
Advice Sheet 6

BIG TOE FIRST: AVOIDING CONFRONTATION

This is a preventative / management strategy suggested by Gerard Gordon ("Managing Challenging Children") which details in a step-by-step approach how to deal with incidences of challenging behaviour. The basic principle is that we don't jump in at the deep end into the dangerous waters of a confrontation but rather start in safer shallow waters and proceed step-by-step to the deeper water. The steps outlined range from least intrusive to most intrusive. Once the pupil returns to the desired behaviour, it's important to praise immediately to reinforce that this is what we are looking for.

Step 1: Acknowledge appropriate behaviour

Acknowledge appropriate behaviour of another pupil in close proximity to the pupil who is not behaving appropriately. In trying to get Jane to begin working, we could say to the pupil beside her: "Well done, Ann, it's great to see you getting started so quickly". If this strategy gets Jane working, no need to do any more.

Step 2: Increase physical proximity

Gradually move closer to the pupil's space, while continuing to praise other pupils behaving appropriately who are in close proximity. This may have the required effect of the pupil stopping the undesirable behaviour or commencing what is desired. No need to make direct eye contact or commence a 'stand-off' at this stage.

Step 3: A brief private question

If the proximity move doesn't work, ask the pupil a brief question in a low voice e.g. "John, can I help you to get started" or "Lisa, is there something up..?" It may be more appropriate to physically get down to the level of the pupil, rather than remaining at a standing position above the pupil.

Step 4: A brief private direction with wait time

If the question fails, time to give a brief direction (again privately / discreetly). "Pat, it's time to start the Maths exercise, thanks". The "thanks" at the end conveys the expectation that the pupil will comply with the direction. Allow the pupil some 'wait time' to get going, rather than risking escalation by saying "immediately" or using a confrontational tone of voice.

Step 5: Acknowledge and re-direct (don't argue)

If the pupil begins an argument "I don't want to do it" or "I don't feel like it" then acknowledge what has been said and then redirect to the request once again. "maybe you'd prefer not to do this work but this is our Maths learning time so I want you to begin working. Thanks."

Step 6: Rule reminder

If the pupil continues to argue or ignores the direction / re-direction, give a private but firm, assertive reminder of the rule, and perhaps point to it if it's on display. "Peter, remember the class rule: *In our class, we use our time for learning. We follow staff instructions and make our best effort*". Alternatively, ask the pupil to say the rule or to identify the rule s/he thinks might apply in this case.

Step 7: Offer a choice

If we still haven't succeeded in getting the desired behaviour, we need to make clear to the pupil the consequences of their behaviour by offering a choice. "Mandy, you can choose to start working now or you can choose to continue as you are. If you start working now, the consequence is that I will support and help you if you need help. However, if you choose not to work, then the consequence is that I will... (write a note in your journal / arrange a detention / take five minutes from your Golden Time etc.). It's your choice! Thanks!". Give the pupil some wait time again to weigh up the consequences (positive and negative).

Step 8: Cool off time for the pupil

If the pupil still refuses to co-operate, then we need to make more intrusive steps. Firstly, we give the pupil some 'cool-off' time in the classroom (have a spare desk and chair somewhere to which you can send the pupil). During this time, all others in the class are to ignore the pupil. Tell the pupil how long you want them to cool off or ask them to let you know when they are ready to rejoin the class work. After the cool-off time, welcome the pupil back into the class. "Ok, Tim, that's your time up. You can come back now and join in with the class work."

Step 9: Exit plan

This is the most intrusive step and needs to be seen as the 'last resort'. What is most important is that we have a **plan** which is implementable, and which we have explained to pupils, parents and other staff in advance. It may be required where a pupil is threatening others, fighting, behaving in a way that is a danger to his/her safety or the safety of others, or engaging in deliberate continuous behaviour of the type that prevents others in the class from learning / teaching. In this plan, consider:

- **Who** will exit the pupil?
- **Where** will s/he go?
- **What** will happen to the pupil during and after the 'time-out'?
- **When** will the pupil return to the class?
- **What** will happen if we have to go this far again with the pupil?

In exiting a pupil, be sure to communicate with him/her that they will be welcome to rejoin the class once they agree to abide by the class rules / class behaviour agreement / individual behaviour support plan.

Source: Gordon, G. (1996) *Managing Challenging Children*, New Ross: Prim-Ed Publishing. ISBN 1864003022