

# 1.

The simplest, most overlooked technique for getting any pupil to work in your lesson ... **Targets.**

**Targets** are so important for re-engaging a pupil who is just starting to waver. Let's say you have a pupil who's messing around, off-task being mildly disruptive. It may well be that he's just not clear about what he's supposed to be doing, he may be confused, he may have misheard or he may just be a bit bored. An excellent tip for getting this pupil back on task is to define a very clear work target for him to achieve, and a set time in which to do so...

Teacher: 'Tony, this is your target – I want you to get to number 6 by half past ten.

(This is said very quietly so as not to disrupt the pace of the lesson or raise the attention of other pupils).

The target gives them something to work towards and reminds them you're supporting them – it shows them that you're interested in them and care about their progress. It gives them very clear instructions as to how to succeed in your lesson.

Boys in particular, work much better when they know exactly what is expected of them and some pupils can only cope with small chunks of work at a time. Target setting is perfect for achieving both these aims and can have a magical calming effect on most pupils who are starting to play up.

I use this method in all my classes. Once I've given them their tasks I go round and put a pencil mark where I expect them to get to in a set time.

'By ten past 11 Sarah you need to have completed the work to this mark – that's your target.'

It's best to do this quietly because some pupils are self-conscious about having smaller targets than others and for others, the fact that I give them more work as their target can lead to quarrels.

Once you've done this a few times they get used to it and accept their individual targets quite happily. In fact, in most lessons, I have pupils actually asking me to give them a target!

In every class, there are very badly behaved pupils who are, in fact very capable. With such children, I explain, in private, that I'll be giving them a bigger target (more work) than anyone else. If I did this without explanation there would be an uproar, but by taking the pupil to one side before the lesson and quietly saying something along the lines of ...

'Shaun, I'm going to set you a high target today because I know you can excel at this. I wouldn't be doing my job right if I didn't give you the chance to show me what you can do. – OK?'

I normally get a focused, hard-working lesson from that student! They seldom let you down when you do that.

The bottom line is – set individual targets, they work wonders!

2.

## **Ten Magic words to make a disruptive student behave**

I have found an excellent phrase for making children really think about their behaviour and enabling them to choose more sensible alternatives. I add this phrase once I've explained what the consequence will be.

### **'Is that what you want to happen? It's your choice'**

So our old statement would be 'If you don't manage to get the work that I've set for you finished, you will end up losing 5 minutes of break.'

and our new statement would be ...

'If you don't manage to get the work that I've set for you finished, you will end up losing 5 minutes of break. Is that what you want to happen? It's your choice.'

By adding this phrase you're doing two very important things here – making them really think about where their behaviour is leading them – is that what you want to happen? and then reminding them that the way out is completely within their control – that they have a clear choice – It's your choice.

In effect this helps them out of the hole they've dug for themselves – it gives them a ladder - and it helps them take responsibility for their behaviour.

## How to say 'no' to a pupil without causing an argument

When a student makes an unreasonable demand it's difficult to know what to say. Some children – particularly those with limited social skills and behavioural difficulties find it very difficult to accept a categorical No.

One way around this is to say 'yes' instead – but to also add a condition. I call this the 'Conditional Yes'.

Student: 'Miss, can we do a poster for this lesson?'

Teacher: 'NO.'

Student: 'Why not? We did one last lesson! I'm doing a poster!'

And on and on and on.

The conditional yes is an answer to their question consisting of three parts:

- That sounds great.
- The only drawback is...
- So how about this as an alternative ...?

Student: 'Sir, can we do a poster?'

Teacher: 'Hey what a good idea Brian – especially after the fantastic job you made of the last ones.' (*That sounds great.*)

Teacher: 'The thing is, we've got to get this English task done as part of your coursework.' (*The only drawback is ...*)

Teacher: 'How about you illustrate your coursework when you've finished?' or 'Get your coursework finished and then you can do a poster about it.' (*Here's an alternative ...*)

It works almost every time as long as you are firm about the drawback and offer a reasonable alternative. Kids know the rules – they just like pushing them so we need to show that we will accommodate their desires (on our terms) whilst remaining in total control.

