

# Teaching Tough Kids

*(Or, options to manage complex student emotions and behaviours more successfully)*

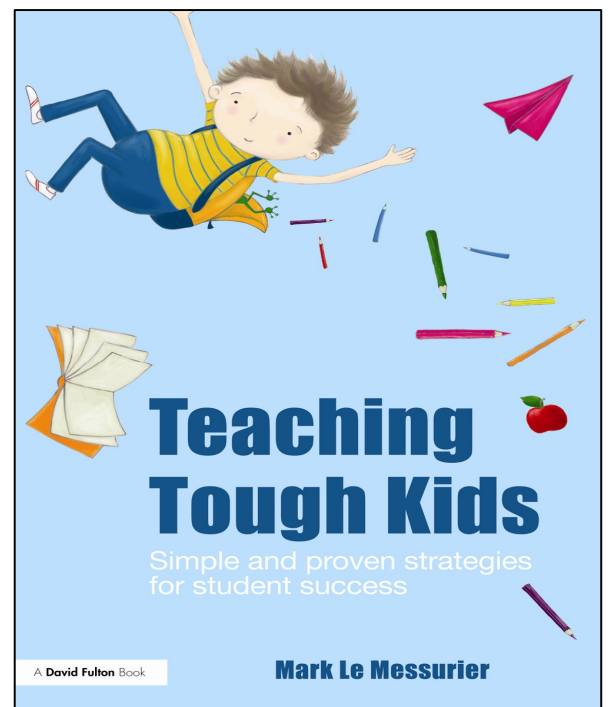
This one day workshop takes educators on a journey into the core processing differences presented by students identified with [Asperger syndrome](#), [learning difficulties](#), [ADHD](#) and [Oppositional Defiant Disorder](#). It aims at appreciating these conditions at a truly intrinsic level as a natural starting point in dealing with the inevitable problems associated with them.

It is presented to enrich the ways we think and work with the kids Mark affectionately calls the Tough Kids and is taken directly from his latest book, Teaching Tough Kids. Managing the emotion and behaviour of these students require hard work, commitment, flexibility and faith. Be warned; there is no easy solution, silver bullet or cure. Each tip insists that you think, plan and implement ideas adeptly. Some of course will be more effective than others. Some will demand less of you and others will consume your time because they demand collaboration and monitoring. What they each have in common is that they are mainstream, tried and tested, sensible teaching processes.

Keep in mind that the best behaviour management strategy is one that radiates from authentic relationships with students. A quality of care that is not veiled, superficial or fake. Our best work is always done inside relationships with kids, and nowhere else.

Teaching Tough Kids is now available:

directly from Mark, phone (Australia) (08) 8332 0698  
or through this website, [Teaching Tough Kids](#)



## ***Tips – at a glance!***

- Always have a plan - goals, monitor progress and provide incentives
- Modify for the student's triggers and inconsistencies
- Show you like them. Keep talking, ask what will help
- Know your limits – keep monitoring and examining 'your energy' and 'your attitudes'
- Build a team approach – educators, education administration, parents, psychology, psychiatrist, allied professionals, etc
- Meet with the parents often – be real and be constructive!
- Set up consistent structures and understandings. Keep reviewing their effectiveness
- Include EVERYONE (*even PE, Music, Art and LOTE teachers!*)
- Stringing together good times & positive behaviours may require the student to attend school for half days for a long time
- Set clear boundaries
- Use unemotional and clear directions
- Provide 'anger control' training (*for you as well!*)
- Keep a social skills/ friendship making program running
- Frequent feedback for students is vital
- Interventions may need to focus on more than one aspect
- Maintain interventions as long as needed (*this may be years*)

# **Tips;** *in more detail*

## **Encouraging relationship**

### **Can you recall?**

Take a moment to reflect on your own school days. Can you recall the teacher who had the most positive impact on you? What did they say or do? How did they gently, gradually build your belief in yourself? In all probability the teacher that made a difference for you was the one who made real connections with you.

### **Your composure is paramount**

Students with impulsive natures and poor self regulatory systems are reliant on poised teachers who treat them with respect and speak quietly and privately when redirection is required. They benefit by being given time to respond by teachers who can cleverly sidestep until the heat of the moment subsides. Wise teachers know that their students' emotional stability is keenly connected to theirs.

### **Borrow from the future - imagine who you will be looking at one day**

Try to picture this student twenty years from now. Recognising the young man or woman of the future prompts us to consider the quality of the relationship we have with them now.

