your body points is said to indicate your feelings. If you point away from the person it could be perceived that you have a negative attitude towards them. In conflict situations it is important to avoid standing face to face as this can inflame the conflict. It is best to stand at right angles to the person in these situations.
- Head Lowering or Tilting to one side
  - Submissive people frequently lower their head or tilt it to one side. It is a sign of appeasement and we should try to avoid such movements with students.

## **FACIAL EXPRESSIONS**

- Frowning and the raising of eyebrows are useful facial expressions that we can use to indicate disapproval. Shaking or nodding of the head are other ways to indicate disapproval or approval.
- Increased blinking is a sign of anxiety. When our mind is aroused or it is racing there is an increase in the normal 20 blinks per minute. When under pressure this figure can increase four or five times that rate.
- A narrowing of the eyes is also a signal of control or dominance. By narrowing the eyes it looks as though the person is looking through the slit in their helmets. Clint Eastwood, in the Dollar series of movies, did this frequently.
- Lowering of the eyebrows gives the impression of dominance because they create a more confrontational stare. (When we are angry we tend to lower our eyebrows.)
- Raising of eyebrows, as well as indicating disapproval can indicate a submissiveness.
- If we set our mouths into a resolute position and avoid smiling this can be very controlling. Symmetrical smiles are seen as sincere. Asymmetrical smiles are seen as insincere.

- When we raise our heads and push our bottom teeth beyond the top set this is seen as a common gesture of defiance or control used in confrontation. The 'Jaw Thrust' is also a sign of dominance.

## **NON-VERBAL CUEING**

- We all use a range of non-verbal cues with students and some of the best examples are used by Teaching Assistants when they signal to students across the room nonverbally. The slightest movement of hand, tilt of the head or facial expression can signal to the student the wishes of the Teaching Assistant.

Some types of clues would include:

- Finger wagging – admonishment
- Raised first finger – to gain attention
- Thumbs up or down – good or bad behaviour
- Finger to lips – request for quiet
- Palms of hands facing and moving downwards – quieten down
- Four fingers pointing downwards – sit on all four legs of chair
- Hands moving away from top of head – remove hat
- Pointing to watch – take-up time over and time now being wasted.
- Shaking / nodding – showing disapproval / approval
- Clicking fingers / clapping hands – to get attention of group
- Holding your arm into the air – students in turn do the same to show they are ready.

## **USE OF SILENCE**

- When you start a lesson or are about to be involved in a disciplinary interaction with students it is important that we wait for silence. The same wait for silence should be observed when we bring students together during the lesson and before their dismissal at the end.

- When giving a command or becoming involved in a disciplinary interaction the use of tactical pausing is a good strategy to use.

Use student's first name – pause for 5 seconds – then make your statement.

In the tactical pause it is essential that you maintain eye contact.

- Moving into the student's territory and standing behind them and saying nothing can be used to indicate to the student that he or she has been noticed.
- Sometimes it will be necessary to tactically ignore some minor incidents of poor behaviour because responding to every incident, no matter how minor, can be extremely disruptive.

## **BARRIER POSITIONS**

- Barrier gestures can be unhelpful when we are dealing with challenging students.
- Some examples of barrier gestures include folded or crossed arms which show defensiveness or hostility.
- Having one arm across the body shows nervousness or lack of self confidence.
- Some people hold books or a bag in front of them as a barrier if they are nervous.

## **TELL TALE SIGNS OF A LIAR**

- It is important that our non-verbal communication is in tune with our verbal communication. There need to be congruence. If we talk tough we need to look tough.
- It is also useful when dealing with badly behaving students that we are able to detect any lies that may be told.

The ticks or tells that a liar may display are:

- Making odd facial expressions
- Grinding teeth or biting lips
- Increased blinking / rubbing of eyes – because liars try to keep their eyes fixed on you. They know that liars can't look you in the eye. In consequence eye sockets dry out and eyes become itchy - hence the blinking and rubbing of eyes.
- Rubbing of nose and hair on neck – increased blood flow around eyes leads to increase in blood pressure in these areas and leads to increased sensitivity.
- Right / left eye movement – when right handed people are recalling an event they engage their left brain and look to the right. When inventing a story they engage their right brain and look to the left. In the case of left handed people when they are inventing a story they look to the right.
- Speech errors
- Alteration in pitch of voice
- Excessive throat clearing
- Adam's Apple jumping
- Asymmetrical smiles / delayed laughter – this occurs when people are trying to show an emotion they don't feel
- Hands / fingers over the mouth – the source of the lie is covered
- Taking longer to answer questions
- Suddenly the person starts to make fewer gestures – to avoid any chance of detection

- There is a lot of non- verbal leakage. *For example: Their upper body shows few ticks or tells – but their feet and legs will move a lot. There is a lot of fidgeting.*
- Micro-Tells –the body controls most body language when you are telling a lie but sometimes there is an involuntary piece of body language that shows true feelings. Spotting these brief and subtle changes is key to unmasking a liar.

