Remember you are not alone

This practical guide will help you to manage pupil behaviour by:

- addressing myths around behaviour
- defining low and high-level disruption
- reflecting on how you respond to inappropriate behaviour
- reflecting on your relationships with your pupils and students
- suggesting behaviour improvement approaches and strategies to try
- providing advice on how to get help and support from your school or college
- giving advice on how to get further help and support

Some truths

Before we look at how you can manage pupil behaviour, here are some truths about behaviour:

- all teachers experience problems with behaviour
- you are not solely responsible for pupil behaviour
- well-planned and interesting lessons do not prevent disruption
- being entirely friendly and respectful of pupils does not always diminish conflict and bring order
- whilst there is concern about a growing culture of violence among young people, such behaviour is confined to a minority of schools and colleges
- the vast majority of schools and colleges are calm and ordered places, where teachers are effective and pupils or students learn successfully
- you can improve pupil or student behaviour

Disruptive behaviour

Disruptive pupil behaviour is a frustration for many teachers. In fact, 70% of teachers told us they had considered quitting the profession over poor behaviour*.

Poor behaviour is a barrier to learning and can easily threaten the health and wellbeing of teachers. Add to this the other pressures that can occur and you have a recipe for disaster, resulting in valuable teaching days, and sometimes careers, being lost.

* Teacher Support Network and Family Lives Behaviour survey 2010
Is disruption low or high-level?

Low-level disruption

The most common form of poor behaviour is ‘low-level disruption’.

A strict definition can be subjective as what concerns one teacher may not be of concern to another, but for the purpose of this section, we are talking about behaviours which are not overtly confrontational or challenging, but which distract from teaching and learning.

There are generally five broad categories of ‘low-level disruption’:

- talk
- movement
- time
- pupil-pupil relations
- teacher-pupil relationships

If these disruptions are not challenged, they can severely damage pupil learning and lead to frustrations and stress for the teacher.

They can then lead on to high-level disruptions.

High-level disruption

‘High-level disruptions’ are more serious and are overtly confrontational and challenging.

These behaviour patterns include:

- challenges to authority
- refusal to obey rules
- frequent verbal abuse

Trying to manage this behaviour is extremely demanding and exhausting. If sustained over a long period, it can have a detrimental effect on a teacher or tutor’s physical and mental health. It will also have adverse effects on pupil and student learning.

In our 2010 behaviour survey over 50 per cent of respondents stated that pupils deliberately distracted them verbally to disrupt teaching and learning on a daily basis and almost 60 per cent said they had applied for a job at another school due to witnessing or being a victim of poor behaviour by a pupil.

“the most wearing problem is a constant degree of low level disruption in enough pupils to unsettle the whole lesson. Irrelevant comments called out, missing books, distracted by others, “I can’t do this” instrumental music lessons, new pupils arrive mid-term, changes to the timetable “I haven’t got” and general interruptions to the business of learning”
Responses to poor behaviour

Before you can decide on what strategies to employ to improve pupil or student behaviour, you first need to think about how you already respond to inappropriate behaviour.

This is often the key to deciding which changes you may (or may not) need to make and the types of strategies to use.

“I am a teacher of 27 years and feel like a novice at times due to disruptive pupils. Feel vulnerable and under valued.”

The choices teachers make in responding to pupils’ behaviour are crucial in influencing the choices pupils or students make about how they will behave.

Managing behaviour is not just about responding to inappropriate behaviour. It is about creating conditions that encourage positive behaviour.

Using the table on this page, tick all the statements that apply to you.

Your answers here should give you a clearer idea of how you respond to poor behaviour. These responses will be used again in the section on types of strategies to use.