### **Getting off to the right start!**

Some teachers are quick to write an engaging letter about themselves at the start of the year and tell their incoming students and parents what's planned. This sends a clear message about their engagement and care. Teachers who supply their school email address and make a point of gathering phone numbers and the email addresses of parents send a reassuring message that communication is welcomed. Others begin the year by sending home a questionnaire that asks parents to clarify their child's strengths and challenges. This immediately gets parents onside as it assures them that the teacher wants what they want.

A friendly idea comes from teachers who, after the first few weeks of school, send a short letter home to parents outlining how their child has settled into their new class. Contained within the letter are several humorous snippets that illustrate the student's personal, social and academic triumphs.

There is also a range of simple connecting ideas available –

- Regular class newsletters
- Group emails to parents
- Sending an inspirational note home in the diary
- Making an uplifting phone
- Sending home the occasional helpful article or a useful website
- Holding an evening or 'weekend event', a breakfast or barbecue or offer an extra interview to those who could do with it

Finally, an increasing number of teachers are going 'high-tech' and set up class websites. Their websites convey all manner of things from their teaching philosophy, breaking class news and due dates for assignments to interesting links, homework information help, and immediate email contact.

### **Always ask, "What will help?"**

Continually put it back to the student, ask, "What will help?" or "What can I do to help you?" So often kids prove to be intuitive and know how they learn and do best. Make time to talk and listen.

### **Really get to know the student**

The advantage of knowing your student lies in being able to read them more ably. It becomes easier to notice changes in their emotion and know when to pull back, modify or change tack. Good relationship is the key to sensing when stress is building up. No matter what the age of the student, at critical times when 'stress-build up' is apparent give the student a long weekend or a day or two off. This of course needs to be cleverly managed with parents.

### **Enthusiasm**

Begin each day on a positive note. Think about the way you introduce topics. Occasionally, grab everyone's attention by doing what students do not expect from you. Be melodramatic, daring, loud or very or very, very quiet. Introduce a new idea with an experiment, a dare, an impromptu play, a video, a guest, or something unforgettable that captures interest.

### **A look is worth a thousand words**

Develop eye contact messages together. What a powerful silent language! These cues can help to modify behaviour. Work on it together and it will strengthen your bond too. Rehearse it to the point where you can simply look at the student, engage eye contact with them and they know what to do. This is training to proficiency!

## Tips for Oppositional Kids

Obviously, the best 'disaster recipe' for these kids starts when their teacher displays the same reactive, dogmatic and inflexible traits. Naturally, teachers who command students to do things and back them into corners invite them to say and do things they would not dream of saying or doing in the normal course of events.

These students are reliant on intelligent, poised teachers who speak quietly or privately when reprimanding, who give time for responses, and can cleverly sidestep until the heat of the moment subsides. Educators who do best know that their students' emotional stability is connected to theirs, and are likely to use these two phrases sparingly, but repetitively, in a completely unemotional manner.

They'll say, "Regardless, this is how it is going to be..."  
Alternatively, they'll say, "I like you way too much to argue over this ...."

Work to a clear, consistent plan. It is wise to develop a regular exit procedure; these are ways for students to remove themselves from the situation with dignity before their emotion boils over. Ideas, as 'cool down' cards, support students to automatically remove themselves and go to a predetermined 'safe-place' or 'safe-person' as they approach the point of no return. Whenever they can achieve this always praise their effort! And, teachers who do best here are those who can assist the student to return to the class group easily without feeling an awful loss of dignity or that the class group (or the teacher) resents their return.

In the meantime explain that you will always remove yourself and the class if you must from their unsafe or extreme behaviour. This is not foolproof, but it's a very sensible start. And, when there is no other option and you have to resort to this, there also needs to be an appropriate consequence to follow for the student. Regrettably, finding an appropriate consequence for these kids is never as straightforward as it is for other students who respond reasonably well to a sharp reminder about what is expected. To illustrate this, a suspension away from school for a day or two where the student spends most of their time at home playing computer games is not appropriate. Nor is having the student sit out from a string of favourite lessons, watching on, seething and feeling humiliated in front of their peers. Consequences in these instances require careful management.

What many teachers find useful, virtually therapeutic, is gaining insight into these kids by appreciating '**THE FOUR GOALS OF MISBEHAVIOUR**'. These of course were coined by the Individual Psychologists, Adler, Driekurs, Dinkmeter et al.

We all know that a reason sits alongside behaviour. For kids whose lives are not going so well, and especially for the Oppositional Defiant students, there is usually a struggle for attention, power, revenge and/or to show us they can't and not to bother helping them (displays of inadequacy).

