

BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS IN THE CLASSROOM: WHAT'S A PARENT TO DO?

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While children can display a wide range of behavior problems in school, from disruptive talking in the classroom to fighting and name-calling on the playground, the reasons for bad behavior are usually simple. If a child is acting out a lot in school, the assumption is either that she's having strong feelings and needs a hand with getting those feelings out, or that something in school is really not working for her. As a parent, you can do a number of things at home to help your child deal with her feelings. You can also change the situation in school so your child has a better time there.

When children are disruptive in the classroom it can cause a lot of problems for their classmates and their teachers. But in the long run, it's the disruptive child herself who is most impacted, on both a social and educational level. So why are some kids disruptive at school? Sometimes it's the classroom environment itself that triggers disruptive behavior in some children. Often kids who are looking pretty okay at home or can manage in small groups, when they hit a classroom situation with 25 or 30 kids, 1 adult, a lot of structure, and few choices, you start seeing a lot of the behavior problems show up. They can't handle the kinds of rule impositions that a classroom involves.

Almost immediately teachers act upon disruptive behavior if it includes bullying, teasing, hitting and name calling. The red flag for kids who are exhibiting really serious behavior problems like hurting other kids is usually raised quite quickly.

What some teacher's consider to be disruptive, others don't. In other words, it will depend upon an individual teacher's tolerance. Some teacher's are just more tolerant, so sometimes we see kids who have a good year and a bad year, a good year and a bad year, depending upon the tolerance of the teacher.

If your child is being pegged disruptive on a regular basis, it's probably wise to talk to the teacher and get specifics on what the teacher considers disruptive. Also talk to your child to understand why your child is behaving this way. Without realizing it, disruptive behavior may be your child's way of making friends or getting more attention. And disruptive behavior can be a sign that your child is frustrated due to a learning disability or is bored because she is under challenged. All in all, disruptive classroom behavior needs to be explored because it could signal that something more is going on than meets the eye.

Classroom behavior is one of the trickiest issues teachers face today. Disruptive behavior results in lost curriculum time and creates a classroom environment that is not always conducive to learning. One key to nipping behavioral problems in the bud is to promote

positive behavior before problems arise. This takes some planning, but the following article will provide you with practical tips to help you lay a foundation for positive classroom behavior.

It probably won't surprise you that classroom control/discipline is rated among the top four challenges teachers face in public schools today, according to the Journal of Educational Psychology [Poll of Teachers' Attitudes Toward the Public Schools](#) (January 2005). In fact, almost half the teachers polled said that discipline was a serious problem in their schools. Not surprisingly, when the public was polled on the same issues, they ranked classroom control/discipline as the number one challenge.

Unfortunately, teachers face not only the challenge of managing their students' behavior while teaching the curriculum. They also face many conflicting theories about how to manage it: logical consequences, behavior management and assertive discipline, to name just a few. Of course, there is no one "correct" way to encourage positive classroom behavior. But if you begin with a good foundation, it is possible. Here are a few time-tested suggestions that can help you build that foundation.

How to help your child at school:

Assess the situation: Start by spending time in your child's classroom (volunteer as an aide for a day or two) to see what's going on. Or have a child therapist, school psychologist, or learning specialist evaluate your child in the classroom. Look at the teacher's teaching style and your child's learning style: Is a mismatch in the teacher-child relationship causing your child to feel misunderstood or angry? Go out to the playground at recess: Is your child being teased or frightened and then acting out in an attempt to get someone to notice she's in trouble? You may learn a lot by spending a day in your child's environment and paying attention to her interactions with the people around her.

Check out your child's relationship with her teacher: This basic dynamic can make or break a child's experience in the classroom. Often when a child is having behavior problems in school, it comes down to a feeling that the teacher doesn't like her. To be able to learn and to act well, it's really important to children to feel liked. Often it's enough just to bring the problem to the teacher's attention, but if your child somehow pushes the teacher's buttons in a way that makes it difficult for the teacher to like her, as a last resort you can look into moving your child to a different classroom. Or see if an adult who likes your child (such as a teacher's aide) can be added to the classroom; sometimes this is enough to smooth out troublesome behavior.

Work with the teacher: Just having to sit still during class is a big challenge for some children. The teacher may be open to letting your child move around or do other activities if you talk to him about it. "

Strategize: Setting up conferences that include you, your child, and her teacher. Brainstorm together about how to make school go well for your child. You may want to

devise a signal your child can give her teacher, such as raising two fingers, when she's feeling frustrated and restless and is about to start acting out; at these times, the teacher could give her something special to do, such as taking papers to the principal's office. Or the teacher could think of a signal, such as a tap on your child's shoulder, to remind her to behave without embarrassing her in front of the class.

Give your child a break: Sometimes the daily grind of going to a place where she is not succeeding can push a child into behavior problems. If you can, try taking a day off from school and work every once in a while to do something with your child that she really enjoys, whether it's playing a Monopoly marathon, spending the day at the mall, or just hanging out in the backyard listening to the radio. Take advantage of the times when she is home sick to get close and pay special attention to her.

Help your child remember that you care about her: Knowing that she is loved can pull a child out of a downward spiral. It can sometimes work to give your child a special reminder of you, something she can put in her pocket, like a little note that says 'I love you and you're great,' Or put a picture in her lunchbox of the two of you hugging.

Tell your child that she can decide where her mind goes: If your child is having a miserable time at school, she can think of you, or of the fun she's going to have after school, rather than stay trapped in bad feelings. A great example of this idea is in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, where Harry encounters some monsters called dementors who suck all the happiness out of their victims. The antidote that a powerful wizard gives Harry is to think of the best time he ever had; this allows him to gain power over the monsters.

Get outside help: If you think it's necessary, get recommendations for a good therapist for your child. Interview possible candidates on the phone, and tell them you're looking for someone who can help your child work through the emotional issues that are making her act out at school. Tell them you're not interested in a medication approach but are looking for someone who can work with your child's teacher and the school system and give the teacher ideas on how to handle her behavior.