## DIFFERENT TYPES OF BODY LANGUAGE AND THEIR MEANINGS

- **Palm down** - Confidence, assertiveness & dominance.
- **Brisk, erect walk** - Confidence.
- **Sitting with hands clasped, behind head, legs crossed** - Confidence, superiority.
- **Clearing throat** - Sign of doubt, disagreement. Excessive use can be a sign of deception or desire.
- **Adam's Apple Jumping** - Unconscious sign of anxiety.
- **Arms crossed on chest** - Defensiveness.
- **Locked ankles** - Apprehension.
- **Biting nails** - Insecurity, nervousness.
- **Gaze off** - Dislike or disagreement.
- **Looking down, face turned away** - Disbelief.
- **Touching, slightly rubbing nose** - Rejection, doubt, lying.
- **Rubbing the eye** - Doubt, disbelief.
- **Patting / fondling hair** - Lack of self confidence; insecurity.
- **Pulling or tugging at ear** - Indecision.
- **Standing with hands on hips** - Readiness, aggression.
- **Hands clasped behind back** - Anger, frustration, apprehension.
- **Tapping or drumming fingers** - Impatience.
- **Sitting with hands on hips** - Readiness, aggression.
- **Gaze down** - Defeated attitude, guilt or shame.
- **Walking with hands in pockets, shoulders hunched** - Dejection.
- **Hand to cheek** - Evaluation, thinking.
- **Pinching bridge of nose, eyes closed** - Negative evaluation.
- **Stroking chin** - Trying to make a decision.
- **Sitting with legs crossed, foot kicking slightly** - Boredom.
- **Head resting in hand, eyes downcast** - Boredom.

- **Rubbing hands** - Anticipation.
- **Tilted head** - Interest.

## **ANGER / CONFLICT NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION**

Some of the signs of a student or teacher becoming angry are as follows:

- A look of agitation and becoming fidgety
- Contorted face
- Facial colour changes – it deepens and then goes pale
- Expressionless or angry gaze
- Have dilated pupils
- Eyes wide open and bulging
- Hostile eye contact
- Breathing faster
- Perspire
- Speak louder and faster
- Move more quickly
- Tense muscles
- Hunched shoulders
- Leaning forward, fists clenched, tight facial expression
- Upright stance and threatening
- Thrusting head and chin forward
- Easily distractible and non-focussed
- Pacing around
- Looking away
- Aggressive gesturing with pointed fingers
- Standing face to face

## RELAXED POSITION

Try to appear relaxed when faced with difficult students. Students will be trying to get a reaction from you by trying to identify your hot buttons. They will be reading your body language closely. Try to appear relaxed by:

- Asymmetrical positioning of limbs
- An openness of arm position
- Using Open palm gestures
- Use of sideways lean and tilt of the head
- When seated try adopting a more reclining position

## RAPPORT BUILDING

When dealing with angry and badly behaving students it is important to think about how we can develop a rapport with them. We need to tune into the other person's way of thinking.

- Angry students will speak using words of their sensory preference. Listen and mirror the language of their sensory preference back to them.  
*For example: I can't see the point.*
- Student has a visual sensory preference so I would reply in a visual language. Other sensory preferences include auditory and kinaesthetic.
- If we try to mirror their actions then the other person unconsciously feels a sense of connection with you.
- Listen to their speech patterns and try to adopt their rate of speech using similar intonations and rhythms.
- You can also practise Interactional Synchronising whereby you move in a similar way.
- Mirroring their body language will also develop a rapport.
- Once you have tuned into their emotional state and match it, you are in a position to change someone's mood. You should change your behaviour to slightly lead them in the direction that you would like them to move.



The importance of non-verbal Communication should never be underestimated. Mehrabian (1972) has stated that 55% of communication is non-verbal, with 38% coming from vocal tone and only 7% from the words used.

## IT'S WHAT WE SAY AND HOW WE SAY IT THAT IS IMPORTANT

In any dealings with students and particularly badly behaved students its important to think carefully about the words we use – an incorrect phrase or wrongly chosen word can fan the flames of adolescent discontent. It is important to develop scripts which can clearly get our message across and be unambiguous. Also the way that a message is presented in vocal tone and in conjunction with our body language can impact on how the message is received. An aggressive tone and intimidatory body language can cause problems.

### POSITIVE STATEMENTS

- The way we greet students on arrival can have a real impact on the way the lesson goes. Standing by the door and welcoming students as they arrive is a good strategy. It also helps us to mark our territory and to say to students you are leaving your social environment and entering my learning environment. The greeting should show a recognition of them as individuals.
- How we dismiss the students at the end of the lesson is important. Be positive, issue any rewards, thank them for their work and say that you are looking forward to working with them in the next lesson.
- Use of appropriate humour is important – it can lighten the atmosphere.
- At every opportunity we need to give out emotional small change to students. 'Catch 'em being good.' We can never give enough praise. Give out nuggets of praise.  
Remember that 'courtesy is contagious'
- Acknowledge students who are getting it right.
- These strategies can create a positive atmosphere where being recognised for good work and behaviour is commonplace. Bad behaviour becomes a less attractive option.