## 4.

### **A simple sentence that reduces disruption by 50%**

In their book, 'You Can ... You know you can.' (2001), Maines and Robinson found a 50% reduction in disruptive behaviours following the introduction of a structured script for teachers for use when giving directions.

They state that communication can be improved and a situation can be de-personalized when staff begin their instructions with 'When you ... (state behaviour)' and ends with an explanation of the resulting effect then 'I ... (state what the behaviour causes)'.

For example, rather than saying 'You need to stop interrupting' or 'You're holding up the lesson', we would say ...

'Vicky, when you shout across the room it disturbs other people. Please get on with your work without shouting.'

Or:

'Greg, when you interrupt me, it makes it difficult for people to hear and I can't teach the lesson properly. Please listen quietly.'

Following a tight script like this makes you focus on what you're saying and you're then less likely to lose your temper.

## 5.

### i) **Move around the room to show you're in charge.**

Moving around the room not only keeps students on their guard, preventing secret plans being hatched in isolated corners of the room; it also gives a subtle but powerful message that you are in control of the whole room.

Invading their personal space (within 2-3 feet) is an effective way of highlighting your confidence and authority. I'm not saying you have to threaten them or scare them – just use your presence to get down to their level when you're chatting to them/helping them with their work to show that you're happy, comfortable and confident in their territory.

Remember, it is your room so you dictate what happens there.

### ii) **Use 'Withitness' to project control**

*Withitness* is a term which describes a teacher's awareness of what is going on in all parts of the classroom at all times. We commonly refer to this as having eyes in the back of your head.

To be effective, your pupils must perceive that you really do know exactly what is going on in all areas of the room. If any pupils are off- task and fooling around, you need to stamp it out straight away and send a clear message that you have seen them and that they need to get back to work.

This awareness improves with practice and every time you catch a pupil, or group of pupils off task, whispering etc. your reputation and credibility is improved. Pupils are always impressed by a teacher who is in total control and the more you display this 'withitness', the more control you will appear to have. Students are more likely to stay on-task if they know you are aware of what they are doing at all times – perhaps just because they think there's a good chance they'll get caught.

By systematically scanning the room, and keeping your back to the wall as you move throughout the class you will be more aware of what is going on and able to pinpoint the trouble.

### **i) Use your body language to show you're in charge**

Pupils are experts at noticing when our limits are being reached and some will take advantage of a teacher they feel is 'losing it'.

Standing limply, head on one side or looking towards the floor with one leg curled behind the other, hands clasped together will appear as an open invitation for many pupils to walk all over you. Other tell-tale signs that we aren't in control include touching our faces or wringing our hands.

An upright, symmetrical stance suggests tension, while an asymmetrical stance – leaning against the wall etc. – gives the impression that you are more relaxed. The effectiveness of these two positions has been researched, testing the time it takes for a class to fall silent when instructions are given from each stance. In every case, the more relaxed person i.e. more comfortable and in control, as portrayed by the asymmetrical stance, got the best results.

But this isn't just about signaling control. When explaining sanctions to pupils or giving instructions the wrong body language can drown out the message you're trying to convey and create additional tension which exacerbates an already fragile situation.

Bulging eyes, stern frowns and pointing fingers obviously isn't conducive to effective communication and a threatening stance - legs apart, chest out and hands-on-hips or behind the back will be viewed as an aggressive threat.

If we habitually adopt postures which could be perceived as threatening, we need to be aware of this and practice other ways of sitting, standing and interacting in order to convey absolute composure and lessen the chances of stimulating an aggressive response.

