

Serious behavioural difficulties: Suggestions for school staff

Children with behavioural difficulties cause stress to those around them. As dealing with students with difficult behaviours is stressful, make sure you have support from colleagues. An effective discipline strategy needs to balance rules and consequences with individual and specific support for positive behaviour. It is important to engage children in learning and to build their belief that they can achieve at school. This can be achieved through having frequent small successes.

How school staff can help

Build relationships

Communicating interest and positive regard for the child helps to build a relationship and encourages cooperation.

Use positive reinforcement

Look out for and praise the student's appropriate behaviour. Be sure to emphasise when the child is doing things right.

Have positive expectations of all students

Create a classroom environment that affirms positive behaviour in all students. Establish classroom rules that are clear and fair. It is important to make sure they are well displayed and reinforced consistently. It often works well when students contribute to the construction of the rules and have a sense of ownership of them.



How school staff can help – continued

Avoid power struggles

Whenever possible, give students options and avoid direct commands.

Establish a 'cool down' strategy

Children who are prone to angry outbursts can manage them better if they have an appropriate 'cool down' strategy. This might include using an 'anger thermometer' to tell them when it's time to take a deep breath or walk away from an angry confrontation. (See the KidsMatter Primary information sheets on managing anger for more suggestions). Seek advice from the school's student wellbeing staff member, school psychologist or counsellor on helping these children develop emotion management skills that work for them.

Match level of instruction to the child's ability

Make sure what is being taught is appropriate to the child's ability. If the work is too difficult (or too easy) the student will be frustrated and problems may escalate.

Make learning fun

When students have completed set work, allow time to do something they find more enjoyable. For example, access to a computer may encourage a student to work well.

Support belonging through structured activities

Children with disruptive behaviours often feel alienated from others. Structure activities to ensure that the student with the behavioural difficulty feels that he or she belongs in the group.

Use social problem-solving

Try to use everyday situations to reinforce learning of social problem-solving skills. Helping children to identify consequences and generate possible solutions to problems helps them learn to think through situations. It can also reduce the tendency to see others as being at fault or as treating them unfairly. See the KidsMatter Primary information sheets on resolving conflict for further strategies.



This resource is part of a range of KidsMatter Primary information sheets for families and school staff. View them all online at www.kidsmatter.edu.au



Australian Government

Department of Health and Ageing

