

BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT 2020

Behaviour in the classroom: troubleshooting

Everyone has times when pupil behaviour gets to them. **Adele Bates** identifies five common classroom scenarios and positive ways to tackle them.

1. Agghh! They won't stay quiet

This one can feel like a losing battle! But you start tackling it by focusing on yourself.

Step 1

Find a moment to be in the classroom on your own. Then practise the following:

- Put two feet firmly on the floor, weight evenly distributed, with a straight spine (or the nearest you can get to these as your body will allow).
- Take three slow and deep breaths.

When we are nervous, or feel out of control, these are usually the first two things to go. We shift around, our pitch gets higher, we may even try shouting and/or pleading. This all signals to your pupils that you are out of control – of yourself. So, practise the above regularly both on your own, and when the class is there.

Even when they haven't listened to you for the last 37 minutes...re-centre yourself. If you come from there you will feel much more empowered.

Step 2

From the next lesson, choose three or four things that will become your non-negotiables. For example:

- no talking during the register



- listen when you are delivering instructions
- no talking whilst someone else is talking.

Communicate these non-negotiables with the class – put them on the board if they won't listen to them! Then explain what the consequences will be for those people who don't follow them.

Practise these with the pupils. Praise them when they get it right, make them repeat when they don't.

Remain absolutely consistent. I have occasionally taken a whole lesson to get through a register. Was it a lesson wasted? For the following two years they knew that 'no talking during the register' actually meant no talking during the register – they didn't need reminding ever again.

Step 3

Check your seating plan.

- Are pupils where they should be? (Or have chatty friends started migrating to one another?)
- Does the plan need revising? Check specific needs of your pupils: if one can't see the board or the work has not been differentiated to support or challenge, they are more likely to disrupt.

Step 4

Look for the positive – the students who listened more than usual, the pupil who completed a task for the first time. Celebrate these successes, both with the pupils and for yourself. Make more of what you can see.



2. Agghh! They won't stay still

The strategies for this are very similar to above. In addition, check if there are reasons for this – for example pupils with ADHD or SEMH may need ‘brain breaks.’ For double periods sometimes a five minute yoga stretch half way through can actually save time in productivity in the long run.

3. Agghh! I'm getting into arguments

Ouch. This usually occurs when pupils have hit a nerve.

Step 1

In preparation, know what your own triggers are. As humans, we all have certain topics – personal or social – that rile us. When a pupil teeters towards them, close the conversation and re-focus on the work. For example:

Miss, is it true your wife left you?

Not relevant to algebra Mo – so, how are you doing on question 5?

Step 2

It's ok to not deal with issues in the moment.

When you feel your heartbeat speeding up and can hear your voice raising, take a small pause. Use a standard sentence that you always fall back on and be honest with them. For example:

We aren't getting anywhere with this discussion and we're upsetting each other. Let's come back to it at X [and say the specific time]. Here's the extract you need to read. If there's anything you don't understand then the dictionaries are in the corner, and you will be discussing it with your partner soon.



Ensure that you do go back to them at the said time. If necessary, invite another member of staff in to facilitate the conversation. Once, after six weeks of coming to logger heads with one pupil, another teacher led a restorative justice conversation with us. After this, the pupil became one of the most engaged members of the class.

Step 3

Remember you're the adult.

This is not your partner, parent, carer or friend. The person you are arguing with is a minor. Consider why they might be engaging in the argument: are they trying to distract from the work? Do they feel upset or hurt? Have they gone so far they don't know how to get out of it?

It is great that our young people feel confident enough to question authority and society – we need them to do that as adults. It is our job to help them realise when this is appropriate, and we do this best by role modelling.

4. Agghh! They think I'm a pushover/their friend/their nan

This is usually a sign that the boundaries are not in place or consistent. If the pupils begin asking you personal questions (and you never quite finish the work) then tighten up. It can be great for the ego to hear: 'Oh Sir, you're our favourite teacher – Ms Patel is sooooo strict', but this rarely lasts as a useful strategy, and often behaviour suffers further down the line. It can be appropriate to share your humanness in certain situations, but the learning should remain the focus.

Have a look at [Getting it right from the start: positive behaviour strategies](#). If you've been quite 'soft' up to now, do be warned, there may well be a kick back to the new boundaries and consistency, but in the bigger picture of the pupils' education, it is worth sticking to.



5. Agghh! I'm so nervous I can't sleep

Get support.

The [Education Support Partnership](#) is a good place to start.

Talk to your colleagues and mentors, join groups and networks. Most teachers will have been through this at some point, so you are not alone. Share how you're feeling and what's worrying you – others can help you to build strategies of support.

To be a great teacher you need to be sustainable. Put yourself first – otherwise you can't help others.

For more successful strategies on how to tackle behaviour issues in the classroom, take a look at my free video series: [How to Manage Challenging Behaviour in the Classroom](#).

Adele Bates is a teacher, speaker, writer and educator for students with emotional and behavioural difficulties. With over 17 years' experience, Adele teaches pupils in a variety of educational settings, trains others to do so – in schools, universities and conferences, and advises on whole school approaches to supporting these students.