



This practice resource will support you in establishing methods for students to gain your attention to request assistance, ask a question or share information. This is important for creating a safe and supportive learning environment and minimising disruptions.

The number of students in a classroom means that a signal is needed to gain the teacher's attention rather than students calling out and moving around the room. Teaching, rehearsing, and reinforcing the signal students use to gain your attention will help to meet students' needs, manage interruptions to teaching and learning, and create a positive and supportive learning environment for all students.

Supporting students to gain your attention includes the following steps:

1. Monitor all students.
2. Have students use an agreed signal to gain your attention.
3. Acknowledge students.
4. Respond to students.

Supporting students to gain your attention and ask questions in class requires several skills, including acknowledgement and praise, circulation, clear communication, non-verbal correction and scanning.

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.

Effectively supporting students to gain your attention

1. M a de

Consistently monitoring all students' behaviour demonstrates that you are aware of what is happening in your classroom, will provide support to students when needed and will reinforce behaviour expectations.

Monitor all students by regularly using a combination of pausing, scanning and circulating. Assist students when needed. Acknowledge students meeting behaviour expectations and praise students exceeding behaviour expectations specific to them. Respond to disengaged and disruptive behaviours, acknowledging students when they correct their behaviour.

2. Have the students use a signal to get your attention

Having an effective signal for students to gain your attention enables them to request assistance, ask a question or share information in a manner that is least disruptive to other students' learning. It's important to teach students a suitable signal for gaining your attention – for example:

- a hand signal, such as:
 - raising their hand
 - using fingers on their raised hand to indicate their need (that is, 1 finger in the air – 'I need to use the toilet', 2 fingers – 'I need to ask a question', 3 fingers – 'I am stuck').
- a physical object, such as:
 - paddle pop sticks or coloured cards on their desk (green – 'I'm ok', red – 'I'm stuck and need assistance', amber – 'I need assistance but can continue with other tasks')
 - holding up equipment such as a pencil to indicate the need to sharpen their pencil.

The signal needs to be taught and practised with students so they have the confidence to use it independently. Prior to starting a learning task, check for understanding by asking students to demonstrate the signal.

You may choose to teach your students to seek assistance from a neighbouring peer before seeking your assistance, enabling you to support other students. You can teach your students that this is suitable when they're not sure about something or need an item, such as an eraser.

3. Acknowledge the student's request

Promptly and positively acknowledging a student's request for help lets them know you're aware they need assistance and will support them when you're able.

The expected acknowledgement should be taught to students at the same time as the signal to gain your attention. If the signal is students raising their hand, you might verbally acknowledge them – for example, 'I've seen your hand, [Name]. I'll come to you after I finish helping [Name]'. The student can continue their work doing what they can or wait quietly. To maintain the flow of instruction, you might use a non-verbal acknowledgement, such as making eye contact and nodding your head.

If students are using coloured cards or paddle pop sticks on their desks to indicate they need assistance, teach them that you will come to help them when you can and they must continue working on something they can do themselves or seek support from a neighbouring peer until then. It's important to be circulating and scanning to see the coloured cards early.

If students gain your attention using a signal for a request that doesn't require your assistance, such as going to the toilet or sharpening a pencil, you should be able to affirm or deny the request with a nod or shake of the head. If the signal is thumbs up or thumbs down, you should be able to affirm or deny the request with a nod or shake of the head.

2. Ha e de e a a eed a a a e

Script, rehearse then practise teaching students:

Regularly revise students gaining teacher attention

Schedule points in the year to revise this practice for yourself and your students.

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.