### **ii) Use eye contact to show you're in charge**

Maintaining appropriate eye contact can be uncomfortable for young people who lack social skills but it is essential that pupils are looking at us when we give praise and instructions. Avoiding eye contact can betray a lack of confidence, interest and/or respect.

A few seconds of eye contact can trigger powerful feelings and whether we're trying to show our pleasure through praise; encouragement through a quiet word or our displeasure through a strict instruction, eye contact is essential if the real meaning behind the words is to be conveyed effectively.

Remember also that it is natural behaviour for males to stare at each other in challenging situations they perceive as threatening so we have to be careful not to illicit the same behaviour by prolonging eye contact.

Keep a roving eye – sweep the room and show that everything is noticed, but don't provoke an aggressive response.

## **Make sure Transitions are tight to maintain control.**

Student behaviour is influenced by the smoothness and effectiveness of transitions between tasks in a lesson. Failure to gain the students' attention, unclear and confusing directions, using lengthy explanations, dwelling too much on the details rather than focusing on key points, and allowing students to take too much time moving from one task to the next contribute to student misbehaviour.

Smooth and effective transitions are one of the most important techniques in maintaining student involvement and class control and one of the best ways I've found to achieve this is to have a lesson plan up on the wall/board with a list of the activities the pupils will be doing.

At the start of the lesson, I spend 2 minutes going through this list and then write up suggested timings for each individual activity ...

Ok this is the plan for today's lesson ...

- Intro (me talking) – 5 minutes
- Practical Demonstration – 10 minutes
- Video clip/reinforcement/scaffolding exercise – 10 minutes
- Independent or group learning – 20 minutes
- Review/feedback to class/plenary – 10 minutes (This is usually some sort of 'fun' review activity or simple quiz game).

The types of activities will vary from lesson to lesson and subject to subject but I like to ensure I have a variety of tasks most in lessons. Once you have gone over this list you can then direct the pupils to their next activity as and when they finish a preceding task. When they know what is coming next, the transition is much smoother.

Write the list up on or near the board and then wipe off or cross out each stage once it has been completed. They benefit from seeing the lesson. The lesson is less daunting – and knowing exactly where they are at any time in terms of the lesson plan helps keep them settled.

**If you maintain their interest, you keep control**

When students experience boredom bad behaviour starts to emerge. Their attention wanders, they start to work mechanically without giving much thought to what they're doing, or they try to create some excitement through fooling around with a classmate or engaging in other forms of misbehaviour.

You can reduce boredom by providing pupils with a feeling of progress, offering them challenges throughout the lesson, and being enthusiastic. Variety reduces and alleviates boredom. Changing the level of challenges, restructuring groups, extending the task, and using different teaching styles add variety to the lesson.

Other examples of ways to keep your class interesting include:

1. Incorporate Mystery Into Your Lessons
2. Don't Repeat Classroom Material
3. Create Classroom Games
4. Give Your Students Choices
5. Use Technology
6. Don't Take Teaching so Seriously
7. Make Your Lessons Interactive
8. Relate Material to Your Students' Lives

## **Back Up Techniques (for Thursday)**

### **The 6 steps to getting any child on task**

#### *Important:*

Your response to disruption must always be less intrusive for the rest of your class than whatever is causing the initial disruption. Some teachers react to minor infractions with all guns blazing and create more disruption than the pupil caused in the first place, which obviously makes no sense whatsoever and invariably leads to classroom chaos.

#### **STEP 1: IGNORE THE BEHAVIOUR!**

##### *Planned Ignoring*

I'm not saying let things go unnoticed but there are times when the best thing to do is completely ignore very obvious attention-seeking behaviour.

At a residential special school I was working in I remember a huge commotion one break time. A boy had somehow managed to climb up onto a wall of the car park and was threatening to throw bricks at the cars below. This obviously gained the attention of a lot of the other pupils as well as 6 or 7 members of staff.