### VOCAL TONE, PITCH, PACE AND POSTURE

- **Tone**
  - Make your point by raising or lowering your voice. Sometimes it may be best to speak in a calming and pleasant tone.
  - Be assertive rather than aggressive. Practise making your voice sound more commanding and strong.
  - Try to keep a confident tone to your voice
- **Posture and Voice**

- A relaxed upright posture is essential to present your voice in the best condition. If you are slumped, your voice could sound strained.
- Efficient breathing is important in voice control.
- Speaking clearly is important. Don't slur your words or lose endings of words.
- If sounds are articulated you will sound more decisive and authoritative.
- Try to vary the volume to match the circumstances.
- **Pace and Pause**
  - Pace the speed and rhythm of our speech.
  - We normally speak at about 125 words per minute when speaking in public. Speaking too quickly may give the impression of being too nervous.
  - Varying pace can help us to communicate more effectively. However don't rush the dialogue – keep your message short and simple.
- **Pitch**
  - Most of us have a pitch range of about 2 octaves, with mens' being lower than womens' because of vocal chord length.
  - People make assumptions about a person from the pitch of their voice. A lowpitched voice can give the impression of control and authority, however with a higher pitched voice, some people may appear emotional or to be a soft target for badly behaving students.
- **Scripts**
  - When giving instructions to students or managing their behaviour we need to ensure we have a clear script to use. Practise the following:
    - Tell them what you want them to do rather than what not to do.
    - Focus on the required behaviour – sanction the behaviour not the student.
    - Staying solution focused is a good strategy to employ **'We're in this together, let us try to find a solution.'**
    - When giving instructions to a student make sure it is followed by a 'thank you'. It makes us sound as if we expect compliance.
    - Moving around the room giving quiet instructions or comments in a low key manner is a good way of gaining compliance.
    - Avoid pleading and weak words.
    - Try to avoid over verbalising – we can say too much and as a result our message is weakened.
    - Stay in control by initiating and ending interactions with students. However try to avoid point scoring with students. It may be best to ignore some comments. Be 'teflon' coated – nothing sticks.
    - Following our comment, give the student take-up time to comply. This is particularly important with an angry child.

- Use naming the rule where we identify what we want  
**'Sitting quietly please..... Thanks'**
- Do not back students into a corner. Give them options. Allow them to save face. **'There are two ways that the situation can go.....the rules say..... and the reason for this rule is.....Ignore it and the consequence is likely to be.....however there is another way you could go.....which will have positive outcomes.'**
- Give students direct choices based on the rules, Code of Behaviour – A Big Brother moment - **'You decide'**  
For example: A student is chewing gum. Take the bin to the student.  
**'You can keep your break by putting the gum in the bin. Or you can keep the gum and lose break. You decide'**. When they conform say **'Good choice'**.
- Giving all staff a choices script to use with students can be helpful.  
**'Let's be very clear about this. As a member of staff at this college I am instructing you to... You now have a choice. Either co-operate fully and follow my instructions or, if you choose not to, there will be consequences...'** If the student follows the instructions **'Thank you for making the right choice'**. If not **'You have chosen to refuse my direct instruction. The consequence of your choice is that your parents will be informed of your refusal and you may be sent home or excluded.'**  
Script to be delivered slowly and calmly to allow student take up time and also time to calm down.
- Maybes / Partial agreement - This can help you to take the heat out of a situation. A script for partial agreement could be:
  - Student: **'Sir/Miss, he gave me a dirty look'**
  - Teacher: **'Maybe he did but I would really like you to ...'**
  - Student: **'Sir/Miss, you have got lines all over your face'**
  - Teacher: **'Maybe I have but...'**
  - Student: **'Sir/Miss, you are a bad teacher'**
  - Teacher: **'Maybe I am but...'**
- Students when challenged about their poor behaviour, try to divert the teachers attention from the Primary Behaviour by smoke screening. This can be done by sulking, looking away from you and doing all manner of gestures associated with Kevin and Perry. If caught doing something they may deny they did it or that the person next to them started it. They may suggest that you are always picking on them or that you let others get away with it or that another colleague lets them do it. In these circumstances tactically ignore the behaviour. Avoid arguing and focus on the Primary Behaviour. Block out their comments. Do not respond to them. Use the Broken Record technique of repeating the same line - **'I am referring to you and how you hit George.'** If used with command in your voice it is a powerful tool.
- Smile therapy is a good approach.

- When students say other negative things towards you do not show that you are phased by their comments. Thank them for their criticism.

Student: ***'Sir/Miss you have got sweat marks on your jacket'***  
Teacher: ***'Thanks for pointing that out. I will put a different one on tomorrow...Now continue with your work for now. Thank you.'***

- When re-directing a student who is not conforming it may be necessary to use single and double what's.

**Single what's:**

Teacher: ***'What's the rule for when you want to ask a question'***

Pause-await student response

Teacher: ***'Use it'***

Pause

Teacher: ***'Thank you'***

**Double what's:**

Teacher: ***'What are you doing and what should you be doing now?'***

Pause-await student response

Teacher: ***'Go and do it'***

Pause

Teacher: ***'Thank you'***

**When / Then:**

Teacher: ***'It's a shame when you shout out because then I can't hear other students' opinions. When you put your hand up I will listen to your opinion'***

- When issuing a consequence it needs to:
  - be related to the deed (Dropping litter, clearing litter)
  - have reasonableness - certainty not severity. If you say a sanction will be applied, ensure that it is. It doesn't have to be a big sanction-just detaining students for a few minutes at the end of the session is normally enough. Students do not respect staff who threaten students often but do not issue punishments.
  - keep your and their respect intact. Do not hurt or humiliate.
  - try to Repair and Rebuild at the end and separate amicably. Festering grudges are bad.