When a pupil or student behaves inappropriately, I:

- display anger, shout or scream, cry
- fail to react or pretend I have not seen or heard anything
- remain passive
- act inconsistently, I can be unfair
- threaten actions, but do not usually follow through
- make hurtful comments or I am sarcastic
- argue or am hostile
- apply sanctions
- leave the classroom
- send for another member of staff
- send the pupil or student from the classroom
- tend to react rather than be proactive
- use a discipline plan
- follow the school or college’s behaviour policy and guidelines
- manage the situation calmly
- respond according to level of inappropriate behaviour (low, medium, high)
- overreact
- use a planned, proactive, professional approach

In our 2010 behaviour survey over 60 per cent of respondents said that School Improvement Plans that consider staff concerns were essential to improving pupil behaviour.
Reflect on your relationships

Now that you have reflected on how you respond to inappropriate behaviour, let’s think about your relationships with your pupils or students.

Which of the following best describe your relationships with students?

Dominant/assertive
- Strong sense of purpose in pursuing clear goals for learning and for class management
- Leadership. Tends to guide and control
- Prepared to discipline unapologetically

Too dominant/assertive
- Too controlling
- Lack of concern for pupils
- Teacher-pupil relationship damaged

Cooperative/collaborative
- Great concern for the needs and opinions of pupils
- Helpful, friendly
- Avoids strife and seeks consensus
- Working together

Too cooperative/collaborative
- Too understanding and accepting of apologies
- Waits for pupils to be ready and lets pupils dictate

Submissive
- Lack of clarity of purpose
- Keeps a low profile
- Tendency to submit to the will of the class
- Entirely unassertive, rather glum and apologetic
- Expects difficulties

Research has found that the most effective teachers find a balance between dominance and cooperation*. We will look at how you can improve these areas when we look at strategies to improve behaviour.

* Robert Marzano’s (2003) findings from his study of over 100 reports on classroom management, including 134 experiments designed to find the most successful classroom strategies as well as finding that pupils prefer the dominant-cooperative style mix twice as much as the purely cooperative style or indeed any other style.
There are, of course, many strategies designed to improve behaviour, but remember it is not solely your responsibility to improve behaviour.

Any strategy you choose to use will only work, if they are underpinned by the following principles:

- there are clear, robust, behaviour and discipline systems and a framework of consequences, which are understood by all (staff and pupils) and contributed to by pupils and students
- there is a whole school or college approach
- there is a focus on positive recognition of appropriate behaviour
- positive relationships are developed and maintained
- organisations work in partnership with agencies and stakeholders, including parents/carers
- there is awareness of adults’ emotional responses to inappropriate behaviour

Could a simple or small change have a dramatic effect?

You are, like many teachers, concerned about behaviour, but think about it this way: if you keep doing what you are doing, you will keep getting the same responses.

1. Rules and procedures

Classrooms become more orderly places when rules are clearly stated and even better when rules have been negotiated, discussed and justified. Pupils and students need persuading.

Here are ten steps to improving rules and procedures:

1. Create rules and express them positively. It shouldn’t just be a list of don’ts
2. Justify rules and rehearse them!
2. Teacher-pupil/student relationships

Think about the style of relationship you have with your pupils or students that you decided upon earlier. Your relationship with a class or group will, of course, depend on the group, but a balance between a dominant and cooperative style is regarded as the most effective way to improve classroom management.

How do you increase your dominance / assertiveness?

This does not mean that you have to shout or strut about. Dominance and assertiveness is about effective leadership, having a clear path to learning goals and good behaviour, pursued with vigour and enthusiasm, but which is also pupil or student centred.

Here are ways to increase dominance and assertiveness:

For the class or group

- Negotiate ground rules
- Goal setting and assessment criteria
- Set learning objectives
- Set specific behaviour objectives

For you

- Be authoritative – in your speech and in your body language
- Fake it until you make it – be absolutely confident and in control even if you don’t feel it
- Get out of the habit of sitting behind the desk
- Try the PEP approach:
  
  Proximity: dominance is increased by walking closer to the pupil. Walk around the classroom, stand by a pupil that may be about to misbehave. Stand a “little too close for comfort” but don’t invade personal space. A difficult judgement sometimes. You don’t want to come over as aggressive or intimidating.
  
