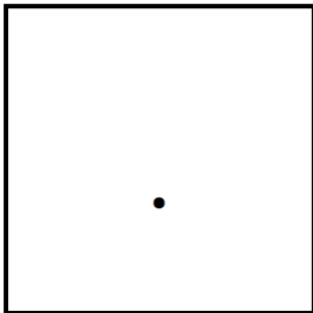


Learning Bulletin

Supporting our school ethos and vision for learning

Behaviour specialist Bill Rogers shares his top ten strategies for tackling low-level disruption in the classroom.

1. The Black Dot in the White Square:



The Black Dot in a White Square: What do you focus on? In Bill Rogers' model, the black dot represents the negative, disruptive behaviour of certain individuals; the white square represents the positive behaviour. By

focusing on the black dot, we are forgetting the white square. This illustrates the need to keep things in perspective and helps to avoid using sweeping statements that can harm positive working relationships

- The class is awful
- The group never works sensibly
- The student is unable to behave
- Everyone is being too noisy

It is so much healthier to reinforce the good rather than focusing on the poor behaviour.

2. Using Positive Language

This is so simple but packs a punch. Instead of "will you stop talking" you say "I'd like everyone listening, please". Instead of "John, stop turning around and distracting Mike" you say "John, I'd like you facing this way and getting on with your work... thanks."

3. Choice direction and 'when...then'

Classic parenting techniques that work brilliantly.

- Jamil, you can either work quietly by yourself or you can come up and sit with me,

- James, you can go next door to work with Mr Anderson or you can work sensibly with Andy as I've asked.
- Richard, you can do exactly what I've asked or get a behaviour mark as warned earlier.

This works so much better than crude belligerent 'do what I say' command language.

4. Pause Direction

Students are in the bubble of their own a lot of the time. Just because you start talking, doesn't mean they hear you. Make a deliberate pause between gaining a student's attention and a direction to ensure they have had sufficient 'take up' time.

Eg. "Michael pause...David...pause...could you face this way and listen, thanks".

You gain their attention, with eye contact, before you say what you want to say. Try it....

5. Take-up Time:

This avoids the horrific teacher domineering – "come here Boy!" nonsense. Simply, "Michael... (pause to gain attention)... come up here a sec please." Then deliberately look away... talk to someone else. Michael will come. He just will. In his own time. It works – try it. It also works in the corridor. "John, come over here for sec please... then walk away to a private area, away from peers. John will follow – and not lose face." You can then have a quiet word about the behaviour without the show-down.

6. 'You establish what you establish'

This refers to the establishment phase with a new class. Right from the start, anything you allow becomes established as allowed; and anything you challenge is established as unacceptable. The classic is noise level, mobile phone use or off-task talking. If you do not challenge students who talk while others talk, you establish that this OK; it is no good getting bothered about it later... Similarly with noise level. If you ask for 'silence' and then accept a general hubbub – then your message is 'silence means general hubbub'. Talk about it

explicitly and reinforce it regularly. The start of a new term is a good time.

At any point, if you are not happy with the behaviour in your lessons, you have to address it explicitly. Otherwise, the message is that you accept it.

7. Teacher Styles

- Don't be an ***Indecisive teacher***: hoping for compliance but not insisting; being timid in the face of a challenge; pleading not directing.
- Don't be the opposite: ***an Autocratic teacher***: using a power relationships to demand compliance without any room for choice. (No-one likes or wants a bullying teacher.)
- Be an ***Assertive teacher***: This teacher *expects compliance* but refuses to rely on power or role status to gain respect. The teacher plans for discipline, uses clear, firm direction and correction, but acts respectfully, keeping the aims of discipline clearly in mind.

The most common problem 'weak teachers' have is that they are not assertive enough; it is their Achilles heel. The tough part is that this comes with experience for many. But you have no choice – it is a key teacher skill that needs to be worked on.

8. Controlled severity

Most great teachers establish very clear boundaries through an occasional dose of 'controlled severity'. A sharper, harder corrective tone that conveys: "No! You will not do that –EVER!" Followed quickly by a return to the normal friendly, warm tone. Ideally, the simple sharp reprimand is all that is needed – that cross tone that says: "I still love you dearly, but you know that is beyond the boundary and you know I will not tolerate it again".

As with parenting, the art is getting the balance: not overused or generated from real anger – thus desensitising children OR under-used and ineffectual. With good 'controlled severity' the boundary is not hit so often –because the kids know exactly what will happen. You know where it is, without nagging or constant negotiation. Teachers who can never sound cross often struggle.

Similarly, teachers who allow genuine anger to build up – also struggle; these are the shouters. Worst of all are teachers who shout but then don't follow up with the consequences. All these groups need to seek help and get help.

9. Partial agreement (aka being the Grown-up)

Teachers should model the behaviour they expect. This includes not wanting the last word. **Partial Agreement** is an essential strategy for avoiding or resolving conflict. It means teachers not trying to have the last word, or asserting their power in a situation when a student disputes their judgement.

The focus is on the primary behaviour, giving students take up time and a choice about consequences. Expecting compliance is key but we should not regard 'giving in' as a sign of weakness. Communicating to students that you may be wrong is an important part of building relationships whilst maintaining your authority. My pet hate is a teacher who wants his pound of flesh; is uncompromising and moans about kids 'getting away with it'. It never ever helps. (This is where I find the concept of Emotional Intelligence helpful...some teachers simply cannot bear it when asked to give ground; it is a problem they need help to recognise.)

10: Behaviour Management is an emotional issue

The overriding message is to recognise explicitly that behaviour is about emotions and associated traits: confidence, self-esteem, peer relationships, group acceptance, empathy, belonging, and resilienceand all the opposites. Crucially, this is for the teacher and the students. There is just no excuse for an angry outburst that has no resolution; for forcing a child into an emotional corner through power or using sarcasm to humiliate. We are the adults. BUT –we are human and we sometimes fail to manage.

Sometimes, things go wrong and as teachers we put ourselves on the line emotionally all day. No other job is like that – where you risk being burned by a teenager just because you ask them to do some work. So, we must acknowledge our emotions. If you do 'lose it'... acknowledge it... "I am angry because..."; "I am raising my voice now because I'm so frustrated..." And then, after a cool-off, as soon as you can, model the behaviour you want to – calm, measured, warm, encouraging and showing you care. 'Repair and Rebuild' is a great concept.

Sometimes, the trick is to take the most difficult student aside, away from a lesson and build up a rapport so that they see you as human – and you see them as more than just a naughty kid.

As with all these things, it is a question of assimilating the philosophy, practicing the strategies and changing habits over time. It takes time.