- Avoid backing yourself into a corner. Some scripts we use can lead to stalemate.

Teacher: '**Why haven't you brought your exercise book?**'

Student: '**Because I've lost it.**' (In a dismissive tone)

Teacher: '**How dare you be so rude.**'

Student: '**I didn't do anything. You've got it in for me.**'

The likely result is out and out confrontation. There is little wriggle room for the teacher. Perhaps giving the student paper to use and asking them at the end of the lesson to have a good look for the book at home would avoid this confrontation. If they can't find it then they can buy a new one next lesson.

- **Sanctions**

- Try to keep reprimands private and only audible to students being reprimanded. This does not give the student the 'oxygen of publicity' that they were seeking from their peer group. When you use low volume as opposed to loud volume then the frequency of disruptive behaviour is likely to decline.
- When working with students don't back them into a corner – giving partial agreement can help to reduce conflict.
- When applying a sanction it is useful to remember that we should ensure 'certainty not severity'. Threatening often and not delivering undermines a teacher's authority.
- Differentiate the serious from the trivial. It is sometimes best to tactically ignore the trivial.
- When issuing a sanction keep your and their respect intact. Do not hurt or humiliate. A student who feels that comments are unreasonable and that they have lost face in front of their peer group may well retaliate. Always try to repair and rebuild at the end. Separate amicably. Festering feuds and grudges get us nowhere.
- When dealing with an incident try to avoid disturbing the rest of the class.
- Do not show fear.
- Sometimes we get lost in the heat of the emotional moment.
  - Describe behaviour.
  - Do not make it personal.
  - Give student the right to reply for all but most serious misdemeanours.
- Tune into how the student is feeling before choosing from your repertoire.
- If you reprimand a student held in high esteem in the group and the behaviour is checked, then the ripple effect is strong and good for the teacher.

- When dealing with an incident leave students' previous bad behaviour behind. Respond to the here and now.
- It is pointless to enforce a consequence in the heat of the emotional moment when student is too upset or angry. Student and teacher may need cool off time to calm down and settle before the situation can be reviewed. It is all too easy for both parties to get lost in their behaviour.
- Commands should be decisive and warm.
- As in a football match good referees often get players to move towards them rather than them going to the player. The same should be done when reprimanding challenging students.
- Students who are challenging will try to blame everyone for their poor behaviour – the teacher, parents or other students. Deflect the responsibility for their behaviour back to the student. Get them to understand that they own their behaviour and they can change the consequence by choosing to modify their behaviour.

## CHALLENGING STUDENTS

Many students who misbehave are doing so to gain the attention of their peers and adults. Many of these students have very low self-esteem and have feelings of inadequacy. A number have inappropriate problem solving styles and are attempting to learn appropriate ways to behave. Some gain kudos by failing '***I'm successful by failing***'. They are very good at being bad.

Dreikurs (1948) suggested that a misbehaving student has lost their belief that they can find belonging and recognition and believes that they will find acceptance through provocative behaviour by pursuing the mistaken goals of behaviour. He stated that there were four mistaken goals:

- To gain undue attention
- To seek power
- To seek revenge or to get even
- To display inadequacy

In misbehaviour students pursue one or more of the four goals, often without being aware that they are doing it.

## ACTING IN AND ACTING OUT STUDENTS

Students express their anger and challenge by acting in or acting out.

### Acting In

Acting in students attack themselves with self-damaging behaviour. They appear anxious, depressed, withdrawn, passive and unmotivated. There is an apparent irrational refusal to respond and co-operate. Two types of acting-in roles are:

- Suffers
  - Holds in anger and denies they are angry
  - They avoid confrontation at all costs
  - They suffer from depression and illnesses
- Withdrawers
  - Express their anger by withdrawing from others
  - By doing this they are protecting themselves from the cause of the anger whilst also punishing those who caused it.

When working with sufferers and withdrawers:

- Mirror how they act and model appropriate strategies they could use to help themselves.

- Get students to use positive affirmations – positive statements to raise self-esteem at problem times
- Get the students to log incidents where they withdrew or they held their anger. Give them alternative approaches for the next occasion.
- Use drama therapy and help them. Use of story is also a powerful tool in Emotional Literacy.

## Acting Out

Acting out students tend to be aggressive, threatening, demanding attention, disruptive and will prevent others from working. Two types of acting out roles are:

- Blamers
  - They have little belief that they can make things better for themselves
  - They blame others for their angry feelings
  - They can tease and name call
- Exploders
  - They express their anger through direct and immediate confrontation
  - Have short fuses and are physically or verbally aggressive towards peers and adults.

When working with blamers and exploders:

- Provide regular contact with a Mentor or Behavioural Assistant
- Use a Positive Restitution approach where aggressor has to meet and make it up with the victim.
- Focus the reprimand on the behaviour not the student.
- Using Behaviour Modification strategies recognise and praise them when they get it right.