  Eye contact: holding eye contact expresses dominance. What you say will be taken more seriously if you can maintain eye contact before, then during and then after speaking.
  
  Posing questions: rather than telling a pupil off pose a question with proximity and eye contact such as “Why have you not started your work?”

These actions are often more effective and far less exhausting than getting angry or shouting and will make you appear in control, even if you do not feel it.

3. Discuss rules with the class. Explain their purpose, i.e. to improve learning

4. Negotiate with the pupils to get commitment. Ask for suggestions and remember to justify and compromise. Make posters and get them to sign up!

5. Regularly review the rules together

6. Encourage pupils to devise rules and take ownership of them

7. Remind pupils of any relevant rules before a potentially disruptive activity or if you are aware of “something brewing”. This kind of response can drastically reduce inappropriate behaviour

8. Encourage and develop team working (team rules for success)

9. Regularly get pupils to self-assess their own behaviour set against the rules.

10. Link the rules to the five broad areas of ‘low-level disruption’
How do you increase cooperation and collaboration?

We all know how challenging it can be being cooperative with badly behaved pupils. How many times have we or our colleagues talked about THAT class or THAT year group.

Sometimes a cycle can develop between the teacher and the students that makes things even worse: the pupils misbehave more, you dislike them more, you are less positive and friendly, they dislike you and your classes more, they disrupt more and so it goes on. The cycle needs to be broken.

The next time you have a class with a particularly difficult student or are worried about a challenging group, why not try the following:

First try focusing on putting negotiated and clear rules in place. This will often require a great deal of emotional generosity and patience or restraint! Try working on those acting skills if needs be. The main aims are to be more positive, friendly and fair.

Then:

1. Meet and greet by the door. Get off to a good start.
2. Catch them doing the right thing and comment positively in private. Much inappropriate behaviour is attention seeking.
3. Put the pupil in “intensive care” No it’s not what you think! Smile, use their name positively, ask for their opinion, make a point at looking at their work, comment favourably about genuine effort or achievement. Talk to them, be patient and helpful, have high expectations and keep calm. Show you value them. But don’t overdo it! Don’t sound desperate and be fair, use this approach with your well-behaved pupils as well.
4. Learn their names. Seems obvious. But it is especially valuable when you are new to a school.
3. Disciplinary interventions

Think back again to how you respond to inappropriate behaviour in the classroom. Are you reactive? Do you wait for problems to happen and then respond? Are you consistent? Are you fair?

A proactive approach to improving behaviour is usually much more effective. Remember managing behaviour is not just about responding to inappropriate behaviour.

It is about creating conditions that encourage positive behaviour.

Try the following approaches:

- remind pupils of rules before activities take place
- reinforce appropriate behaviour. Use tokens and symbols which can be used for privileges
- encourage pupils and students to self-assess their behaviour and award themselves appropriate tokens/points
- individual/group/whole class rewards. To receive these rewards there needs to be very clear success criteria
- mild punishments: What’s important is the consistency and fairness of the punishment. Its success is also dependent on the assertiveness in which it is given. It means being firm, unemotional, unapologetic and confident. It does not mean being hostile or aggressive.

In our 2010 behaviour survey over 60% of respondents said that additional training for teachers on challenging behaviour and using restraint and search powers were essential to improving pupil behaviour.
4 Mental set

Although, you are not solely responsible for improving pupil behaviour improving your attitude to classroom management can have dramatic effects. There are two parts to this:

Withitness.

Knowing your classroom. This is a term first used by Kounin (1970) meaning an awareness of what is going on in all areas of your classroom and having a quick response to actual and possible disruptions. It’s a “nip in the bud” approach that stops inappropriate behaviour spreading.

Emotional objectivity

Thinking how you will respond to disruption and not letting your emotions lead the way.

