



This practice guide will support you to respond to behaviours associated with disengagement and disruption to maintain a safe and supportive learning environment for all students, and support students to focus on their learning. Positive learning environments are created when teachers establish and maintain positive teacher–student relationships and proactively teach, model, revise and reinforce the expected behaviours, routines and rules with their students. In a positive learning environment, expected behaviours are recognised, encouraged and reinforced using acknowledgement and praise.

While proactive classroom management is a preventative strategy, at times, for a range of reasons, students will demonstrate disengaged and disruptive behaviours. The aim of any intervention is to support student safety and focus on learning. Any response to disengaged or disruptive behaviour needs to focus on reminding students of the behaviour expectations or teaching students the skills needed to achieve these.

Goss et al. (2017) define **disengaged behaviour** as passive compliance, including passive disengagement, with little or sporadic engagement in learning, such as sitting quietly but not listening to the teacher, half-completion of tasks and requiring reminders to get work done.

They define **disruptive behaviour** as low-level actions that impact negatively on teaching and other students' learning, such as calling out, interrupting others, being restless, getting out of seats and not following the teacher's instructions.

**To manage disengaged and disruptive behaviours:**

1. Monitor all students.
2. Use a non-verbal correction.
3. Use a verbal correction.
4. Give a choice.
5. Implement the consequence.

Responding to disengaged and disruptive behaviours requires several skills: acknowledgement and praise, circulation, clear communication, deliberately pausing, non-verbal correction, scanning and voice control.

Always interact with students with a calm tone, respect and politeness – for example, greeting students on first encounter and completing instructions with 'Thank you'. Positively frame communication, stating what students need to do rather than what they don't (that is, avoid using words like 'no' and 'don't'). This models respectful and polite interactions for students and creates a positive and supportive learning environment.

It's important to use responses that support students to correct the behaviour not meeting expectations and re-focus on their learning. Students will often respond to a non-verbal or verbal correction, but sometimes it will take a combination or escalation of responses to correct behaviour and support students to re-engage in their learning.

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Combining a deliberate pause with proximity, 'the look' or a gesture is powerful in helping to address disengaged and disruptive behaviours. Students will notice you're aware of their behaviour and will likely respond with a positive change.

Give the students time and space to respond to the non-verbal correction and acknowledge them correcting their behaviour (for example, thumbs up, 'Thank you' or a smile). This positive interaction helps maintain connections with the students while correcting their behaviour.

It's important to note that some students may not understand or respond positively to some subtle non-verbal corrections and will need clearer verbal corrections. Taking the time to teach students expected responses to non-verbal corrections may reduce the need for more intrusive responses over time.

### 3. Use a verbal correction

Verbal corrections aim to address students' disengaged or disruptive behaviour by reminding them of expectations and allowing them time and space to respond positively and re-engage with their learning.

Verbal correction should be done with minimal disruption to the flow and pace of a lesson. First, acknowledge students demonstrating the expected behaviour and deliberately pause to allow students not demonstrating

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- **Quick group or whole-class reminder of expectations** using clear communication and an assertive voice. Provide students with a short reminder of the expected behaviour. Allow time and space for students to action the correction and acknowledge when the behaviour expectation is met.

'Can we all make sure we're using the equipment to complete the maths activity only.' *[Pause, scan and acknowledge those who've followed the direction.]* 'Thank you.'

- **Anonymous correction** using clear communication and voice control to state the expected behaviour and identify that there are students not meeting it. Allow the students time and space to action the correction and acknowledge when the behaviour expectation is met.

'Thank you to those students who are facing the front, looking and listening.' *[Pause and scan.]* 'I can see 2 people whose attention is not with us yet.' *[Pause and acknowledge those who have followed the direction.]* 'Thank you.'

- **Quick correction**, using clear communication and voice control to provide the students with a short identification of the expected behaviour. Allow the students time and space to correct their behaviour and acknowledge when the behaviour expectation is met.

'[Student name], focusing on your own work.' *[Pause and acknowledge the student making the correction.]* 'Thank you [Student].'

In some instances, you may need to provide a prompt for the students to engage in the positive learning behaviour – for example, 'Show me [state expected behaviour]. Thank you'.

After using a verbal correction, allow the students time and space to demonstrate the positive expected behaviours. Acknowledge when the behaviour expectation is met to reinforce the expected behaviours and support the learning of that behaviour while also maintaining a positive relationship with the students.