Student's challenging behaviour can manifest itself into 3 main categories of behaviour:

- Disruptive
  - Wandering around and interfering with other students.
  - Taking other students' materials
  - Flicking paper pellets
  - Throwing objects around the room
  - Feigned ignorance over task
  - Forgetting equipment
  - Talking over teacher talk
  - High pitched / loud comments / laughter

- Play fighting
- Making unnecessary noise with chairs / pencils / rulers
- Late arrival
- Fiddling with mobile phones
- Work avoidance / calculated idleness
- Defiance
  - Blanking / totally ignoring teacher
  - Dumb insolence – not responding
  - Refusal to do something
  - Swearing
  - Argumentative behaviour
  - Put downs, criticism, negative comments towards teacher
- Aggressive
  - Verbal abuse towards students and teacher – offensive, insulting, insolent and threatening
  - Physical aggression towards other students or teacher
  - Physical destructiveness
  - Foul and abusive language to teacher
  - Pushing past / bumping into a member of staff
  - Leaving the room without permission



## MANAGING CONFLICTS

*'Whilst failure is inevitable negative criticism is not'*

**Lawrence**

We all have levels of adrenalin in our bodies which was necessary for survival in cave person times. In today's world we have few places to make use of it and so we have to contrive situations in which it can be used. Hence the modern day phenomena of rage.

Examples of this include:

- Road rage
- Air rage
- Tele marketer rage
- Unsolicited calls rage
- Mobile phone rage
- Swimming pool lane rage
- Movie rage
- Sales rage
- Queue rage
- Supermarket trolley rage

Other occasions which can generate anger and rage are when people ignore you, challenge your competence, give unsolicited advice, don't appreciate you or when people are condescending towards you.

### WHY WE BECOME ANGRY

All students have anger inside them and it is an explosive energy which is required for self-preservation. However some students are unable to cope with the demands of the situation and respond with anger. Sometimes when students show anger towards us they are using displacement. Often by our actions and social tone we may remind them of someone outside school who may be abusive towards them. Therefore inappropriate feelings are often displaced onto people and objects in school.

To understand how to manage badly behaving students in conflict situations it is important to understand why we become angry.

When we are faced with danger or conflict our bodies prepare us to deal with it. Blood chemicals tell us to act and the message is so strong that our neo-cortex (the top part of the brain where we do most of our logical thinking and planning) cannot operate properly. An individual is flooded with feelings and can't think properly. The mammalian part of the brain takes over and all rational thought becomes impossible. We follow an act first, think later routine. Often it is a simple fight or flight response.

Neural links between emotional and cognitive sites are greater in number than those from the cognitive to the emotional centres. It therefore takes longer for the thinking site to send back the information that the situation is not serious. Hence many people respond in an inappropriate manner because of the lag time involved they are literally taken over by the emotion they are experiencing. Many students do not have the emotional intelligence to decode the non-verbal and verbal communication that is occurring around them to understand when situations are likely to result in conflict. Also they do not have the vocabulary to negotiate and discuss situations. Remember that 'all behaviour is learnt'. However students are good observers but they don't always interpret it well. Many potential conflicts can be avoided by effective communication.

***'What makes me angry?'***  
***'I make me angry.'***

Male students tend to display aggressive behaviour in school. Often it is in the form of play acting. Boys tend to move physically and loudly in corridors and tend to disrupt when not engaged. A limitation to the emotions that males are allowed to show makes aggressive behaviour all the more likely. When adrenalin is released following a trigger situation we climb an anger mountain.

## **KEY STAGES OF ANGER**

It is important to understand the key stages of the anger process. Initially there is a trigger which signals a perceived danger or problem. The hormone adrenaline is then secreted which as we become more aroused we tend to lose the ability to think rationally. Our emotional arousal is energising and makes us sharp and ready for action in the build up phase.

The signs we display in this phase are that:

- Our face colour deepens.
- We breathe faster.
- There is an increase in perspiration.
- We have dilated pupils.
- We speak louder and faster.
- We become agitated and fidgety and move faster.
- We tense muscles, have a contorted face and clench our fists.
- We have tightly closed lips.
- We have hunched shoulders and a stiff rigid posture.
- We are easily distracted and unfocussed.
- We have aggressive posturing and pointed fingers.

## STRATEGIES TO USE

- When faced with someone who is angry it is important that we try to remain calm and acknowledge their feelings and that they may have a point.
- The teacher should not use dominant, threatening behaviour or show avoidance.
- Respect needs to be shown towards the student.
- We should not belittle or humiliate them.
- Avoid having an emotional reaction to misbehaviour. Put up a wall between yourself and what the student is doing.
- Avoid becoming defensive.
- Try to keep it in perspective.
- Avoid squaring up, invading their personal space and any threatening movements.
- Do not try to mirror their mood e.g. they shout and you then shout louder, as this can lead to an upward spiral of confrontational behaviour. It is best to try and match the mood level, show some heightened response.
- Avoid excessive eye contact as this can be seen as threatening and challenging. Allow the student to look away.
- Try to be solution focussed and allow the student to save face – give them an escape route.
- Show that you are willing to accept a compromise, a solution that is acceptable to all and allows everyone to feel a winner. Making token concessions can be good, admit that they may have a point (known as the 1% technical error strategy).
- Deferring the discipline and giving students timeout to reflect can be a useful strategy.
- Staying low key can defuse aggression.
- Also avoid the ‘oxygen of publicity’ generated by public exchanges by taking the discussion somewhere private (but not away from a third party, otherwise you may be vulnerable).
- Sometimes we may need to use wrong footing tactics and behave in a different way to what the student would normally expect from us.
- Use of attention diverters with distractions real or imagined can be a way of breaking the cycle of anger e.g. standing and looking out of the window and saying nothing....soon the student will be joining us to look out of the window.
- We need to try and establish a rapport by mirroring body language and listening to the language of their sensory preference (and other strategies outlined in Chapter 2, Body Language).
- Humour can be used to relieve the tension of the situation.