### 1. ATTENTION

Student thinks; 'I must keep you busy with me' 'I matter most when people are busy with me'  
Teacher thinks; 'This kid is driving me mad!' 'I wish you would shut-up! Back off. Give someone else a go'  
Teacher feels; annoyed  
Best approach; Use your annoyance as a catalyst to respond pleasantly when you can and build out your response frequency.  
Avoid the natural instinct to scold or re-direct, use tactical ignoring when possible.

### 2. POWER

Student thinks; 'I only matter when I'm in charge' 'I have to be the boss'  
Teacher thinks; 'Why, you little ....' 'You have no right to pull this stuff' 'You'll be sorry'  
Teacher feels; threatened – authority is challenged  
Best approach; avoid, side-step, be an adaptable chameleon – 'take your sails out of their wind'  
Respond with comments like "I like you way too much to argue about this". Then walk away - get out of their space and if they follow, keep walking! Power seekers can become power drunk. They love to battle and just don't know when or how to stop.

### 3. REVENGE

Student thinks; 'I'll get you back' 'It's payback time'  
Teacher thinks; 'I'll give you a bigger consequence to even up things' (tit for tat)  
Teacher feels; hurt  
Best approach; dialogue. Find middle ground. Find something to work with and work on - get kids to repair, restore whatever their act of revenge trashed, but only after everyone's emotions have cooled.

### 4. DISPLAYS OF INADEQUACY

Student thinks; 'I can't' 'Don't expect me to' 'I never have. I never can'  
Teacher thinks; 'Nothing I try seems to work'  
Teacher feels; sense of hopelessness what can I do?  
Best approach; be a skilful model, persist and believe in the value of seed planting. Become expert at encouraging instead of praising (encouragement - process focused, praise - outcome focused).

While these understanding and approaches won't cure Oppositional Defiant Disorder, they will when used consistently, take the sting out of these tricky behaviours. What's more, these thoughtful, calm and consistent responses are likely dampen the escalation of challenging behaviours.

In calmer times, discuss with the student why they use anger.

- Do they think it will get them what they want?
- Is it frustration that turns to anger?
- Does it make them feel powerful?
- Or do they feel embarrassed and remorseful?
- Keep asking, "What can I do to help?"

You may be able to work on this, and make some headway, but more often professional support is vital from within the school system itself, from parents and input from counsellors, psychologists and psychiatrists. The objective is to gradually disarm anger as the preferred way to function. This often takes much, much more time than is appreciated by most, perhaps years.

## Tips to sharpen organisation

From an organisational viewpoint, the choice is obvious. We could refuse to accept the basis of their organisational and planning difficulty and make a decision not to do anything about it. We could continue to tell them off, criticise and ensure they fail the standard they can't reach. Or, accept that organisation is a set of higher-order skills not yet available, and find ways to compensate and modify to assist students to find success.

I remember, not so long ago, speaking to a teacher about a student. This student was 10 years old, a delightful boy (fabulous family) and had been identified with severe learning difficulties and ADHD. His memory and organisation was awful. During the conversation I gently raised the issue of providing him with a little scaffolding, some reminders and a new routine to help him finish off the day so he might have a better chance, more consistently, to bring home his school diary filled in accompanied by the right belongings to tackle his homework. Now I should add, that I've known this teacher for a long time and have a good working relationship with her. However, she bristled over this suggestion. "Mark," she said, "If we do it for this boy he'll never learn to do it himself. He's old enough to think about what he should do and take the consequences for what he chooses not to do." For her, the matter was very black and white. For me, and many others who know much more than I, there are shades of grey we need to intelligently navigate when it comes to organisation. To settle on this teacher's approach would make certain that this boy's poor habits persisted and he continued to feel inadequate and unsuccessful.

The reality is that all students do best working in a thoughtfully developed class climate that has obvious routine, order and structure, and the students we have in mind depend on this! Predictable easy-to-follow systems allow students to operate proactively rather than reacting to what seems like a series of endless surprises.

### Educate parents about organisation

Teach parents the fundamental things they can do to help their children cope best with the school day, for example:

- Be on time for school. This may require suggesting to parents that they need to be in bed at a reasonable time as well.
- Morning routines - visual prompts as charts, checklists, pictures, etc
- Ideas to get children's belongings ready for school
- How to own and maintain a pencil case and school bag
- Ideas to help in the easy identification of books
- How to use the diary or communication book
- The value of wearing a watch

Continue to gently feed organisational tips to parents. Work on the theme to parents, "when your child is organised they are ready for learning."

### Develop a predictable timetable

Display the daily or weekly timetable on the wall of the classroom, or attach a min version to the student's desk.

