



BAD BEHAVIORS

And how to turn them around

By Jen Scott Curwood

Have you ever had one of those days when a student is misbehaving and your only response is a sigh? By the time March comes around, students are anticipating spring break and warmer weather—not to mention the rapidly approaching end of the school year. To keep you sane during this March Madness, here's how to cope with seven common challenges.

1 "JOHN PUSHED IN LINE AND MARIA SAID A BAD WORD AND LAURA SAID ..."

Olivia has made it her business to let you know *exactly* what happens on the playground. While she thinks that she's helping you to enforce the rules, her classmates have branded her as

a tattletale. (And frankly, you can't help but agree.)

QUICK RESPONSE:

The next time you hear "Teacher! Teacher!," ask yourself, "Is this telling or tattling?" Most 5- to 10-year-olds tattle on a classmate for the same reason they tug on your pant leg—simply to get a few moments of your attention. If this is the case, try simply replying, "Thank you for saying that." If a child is telling you something serious ("Lila's sticking her pencil in the light socket"), then obviously you need to address the situation immediately.

LONG-TERM SOLUTION: Try making a tattle box. Students write down their name, the date, and what they want to tell you on slips of paper and put the slips in the box. Make a point of telling students that you will read their notes daily and get back to them if it is necessary. But be clear that students can still come to you if it's an emergency. Discuss examples of "good" telling (such as the pencil-in-socket scenario above) versus "bad" tattling. This technique will cut down on the "bad" tattling, and it's also not a bad way to practice penmanship.

Cindy Lynch, a specialist in gifted education

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in Oxford, Alabama, reports success with her tattletale students through bibliotherapy—the use of books to help students solve problems. “It works well with students without being confrontational or punitive,” she says. Try reading Jeanie Franz Ransom’s *Don’t Squeal Unless It’s a Big Deal: A Tale of Tattletales* together.



2 “JAKE’S BOTHERING ME AGAIN!”

Whether you’re reading *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* or reviewing subtraction, Jake always has the wiggles. He speaks out and bumps into the other children, who then add *their* voices to the chorus. It’s like a chemical reaction.

QUICK RESPONSE: It’s hard not to resort to the broken record method. “Jake. Jake, I said no. Jake, I’m counting to three.” Instead of repeatedly reprimanding an easily distracted student,

Sister St. John Delany, Ph.D., a professor of education at Pace University, recommends having him or her sit next to you.

“Sometimes, that’s all you need to do,” she says.

“You can also place your hand gently on a shoulder, which can be a soothing influence.”

LONG-TERM SOLUTION:

With any activity, it’s critical that you establish a purpose and convey your expectations to students. Write a brief outline of your lesson on the board and review appropriate behavior, emphasizing how distractions will affect the whole class. “Because I’m going to read aloud, eyes should be on me. And we all want to find out what happens next, so please raise your hand before talking or asking a question.” It sounds simple, but this will help cut down on disruptive behavior. Delaney also suggests that less is more. “Children will

stop listening if your explanations are too lengthy.”

3 “WHAT ARE WE DOING NOW, MRS. SMITH?”

You just said that it was time to clean up and go to music. Three times, no less. But Henry is still surrounded by construction paper, and Cara is pulling on your sleeve asking what she’s supposed to do. Sometimes it seems like your class has tuned you out.

QUICK RESPONSE: Try a strategy called “Show, Don’t Say.” For instance, tell your students, “You have this many minutes to complete the activity,” while holding up five fingers. By having to visually focus on your hand, they’ll be more likely to remember your instructions.

LONG-TERM SOLUTION: You can appeal to students’ multiple senses in other ways, too. Polly Matyorauta, the program coordinator at the Center for Excellence in Education at Central

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Michigan University, suggests trying a technique called visual paragraphing. Stand in place and say, "First, you will do this," and explain your instructions briefly. Then take a big step to your left and say, "Second, you will" Then take another step to your left and say, "And third, you will" By moving your body across the room, students will have to process your directions visually as well as aurally. This technique works especially well for tasks with several steps.

4 "I DON'T KNOW WHERE MY HOMEWORK IS."

Either the dog ate it, his little sister colored on it, or his mom lost it—Thomas always seems to have an excuse.

His desk is messy and his locker even worse. As his fifth-grade teacher, you're worried about how he will cope with the increased

demands of middle school, let alone high school.

QUICK RESPONSE: Try establishing more routines, says Joan Bohmann, the director of Professional Standards and Continuing Professional Development at the National Association of School Psychologists. "Have a set time every day that homework is collected," she suggests. "And use a designated basket in your room for assignments."