- We need to stay in control of ourselves by checking our body language and speech volume. We need to keep clear of power struggles and to avoid hostile remarks where sarcasm and ridicule are used.
- Remember to keep your and their respect intact.
- When in a conflict situation we can sometimes make idle threats which we can never follow through. These must be avoided at all costs.

## HOW STUDENTS EXPRESS THEIR ANGER

How a student expresses their anger in a conflict situation can have a lot to do with their anger styles. Although anger styles are learned they are deeply ingrained in us and are automatic, almost like reflexes.

Students tend to get stuck in a particular way of managing their behaviour. In supporting students to effectively manage their anger and confrontation we need to get them to understand the physical signs in themselves and others when they are about to lose their temper:

- to give them specific intervention strategies to use to reduce their feelings of anger
- to develop relaxation / stress reduction techniques that they can use.

## SUPPORT AND STRATEGIES WE CAN GIVE STUDENTS

Some examples of the support we can give are:

- **Dramatherapy** – through music and drama we can help students to understand how to identify signs of anger and how to control their feelings. We can also give them an active vocabulary to use to negotiate in such situations.
- **Mirroring and Modelling** – gaining students' permission to mirror their non-verbal and verbal language when they are getting angry might be a useful strategy. If you mirror some of the signs this will increase their awareness of when they are getting angry. Then model some strategies that they may use to reduce their feeling of anger e.g. breathing exercises.
- **Fire Drills** – give students strategies to use in conflict situations. Get them to rehearse what to do, particularly how they should react to an angry student in the classroom.
- **Develop Positive Self-Talk** – get students to list 4 or 5 statements that they can think of when faced by another person's anger e.g.
  - I am not responsible for this person's feelings.
  - I am able to put a temporary lid on my anger.
  - I can reduce the stress in this situation by being calm.
  - I must not expect people to be fair when they are angry.

- **Giving students strategies to reduce their stress** e.g.
  - Relaxation techniques – visualisation
  - Tension releasers – beanbags / stress balls.
- **Changing Negative Feelings** – getting students to reframe negative feelings. Many angry students have very low levels of self-esteem and have fragile egos. If someone pushes them or knocks into them in the corridor they believe that they wanted to hurt them or start a fight. We need to develop more neutral thoughts in students. Perhaps the person lost their balance or that they were not looking where they were going. This is a long term process but will help students.
- **Causes of Conflict** – get students to reflect on causes of anger. What triggers them into anger and conflict? Get them to keep an Anger Diary and record incidents of anger and their triggers. Work through this with them and develop strategies that students could use.
- **Developing ‘I’ statements** to rationalise their behaviour and to give them a script to use with the other person in the conflict.
  - When someone accuses me of (*Behaviour*)
  - Other students get upset with me (*Effect*)
  - It makes me upset (*Feeling*)
  - I would like to discuss it with the person who made the allegation (*The Solution*)
- **5 Step Plan To Resolve Conflict** – give students this 5 step plan to use when faced with conflict
  - **Step 1** - Stand back and detach yourself from the conflict. Look down on the play unfolding beneath.
  - **Step 2** - Confirm what is happening. Look at the conflict from the other person’s viewpoint.
  - **Step 3** - Get more information about the situation from the other person – get their viewpoint.
  - **Step 4** - Assert your own interests. They will now be ready to listen.
  - **Step 5** - Find common ground for a solution. Get the students to understand that everyone in a conflict needs to feel a winner so that a resolution can occur.

# 101 TOP TIPS - A SUMMARY OF STRATEGIES OUTLINED IN THE BOOK

## NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION:

### Eye Contact

1. When greeting students at classroom door on arrival engage in firm eye contact
2. When dealing with students avoid staring into distance or looking at the ground. This avoidance is a submissive gesture.
3. When involved in a disciplinary interaction with a student get into their line of sight and establish eye contact with a stare.

### Positioning

4. When talking to the whole group stand in a position where you can scan or lighthouse the whole group.

### Patrolling

5. Patrol the whole of your classroom frequently. Avoid having no go areas.
6. When group is settling patrol around the perimeter of the room - this will keep the maximum number of students in your gaze.
7. Standing at the back of the room is a psychologically controlling position.
8. Standing behind a student who is misbehaving and saying nothing can be an effective strategy.
9. Moving slightly into the student's **Personal Space Bubble** can be a controlling move (about 46cm is normal space bubble)
10. Posture is important. Stand upright and avoid stooping, or standing with your head downward as these are signs of a lack of confidence.
11. In conflict situations do not stand face to face with a student. Standing at right angles to the person is best.

### Facial Expressions

12. Narrowing your eyes as though you are looking through the visor in a helmet can be a signal of control of dominance.
13. Lowering of the eyebrows gives the impression of dominance.
14. Setting mouths in a resolute position and avoidance of smiling can be very controlling.