After a few minutes, the pupils were duly herded off to classrooms but the astonishing thing was that 5 of the staff remained and this obviously continued to give the boy the audience he wanted. He continued his threatening behaviour. Eventually, all but one of the staff went inside and the remaining teacher feigned disinterest. The boy climbed down when the thrill of playing up to the crowd had been removed.

Ignoring challenging behaviour does not come naturally. It is difficult to do because it's the opposite to what we believe we should do; after all, isn't the aim of classroom management to tackle bad behaviour? Are we not supposed to do something about the bad behaviour we face on a daily basis?

We automatically respond to any behaviour that captures our attention, causes us stress or threatens us in some way – usually by shouting, giving a good telling off or giving lengthy lectures about proper conduct. But this is exactly the wrong thing to do.

When we give our attention to a child who is misbehaving or has caused us stress, we are effectively giving them exactly what they want – our attention. We are giving the message: When you act like this, I get all emotional and give you lots of attention. Do it again if you want some more attention from me.

A far more effective way of dealing with these attempts to gain our attention is the act of Planned Ignoring. Simply put, this means totally withdrawing attention from the child- acting neutral, looking away from them, not speaking and generally feigning total disinterest in them.

Switching your attention to other members of the class who are behaving appropriately, verbally praising them and showing interest in their work can often put an end to instances of attention-seeking silliness.

If that fails, then you need to move to step 2.

## STEP 2: USE NON-VERBAL SIGNALS

Non-verbal communication in the classroom allows you to signal your authority and deal with pupils silently, without disturbing the flow of a lesson.

If a member of your class is disrupting a class-teaching session or is becoming disinterested, it is far more effective to deal with that one person without attracting the attention of the other members of the class as this would affect the pace of your lesson.

As soon as you use your voice to a level audible to the rest of the class, you've lost momentum. As soon as you stop, mid-flow, to address a problem pupil, you've lost momentum. Once this happens there is a real chance of a small disruption ruining a whole lesson.

A frown, or shake of the head, the discreet wagging of a finger, a finger to lips or raised palm is far less likely to lead to conflict and disruption than a verbal reprimand which attracts the attention of the rest of the class.

And here's another good reason to use Non-verbal gestures and eye signals... They not only keep distractions to a minimum – they also build into a kind of private dialogue which can strengthen relationships with your worst pupils. There is nothing like making a child feel special if you want to improve your relationship with them and what could be more special than having a silent, secret exchange that the rest of the class are unaware of?

If pupils don't respond to non-verbal signals, your physical presence is the next tool to use.

## STEP 3: GET CLOSE UP

Walking around the class or next to an 'off-task' pupil is the next logical step. Again, this must be done without detracting from the lesson activity – it needs to be a smooth, seamless interaction.

You might pull up a chair at the back of the room next to a rowdy table and continue your lesson from this position for a while. I often spend part of my lesson sitting close to my most challenging pupils. I can give them the extra support they need and we occasionally have little breaks and a quick chat which strengthen our relationships.

If your close proximity fails to deter a disruptive pupil, it's time to have words...

#### STEP 4: USE VERBAL SIGNALS – OFFER SUPPORT

When under pressure we can be pushed to the limit by some pupils - our reaction is often to speak in a louder and louder voice or jump straight in with threats of punishment. This has the opposite effect to the one we desire. It shows a lack of control and unfortunately, many pupils come from undisciplined, chaotic homes where shouting is the norm so it has little effect. Raising our voices is often a source of great amusement to bolder pupils who know they have succeeded in winding you up. And going straight into 'punishment mode' will usually lead to pupils putting their barriers up. Once they are on the defensive it is difficult to make progress with them.

Thankfully there are a couple of other ways to get reluctant learners back on task (even if all our preventive measures have failed).

Let's say Brian isn't getting on with his work. Our usual first response might be something along the lines of 'Brian, get on with your work.' If that doesn't work we would probably increase the severity in the form of a louder voice, harsher tone, perhaps even threatening a consequence of some sort but the overall message is the same... Brian, get on with your work.