Withitness strategies

- Invest time getting to know your classroom and pupils
- Get to understand the physical, social and psychological settings that you and your pupils and students find yourselves
- Find out where the “hot spots” are. Run a behaviour audit or make this a specific of classroom observation
- Scanning. Position yourself so you can scan regularly and make eye contact with as many of the class as you can
- Intervene promptly. Make your pupils know straight away or even before it happens! Combine eye contact and proximity approaches as mentioned earlier. Early identification and intervention is an essential factor in successful behaviour management
- Use of names combined with eye contact (sharp tone)
- Silent and still approach. Stop what you are doing and remain silent and give eye contact until you get the response you want, then continue
- Non-verbal reminders and commands. These are quite traditional but are still effective e.g. finger to lips to ask for silence, standing straight with hands on hips to signal displeasure, click fingers to signal “stop it”.
- Be organised. Prepare your classroom and have materials ready!
- Reminders and warnings about rules before an activity
- Walk about with plenty of eye contact

“...The main issue in education is student behaviour. Some students are prevented from learning because of the behaviour of a minority of students. This should be totally unacceptable but it happens all the time...”
It is not always easy to remember, but bad behaviour is not an attack on you. It is not personal. If you do see it as something personal, you are more likely to get angry, upset, depressed or resentful.

Try to remain unemotional, this does not mean being distant. You should be alert and business like, but you are protecting yourself and your emotional wellbeing.

Understand yourself

Try not to show anger or frustration, you’ll look and feel more in control. Easier said than done as pupils will press buttons you didn’t even know you had! But practice. Remember what upset you, so that you recognise the situation next time.

Students have their own issues

Also remember that your pupils or students may well be dealing with difficulties or issues themselves that maybe causing the inappropriate behaviour.

You are not alone

You do not need to suffer inappropriate behaviour alone. You can get support from within your school or college and outside of the workplace, but it is important to recognise your own feelings. Talk things over with a friend, family or colleague, your union or Teacher Support Network.

How to get help and support from your school or college

The support available from each school or college will differ. The advice from unions on what staff are entitled to vary slightly, but are largely similar.

One union suggests:

- staff are entitled to work in an environment free from violence and disruption and to appropriate access to training and support on behaviour matters. Equally importantly, pupils are entitled to a safe and orderly learning environment
- all schools should establish behaviour policies and strategies and a range of rewards and sanctions in consultation with staff and school workforce unions to promote acceptable standards of behaviour
- schools should ensure that their behaviour management policies are non-discriminatory in their scope and operation, including on the grounds of ethnic or national origin, culture, religion, gender, disability or sexuality
- schools should collect and regularly review data on behaviour to ensure that their behaviour management policy is operating fairly and equitably

For further advice we recommend that you contact your union directly.

Pupil behaviour has seriously affected my health. I think behaviour can be improved by teachers being backed by management and applying consistent sanctions. Pupils who know they can get away with it will
I am an NQT at a primary school and am working in a classroom with several highly disruptive pupils. I feel their behaviour is making me unable to do her job.

The pupils are frequently using highly abusive and threatening behaviour towards me and other children and I feel unable to teach the class effectively. I always find myself having to act in response to their behaviour.

I feel very disillusioned with the profession; it isn’t what I had thought it would be. Although I don’t feel physically threatened I do feel that I have not been trained sufficiently to deal with the possibility of violence between children or constantly threatening behaviour.

Sally decided to call the Teacher Support Network Support Line and spoke to one of our trained coaches.

The coach listened to Sally’s concerns and reflected back to her what her thoughts and feelings were, allowing Sally the opportunity to clarify what was going on for her. The coach discussed with Sally about seeking support from her headteacher, looking into the schools’ discipline policies and seeking advice from her colleagues. They also recommended that Sally speak to her union.

At the end of the coaching session Sally said she felt better simply for being able to talk the problem over. She felt she had a course of action that would help tackle the issues she was facing and that there would be no shame involved when approaching senior staff members for support and advice on school policies.

If, like Sally you need someone to talk to about the problems you are having with pupil behaviour you can call our Support Line, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

*Name has been changed to maintain confidentiality*