15. Jaw thrusts - where we push bottom teeth beyond the top set is a gesture of control or defiance.

### **Non-Verbal Cues**

16. Develop a repertoire of non-verbal cues that you can use with challenging students.

### **Use of Silence**

17. When you are about to be involved in a disciplinary interaction with students, wait for silence.
18. When giving a command or becoming involved in a disciplinary interaction with students use tactical pausing. Engage eye contact - use student's name - then pause for 5 seconds - then make your statement.

### **Barrier Positions**

19. Barrier gestures such as arms folded across the chest must be avoided. These positions show defensiveness and nervousness.
20. Try to avoid any ticks or tells that show a lack of confidence or that we are not meaning what we are saying. Try to avoid increased blinking, rubbing of neck / eyes / nose, variation in vocal tone, movement of feet / legs and excessive throat clearing.

### **Relaxed Position**

21. Try to appear relaxed when faced with difficult students. This can be achieved by using open palm gestures, an openness of arm position, asymmetrical positioning of limbs, a sideways lean and tilt of the head.

### **Rapport Building**

When dealing with angry students we need to develop a rapport with them.

22. Listen to how they speak. When angry they will use words relating to the sensory preference (Visual, Auditory or Kinaesthetic). I can't SEE the point - Visual. Mirror the language of their sensory preference back to them. The student will calm down quickly if this strategy is used.
23. Mirror their body language.
24. Listen to speech patterns and try to adopt their rate of speech and use similar intonations and rhythms.

### **VERBAL COMMUNICATION - EFFECTIVE SCRIPTS WE CAN USE:**

#### **Positive Statements**

25. Meet and greet students at the doorway to the classroom. This will help use to mark our territory and get them to recognise that they are leaving their social environment and moving into your learning environment.

26. When greeting students recognise them as individuals.
27. Attempt to use 5 positive statements to every negative statement in the classroom.
28. Orderly dismissal at the end of the lesson is important. Be positive, issue them with any rewards, thank them for their work and say that you are looking forward to working with them next lesson.

### **Vocal Tone, Pitch and Pace**

29. Be assertive rather than aggressive. Practise making your voice sound more commanding and strong.
30. Try to keep a confident tone.
31. Make your point by raising or lowering your voice.
32. Try to speak in a calming tone. '***Calm words, calm children.***'
33. A relaxed upright posture is essential to present your voice in its best condition.
34. Make your message clear - don't try to make too many points at once as this can weaken our message.
35. Speak clearly - don't slur your words or lose word endings.
36. Articulate sounds that will make you more decisive and authoritative.
37. Try to vary your volume to match the circumstance.
38. Check the speed and rhythm of your speech. Speaking too quickly may give the impression of being too nervous.

### **Scripts**

When giving instructions we need to ensure we have a clear script.

39. Tell students what you want them to do rather than what not to do.
40. Staying solution focussed - let us try to find a solution.
41. Give students an instruction followed by a '***thank-you.***' This gives the impression that we expect compliance.
42. Avoiding pleading with students and using weak words.
43. Moving around the room and giving quiet instructions or comments in a low key manner is a good way of gaining compliance.

44. Stay in control by initiating and ending interactions with students. However, avoid point scoring. Tactical ignoring of some student comments may be best,
45. When giving an instruction give students 'take up' time to comply.
46. Use the naming rule, where we identify what we want - '**sitting quietly please ...thanks.**'
47. When giving an instruction try not to back students into a corner.
48. Give students direct choices based on your rules. Allow them to save face.
49. Use maybes and partial agreements with students.

**Student:** 'Sir / Miss, he gave me a dirty look'

**Teacher:** 'Maybe he did but I would really like you to get on with your work'.

50. Redirect students when they are not conforming by using what / where / when. **e.g. When / then**

**Teacher:** 'It's a shame when you shout out because then I can't hear other student's opinions. When you put your hand up I'll listen to your opinion.'

## **SANCTIONS**

51. Try to keep reprimands private and only audible to the individual student.
52. When issuing a sanction keep yours and their respect intact. Do not hurt or humiliate. A student who feels that comments are unreasonable and that they have lost face in front of their peer group will retaliate.
53. When applying a sanction we need to ensure '**certainty not severity.**' Threatening sanctions often and not delivering undermines a teachers authority.
54. Try to differentiate the serious from the trivial. It is sometimes best to **tactically ignore** the trivial.
55. When dealing with an incident try to avoid disturbing / disrupting the rest of the class.
56. By reprimanding and checking the poor behaviour of a student held in high esteem in the group it will have a controlling effect on the rest of the group.
57. Students who are badly behaved will attempt to blame everyone for their poor behaviour. Deflect the responsibility for the behaviour back to the student. Get them to understand that they own their behaviour and that they can change the consequences by choosing to modify their behaviour.
58. Watch for **smokescreening** from students when their behaviour is being challenged.

They will attempt to divert your attention by using secondary behaviour such as sulking, tutting or looking away. They may also suggest that others have got away with the same behaviour and yet you did nothing about it. We need to block their comments and re-direct them to the primary behaviour using the **broken record technique** - where we repeat our own statement until compliance is achieved.

- 59. Tune into how the student is feeling before choosing what action you are likely to take.
- 60. Focus any reprimand on the behaviour not the student.

