



**Working Together**

# **Guidance on the Management of Challenging or Disruptive Behaviour**

## **Introduction**

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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## Introduction

There may be a number of explanations why students behave inappropriately. Inappropriate behaviour may result from:

- Inconsistent parenting
- Uncaring or over-protective parents
- Bad influences in a student's local community
- Poverty
- Poor quality teaching
- Teachers' attitudes towards children
- Students deliberately challenging adult authority
- Students' failure to work or behave in the past

Students who present challenging or disruptive behaviour are difficult to deal with. This type of behaviour can make others feel:

- Angry or threatened
- Anxious or defensive
- Frustrated
- Humiliated
- Hurt
- Resentful
- Tired
- Withdrawn

The way in which challenging or disruptive behaviour is managed by teaching or support staff has a major influence or effect on whether the methods used by them are appropriate or not. There is little doubt that staff can react in ways that make the problem worse. Knowing how to deal with difficult students will involve staff learning how to manage a two-way transaction. This will give students a chance to work with staff to modify their behaviour.

The guidance set out in this paper is the outcome of two half-day workshops where staff (Appendix A) examined the issues relating to the management of challenging and disruptive behaviour.

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## General Principles

Managing students who present challenging and disruptive behaviour can be positively influenced by a distinctive approach. The potential for difficult behaviour will always exist but the adoption of general principles that alleviate discord will help staff to manage challenging or disruptive behaviour more effectively. Three steps have been identified that will help staff to embrace a strategy for dealing with inappropriate behaviour effectively:

- Analysis
- Planning
- Management

### Analysis

The objective of this approach is to identify what sparks the behaviour off and what keeps it going. Essentially the analysis of inappropriate behaviour in the classroom is the precise description of the behaviour at three levels:

- What happens before the behaviour occurs (Antecedents)
- The behaviour itself
- What can happen subsequently (Consequences)

### Antecedents

Through regular contact with students, staff should be able to collate information about a student's background and understand that a number of underlying reasons will be the possible cause of inappropriate behaviour. Factors that can bring about inappropriate behaviour may result from:

- Past traumatic life episode(s)
- Acquired or genetic disabilities
- Emotional, physical, mental or sexual abuse
- The prolonged influence of critical, domineering or laissez faire parenting
- Temporary or permanent absence of parents
- Prolonged exposure to poverty or adverse environmental conditions
- Boredom or lack of appropriate stimulus
- Poor teaching or poor relationships with teachers in school

The underlying reasons for inappropriate behaviour may be difficult to pinpoint but the information staff obtains from students will help to put the behaviour in context and more adequately define the reasons for it.

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## Behaviour

Inappropriate behaviour may be presented in a variety of different forms and on a continuum from one extreme to another. The following inappropriate behaviours are not exhaustive but indicate the diversity that challenge staff in and outwith the classroom:

- Attention deficits
- Refusal or constant failure to carry out reasonable tasks or instructions
- Inept or misuse of tools or equipment
- Damage to property
- Argumentative and failing to accept responsibility for actions
- Threatening or actual attacks of violence
- Use of offensive language
- Loud and disorderly conduct

Again, by defining what the student does, how often, to whom and in what circumstance staff can specify precisely what the issues are and their frequency and intensity. This will provide a baseline against which improvements can be made.

## Consequences

The results or effect of a student's actions are indicators of what keeps the inappropriate behaviour going. In these circumstances the way in which the situation is controlled will decide whether it can be managed or not. The outcome of inadequate control may:

Adversely influence the recurrence of inappropriate behaviours  
Lead to the potential risk of a student prematurely withdrawing from a course  
Put the safety of students or staff at risk  
Disrupt students' learning experience

Understanding the consequences of inappropriate behaviour will help staff to foresee the potential risks associated with the unsuitable use of some management techniques. In such situations the need for planning becomes paramount.

## Planning

It is not always possible to foresee problems that may occur in the classroom but concern about the perceived difficulties of managing inappropriate behaviour should not hamper lesson planning. However, there are a number of factors that influence the management of inappropriate behaviour, which should be considered as part of the lesson planning process.

These factors should be in addition to the normal preparation of lesson notes, materials and resources. They may consist of:

- Keeping a focus on objectives
- Differentiated lesson content
- Clarification of what is expected in terms of behaviour
- Methods of delivery that encourage active participation
- Constant dialogue with students to establish their perceptions
- Alternative approaches to overcome barriers to learning

## Management

As part of a student's induction the College's expectations of student conduct and attendance will already have been specified. Notwithstanding this benchmarks of what is acceptable or unacceptable behaviour will need consistent reinforcement. These benchmarks may consist of:

- Immediately challenging inappropriate behaviour when it occurs
- Working through the problem behaviours with the student
- Examining likely outcomes and alternative approaches with the student
- Looking for and responding to feedback from students
- Appropriate questioning of students either collectively or individually
- Being seen to be fair and consistent
- Enhancing self-worth of all students

These benchmarks should be restated when inappropriate behaviour occurs so that there is an understanding of what is expected of students. Additionally there are a number of methods that can be used which will facilitate a commitment to learning.

## Management Techniques

There are techniques that will help staff to avert or deal with inappropriate behaviour and can consist of:

- Developing a rapport and regularly talking with students about their perceptions
- Getting to know students individually and knowing what their interests or expectations are
- Finding out what students' strengths are and building on them
- Creating a working relationship where students feel valued and respected
- Making lessons enjoyable and providing work that helps students to achieve
- Being flexible and prepared to make changes that will generate commitment
- Trust in colleagues and seek their support when things are not going to plan

## Conclusions

To improve the quality of our work the focus of staff attention must continuously address the need to improve the students' learning experience. Notwithstanding this objective, the management of inappropriate behaviours can be challenging and stressful for staff.

This report is the outcome of two half-day workshops that examined how best to manage students' inappropriate behaviour. The conclusion of these workshops was to set out an approach that:

- Identified the potential causes for inappropriate behaviour
- Defined the behaviour that caused concern
- Examined the consequences if inappropriate behaviour remained unchecked
- Proposed, through appropriate planning and management, methods to bring about a change in student behaviour

The contributors to the workshops concluded that a consistent approach, accurate recording of information and the adoption of management techniques could all contribute to an improvement in the ability of staff to cope with difficult students.