But Brian doesn't want to work. So, no matter how many times we tell him to do the same thing, it's not likely to have the desired effect – at least not until a sufficiently inconvenient consequence is brought into the picture. Let's look at a couple of alternative approaches to getting Brian out of his stubborn cycle of refusal.

Offering support can never be seen as confrontational by a pupil no matter how wound up they are. If we offer help and support there is more chance, they will listen to us than if we start reading the riot act.

You don't have to jump straight into the straight-laced authoritarian mode and bark instructions like a sergeant major; sometimes a bit of humour to lighten and deflate a situation is all that's needed to get a class back on track.

And don't always assume that they're messing around just to annoy you either. Remember that there is always a reason for their bad behaviour and it may well be that they are confused or upset about something. Therefore, your first verbal response to a pupil who is misbehaving might be ...

'What's the matter? You seem to be distracted, tell me what's wrong so I can help you get on.'

Or

'Have I not explained the task properly? What do you want me to do to help you?'

Or

‘Is something wrong with the work? Tell me how to help you get on.’

Through this supportive questioning you very clearly show that you are there for the pupil, you show that you care; but you also show that you’re fully aware that they are not doing as they should be - without actually criticizing them for their behaviour. This simple questioning alone can quickly prevent a pupil from becoming more disruptive.

‘Are you managing with those questions Anthony? Do you need some help?’

‘Can you see the board from there Simon? Do you want to move a bit closer?’

‘Have you got everything you need? Just ask if there’s something you need to borrow.’

### **STEP 5: OFFER LIMITED CHOICES ...**

In line with the Needs-Focused philosophy, offering choices is an incredibly powerful means to getting compliance from pupils. This is basically because it is far nicer to be given a choice than to be cornered into making a decision you don’t want to. Limited choices are questions we give to pupils to sweeten our instructions. It is far less hostile and therefore invites fewer arguments from pupils.

‘Do you want to use a blue pen or a black pen to do the work? Do you want me to help you or Jason to help you do the work? Do you want to sit here or over there?’

‘Do you want to try this question or that question first?’

These limited choices still convey the message You’re going to do the work but because they allow a certain amount of autonomy they are easier for the pupil to accept. Nobody likes being told what to do and when you’re an angry pupil, being seen to be under the total control of the teacher can be too much for them to stomach. Giving them limited choices gives some control back to them – being able to make a choice for themselves, however small or controlled that choice is, often allows them to save face.

### **STEP 6: USE PRAISE – PRAISE OTHER PUPILS WHO ARE DOING THE RIGHT THING AND BE READY TO PRAISE THE PUPIL IN QUESTION THE MOMENT THEIR BEHAVIOUR CHANGES**

An important part of these four steps is to be vigilant for opportunities to praise positive behaviour and be ready to give your attention to the pupil, should he start to behave appropriately. This can turn a negative situation around very quickly.

‘John what you did then was perfect. That was exactly what I was asking for. I know how difficult it can be doing the right thing when you’re wound up – so well done!’

Similarly, heaping praise on other pupils in the room who are already doing what is expected, (proximity praise) can alter the whole atmosphere in your classroom and create what is called the Ripple Effect.

The ripple effect occurs when you praise good behaviour in one student, and this in turn positively influences the behaviour of other students. The ripple effect is influenced by the sincerity of the praise.

Most people respond positively to praise, we all know that, so if you foster an atmosphere of high expectation, where those who are following your instructions are rightly given the attention they deserve, there is a good chance that other members of the class will strive to achieve the same recognition.

Just to re-cap, these are the 6 steps to get them on task – the techniques for dealing with minor disruption ...

1. Ignore it
2. Use hand gestures and eye signals
3. Move in close
4. Offer Support
5. Offer limited choices
6. Use proximity and personal praise