## **MANAGING CONFLICTS**

When faced with an angry student we should:

- 61. Try to remain calm; acknowledge the student's feelings and that they may have a point.
- 62. You should not use dominant, threatening behaviour or show avoidance.
- 63. Avoid having an emotional reaction to misbehaviour. Try to keep everything in perspective.
- 64. Put an invisible wall up between yourself and what the student is doing. Avoid being defensive.
- 65. Avoid squaring up and invading their personal space. (45cm is normal space bubble around a person, this increases in size when angry).
- 66. Do not mirror their mood - they shout, so you shout louder - as this can lead to an upward spiral of confrontational behaviour. Match their mood level but avoid being competitive.
- 67. Avoid excessive eye contact as this can be seen as threatening and challenging.
- 68. Remember that the student may not wish to engage in eye contact and will look away. Do not make this an issue.
- 69. Allow the student to save face by giving them an escape route.
- 70. In many cases show that you are willing to accept a compromise, a solution that is acceptable to all and allows everyone to feel a winner.
- 71. Making token concessions can be good, admit that they have a point - known as the 1% technical error strategy.
- 72. Deferring the discipline and having time out for each party to reflect on the situation can help defuse the situation.

73. Staying low key can defuse aggression '**calm words, calm children.**'
74. Try to avoid the '**oxygen of publicity**' generated by public exchanges between you and the student. Students will show boat in front of their peer group. Take the discussion to somewhere away from the peer group - but not away from a third party, otherwise you may be vulnerable.
75. To break the anger cycle we can use wrong footing tactics and behave in a different way to what the student would normally expect from us.
76. Use of **attention diverters** with distractions real or imagined can be another way of breaking the cycle of anger. E.g. breaking off mid-sentence to look out of the window and saying nothing. Soon student will be joining you.
77. Use of humour, when appropriate, can be used to relieve the tension.
78. Keep clear of power struggles and avoid hostile remarks where ridicule and sarcasm are used.
79. In the heat of the moment do not make idle threats of sanctions which can never be applied.
80. Try to remain relaxed even when feeling threatened or angry.
81. Remember an angry student has no inhibitions.
82. Students will 'awfulise' their situation and be negative. Try to reframe and get a more positive outlook from them.
83. Check you non-verbal behaviour - is it saying what you want it to say?
84. Develop positive self-talk scripts which you can quickly bring to the forefront of your mind when dealing with confrontational behaviour. E.g. I do not have to negotiate with an angry person. I can control my reaction to anger I must not expect fair play when someone is angry

### **GIVING STUDENTS THE SKILLS TO MANAGE THEIR BEHAVIOUR**

85. Develop Fire Drills for students to use in conflict situations. Get them to rehearse what to do when faced with an angry person.
86. Develop relaxation techniques in students to relieve stress which may cause anger.
  - Relaxation techniques such as breathing exercises or visualisation.
  - Use of bean bags / stress balls.
87. Try to give students the skills to change their negative feelings. If someone pushes into them they may feel, because of their low self-esteem, that it was a deliberate act and that the person has it in for them. We need to encourage them to develop neutral thoughts ... Perhaps they weren't looking where they were going.

88. Get students to identify the causes of their anger. What triggers them? By keeping an Anger Diary they will be able to identify triggers and with adults help develop strategies they could use to avoid them.
89. Try to get students to develop 'I' statements to rationalise their behaviour and to give them a script to use with the other person in the conflict.
- 'I' statements are developed in relation to the behaviour of another person towards them, its effect on them, the feeling it creates and the solution they want.
90. 'Dramatherapy' - through music and drama we can help students to understand how they can identify signs of anger and how to control their feelings. It can also give them an active vocabulary to negotiate in such situations.
91. When students practise using their new skills ensure that you recognise when they get it right and offer them praise - give out as much '**emotional small change**' as you can.
92. **Mirroring and Modelling** - gaining students' permission to mirror their non-verbal and verbal language when they are getting angry might be a useful strategy. If you mirror some of the signs this will increase their awareness of when they are getting angry. Then model some strategies that they may use to reduce their feeling of anger. e.g. breathing exercises.
93. Develop active listening skills in students such as importance of facing speaker, looking at speaker, do not fidget, use of nods and other forms of non-verbal communication to show positive affirmation.
94. Get students to recognise communication blockers and develop strategies to avoid using these. Blockers include interrupting, dominating, challenging, accusing and controlling.
95. Encourage students to use phrases such as 'and' and 'we' rather than 'if' and 'but'.
96. Develop assertiveness skills in students. These would include an ability to decide what they want, be able to ask clearly for it, express feelings openly and be able to give and take compliments and criticisms.
97. When facing conflict give students a 5 point plan to manage it:  
Step 1 - Detachment - look down from above on what is unfolding  
Step 2 - Look at the conflict from other persons view point.  
Step 3 - Get more information form the other person.  
Step 4 - Assert your own interests.  
Step 5 - Find common ground for a solution.
98. Get students to remember that they own their behaviour.  
**'Who makes me angry ... I make me angry'**

## **YOU ARE IN CONTROL**

99. Ensure that you are aware and know what is happening in your classroom.
100. Make your classroom your territory. Mark it's boundaries metaphorically as a rhinoceros does in the African Plains by digging your own metaphorical hoof marks.
101. Be prepared. Have a clear idea of what key strategies you are going to use for the most common forms of poor behaviour.

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