## 4. Give a choice

Some students may not respond positively to non-verbal and verbal corrections and continue to engage in disengaged or disruptive behaviour. A choice can function as a prompt for both the positive alternative behaviour the student should be engaging in and the help you can offer. It's also a signal of the consequence if the prompt is not followed.

When disengaged or disruptive behaviour continues following non-verbal and verbal correction, it's important to briefly consider why the student is behaving in this way and what might be contributing to their behaviour:

- Is the student moving away from something (for example, work, peers, staff, etc.) or towards something (for example, preferred items, the attention of peers and staff, etc.)?
- Is there is a skill gap that needs supporting (for example, task-related, class expectation or social skill, etc.)?
- Is there something you've brought to the situation to contribute to their disengaged or disruptive behaviour (for example, Did you get straight into teaching without checking in with the student after break? Did you correct their behaviour and not another student's similar behaviour?)?





# Rehearse and practise responding to disengaged and disruptive behaviours

Use the checklist for each step in the following section to identify your strengths and to prioritise the step you'll focus on first for rehearsal and practice. Focus on one step at a time until you can confidently demonstrate each item on the checklist.

Script and rehearse without students present. Consider filming your rehearsal and using the relevant checklist to review the recording yourself or with a colleague.

Then practise with students present. Record and review your practice alone or with a colleague using the relevant checklist, making sure to follow school or employer policies regarding recording students.

Invite a colleague to observe your responses to disengaged and disruptive behaviours in action. Ask them to use the checklists to provide feedback on what went well and to suggest one area for further improvement.

## 1. Monitor all students

Rehearse, then practise:

a strategic position where you can see all students

deliberately pausing in your strategic position

scanning combined with deliberately pausing

circulating the classroom to:

support students requiring clarification of an instruction or extra assistance

acknowledge students meeting behaviour expectations

praise students exceeding expectations specific to them.

## 2. Use a non-verbal correction

Identify the disengaged and disruptive behaviours you experience in the classroom – for example, students calling out instead of putting their hand up, moving out of their seats to do something they shouldn't be doing, talking during independent work or using a loud voice during group work.

Rehearse, then practise non-verbal responses to the disengaged and disruptive behaviours:

using proximity, moving near the students to gain their attention to correct their behaviour

deliberately pausing, stopping what you're doing to gain the students' attention to correct their behaviour

using 'the look' to demonstrate your awareness of the behaviour and the need to correct it

using a gesture to communicate the expected behaviour.

When rehearsing with a colleague, ask them to play the role of the student.

When practising in a lesson, start with the non-verbal correction that is least intrusive to the flow of the lesson.



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offering support to address identified causes for the behaviour

if the student doesn't identify a cause or accept support, clearly communicating a choice using non-threatening body language and a calm tone, stating:

the expected behaviour and the impact on others and themselves of the disengaged or disruptive behaviour

support you're able to provide

the consequence should they choose not to correct their behaviour.

giving the student time and space to make their choice

acknowledging their positive choice, should they make that choice.

When rehearsing with a colleague, ask them to play the role of the student.

## 5. Implement the consequence

Ensure you've practised the 'Give a choice' step before this step.

Script, rehearse then practise:

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# Regularly revise responding to disengaged and disruptive behaviours

Schedule points in the year to revise this practice.

## Questions for reflection

When you've refined and combined each of the steps for responding to disengaged and disruptive behaviours, consider the following questions:

- To what extent are you using preventative behaviour support practices in the classroom? Could implementation of these practices be improved to reduce the need for reactive approaches?
- Are you staying calm when responding to disengaged and disruptive behaviours? Is there anything you can do to further support your composure? Is your body language reflective of a supportive approach to disengaged and disruptive behaviours?
- To what extent is using non-verbal corrections addressing disengaged and disruptive behaviours in your classroom?
- How effectively are you selecting verbal corrections that are appropriate to the behaviour and context? What are you observing in your students' responses to these corrections? What does that tell you about the impact of these corrections?
- How effectively are you addressing disengaged or disruptive behaviour by identifying the possible cause of the behaviour and supporting students to address that cause? What impact is this having on refocusing students on learning?
- How effectively are you presenting choices to students to correct their behaviour, receive support or receive a consequence?
- What changes in disengaged and disruptive behaviours are you observing after giving support or consequences in your classroom?

## For more practical guidance

AERO has developed a suite of resources to support teachers and school leaders to refine or refresh their foundational practices in creating safe and supportive learning environments through effective classroom management. You can read the [Classroom Management Resources: User Guide](#) for an overview of these resources and suggestions for their use.