LONG-TERM SOLUTION: Be sure parents understand the expectations you have for your students so that they can help their children better meet them. "Organizational skills aren't always intuitive for kids," Bohmann says. You can help students learn these skills through having colored folders for each subject, with one pocket for homework and the other for completed work. Some teach-



ers will have students as young as first grade use assignment notebooks and require daily parent signatures on homework. What works for one kid may not work for another. It can be tough to have a dozen different systems, but some flexibility will help even the most disorganized child.

5 "IT'S TOO HARD. I DON'T KNOW HOW TO START!"

It's time for students to work in their reading journals, but Katelyn is just staring at hers. Soon she rests her head on her desk and refuses to work altogether. It's always a battle with her.

QUICK RESPONSE: Often students like Katelyn are feeling overwhelmed, so start by breaking the task down into smaller steps. Matyorauta suggests saying, "Let's brainstorm first. When I come back in two minutes, tell me what your

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first sentence will be about.”

LONG-TERM SOLUTION: Your ultimate goal is to show students how to break tasks down into more manageable steps on their own. For now, walk them through the process. For many students, the hardest part is getting started. As a class, talk about what to do if kids are feeling stuck. Suggest brainstorming with a partner or checking a textbook. Once you’ve shown them how to do that—and taken your time to work one-on-one with them—they will be better able to tackle the task at hand.

6 “ELI CALLED ME AN UGLY STUPID HEAD!” “NO I DIDN’T.” “YES, YOU DID!”

Elijah and Cole are at it again. As soon as they walk in the door from recess, Cole runs up to you, saying, “Eli called me a bad name!”

QUICK RESPONSE: Take Eli and Cole



aside and talk about how words can be hurtful. Encourage them to talk about their feelings using “I statements” and to apologize to one another.

LONG-TERM SOLUTION:

When it comes to dealing with teasing, or even simple personality conflicts, prevention is the key. Brandon Beck, a fifth-grade teacher in Ossining, New York, plays a song for his students called “Don’t Laugh at Me” by Peter, Paul, and Mary. The lyrics talk about issues of belonging and of bullying: “Don’t laugh at me; don’t call me names / Don’t get your pleasure from my pain.” After discussing the song with his students, Beck then has them draw life-size outlines of them-

selves on a sheet of a paper. “On the outside, they’ll write examples of negative behaviors, or put-downs. On the inside, they’ll list some positive behaviors, called put-ups,” he says. These activities are part of the Don’t Laugh at Me curriculum developed by Operation Respect, which can be ordered free of charge (www.dontlaugh.org).

7 “MR. HAYWARD, YOU NEED TO LEARN TO CONTROL YOUR KIDS.”

Argh. Your principal comes to you after seeing your little monkeys swinging from the drinking fountain while walking from gym to lunch. You always have students line up neatly to go out, but the order falls apart faster than kids can say, “Hey! There’s gum on the floor!”

QUICK RESPONSE: First, apologize and let your principal know you will address the issue. Then, the next time you leave the room with your class, give the children clear expectations (“We will walk

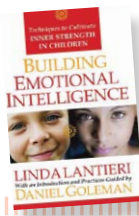
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in single file and we will not talk in the hallway”), convey the consequences (“If you choose to talk or to run, you will stay inside for recess”), and give a lot of positive reinforcement (“Kate, you’re doing such a great job staying in line!”).

LONG-TERM SOLUTION: A school-wide behavior policy is invaluable. Not only does that keep expectations consistent as students work with different teachers throughout the course of the day, it also carries from grade to grade. At the Claremont School, where Beck teaches, they’ve adopted a national model called Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). PBIS focuses on prevention of negative behaviors; the teachers at Claremont also use a “ticket system” to reward students who follow the rules. “It was really easy to integrate the program,” Beck says. “It’s also been very motivating for our students.” That’s the kind of news you want to hear during March Madness. □

3 New Books on Behavior

Research reveals that students really are learning something when they play.

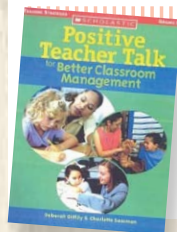


● BUILDING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

by Linda Lantieri and Daniel Goleman (*Sounds True, 2008*). Educator Linda Lantieri joins forces with psychologist Daniel Goleman to offer a guide for helping children quiet their minds, calm their bodies, and manage their emotions.

● WHAT TO DO WITH THE KID WHO...

by Kay Burke (*Corwin, 2008*). ...constantly disrupts class, the kid who never participates, or the kid who never finishes homework. Kay Burke offers updated techniques to help both new and experienced teachers tackle classroom challenges.



● POSITIVE TEACHER TALK FOR BETTER CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

by Deborah Diffily and Charlotte Sassman (*Scholastic, 2007*). Two teachers share their ideas for what to actually say to kids when they’re acting out. The way we talk to students affects how they learn and how they feel about themselves as learners.

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