### Be VERY specific

To help students feel a sense of order many teachers start the morning by ensuring the lessons and materials required are displayed on the whiteboard. In this way students can see how the morning will unfold and know the things they'll need for each lesson.

### Planners

A number of teachers construct a two or four week planner onto their whiteboard and make a point of adding and deleting things with students participating in the process. This immerses students into knowing what's coming up, and when they forget, they can look at it!

### **Make homework timetables**

Help students make their own homework timetables for after school. It helps to get around the 'homework blues'. Take it a step further and help students make their own checklists, such as how to get ready for school on time. Always remember procrastination can be a strong ADHD trait.

### **Develop class rules together**

Discuss with your group the rules necessary for a caring and cohesive group. Boldly display them. Follow them, talk about them, review them and make them live as an integral social part of the classroom. All children (adults too) are reassured by knowing what is expected.

### **Do a daily 'piggyback'**

Piggybacking is an appealing strategy to put together something a student tends to forget with something that is part of their everyday routine. Piggybacking can work for lots of things, both at home and school. It's the very reason most of us leave our car keys hanging from the lock on the back door!

### **The 'liary' diary**

When the school diary just won't work don't let it beat you, get creative and play with other remembering and reminding systems;

- faxing
- emailing
- usb's
- iPods
- mailing work
- texting
- telephoning
- leaving messages on answering machines
- placing photos of the homework on to the student's mobile phone

### **Organising drawers and lockers**

Set up an understanding with your student that you or their parent, an older student or a school support officer can stay back in the classroom one afternoon each fortnight to go through the student's locker or drawer with them. So many students will tell you just how much they really hate their lockers or trays being in a mess, but don't know how to tackle the problem or maintain it independently.

### **Organising schoolbags**

Ask the student's parent to clean out their child's schoolbag with their child each weekend. This also helps parents to discover or rediscover notes, newsletters, library books, lunch bags and belongings that have worked their way to the bottom of the bag.

### **Lists**

The truth is that lists are probably the most widely used visual reminding tool by most adults. So many of us live and die by our lists, yet we can overlook teaching this effective remembering strategy. Whatever needs remembering can be added to a list. Lists can be created on the computer, bought or may be as simple as a blank pad. Suggest to students that they attach their list to their wardrobe, a noticeboard, the back of the toilet door, the fridge, on their school desk or on the dinner table at home. Enlist parent support. The golden rule is to keep it in the same place and that it's seen daily. In this way it becomes a part of the daily routine. Oh, it helps to attach a pencil as well!

### **Checklists**

Checklists are valuable because they can be set up to contain word or picture prompts, and sequence the task into smaller steps, such as:

- getting ready for school in the morning
- organising what to put in the school bag
- Knowing what to do on arrival at school
- how to set up the locker or organise the desk
- remembering a special task
- how to pack up and what to take home.

Students also benefit when they see their teacher working from their checklist on the whiteboard! And, when all your strategic organisational planning looks as though it's falling apart don't let it become an issue of consequence. Call a meeting with the class, the student and/or their parents.

## Tips to accommodate physical restlessness

Some, no matter their age, experience difficulty being still and remaining seated. This is a physiological problem and needs to be appreciated in this light.

### **Allow a 'seat break' every now and then.**

Develop several 'legal places' in the classroom the student may move to providing they deliver a cue before moving. In other words, moving is fine, but they need to develop an appreciation of their need as well as yours. Sometimes let them stand while working.

### **Job monitors**

Set up classroom tasks the restless student can do to help compensate for their physical restlessness. Sometimes giving students leadership opportunities, or important jobs to do, brings surprisingly productive results. It is crucial that the kids who can easily lose their way feel as though they are a part of things.

### **Find ways for students to 'burn off' energy**

Send them on a message to avoid the inevitable, even if it is just getting them to take a note in a SEALED envelope explaining to a colleague that you need a break. This is so much healthier than both climbing the walls together!

### **Organise double PE**

Vigorous exercise helps burn off excess energy. It helps to focus attention as it stimulates certain neurochemicals that are beneficial for concentration, and it's fun.

### **Provide 'fidget toys'**

This is key during times when you want the student to take in a lot of information at once. It does help, for whatever reason, to have something in their hands to fidget with (eg. Blu-tak, a piece of sticky velcro on the underside of their desk so the student can rub it while they listen, a soft squishy ball to hold, etc). By occupying the physical senses restlessness decreases and concentration improves.

### **Staying put**

When you are teaching to students sitting on the floor one idea is to stick a piece of masking tape as an X on the floor for your 'wriggly' student to sit on, or give them their own cushion. This needs to be handled sensitively though.

## Tips to maintain perseverance

### **Saying of the week**

There are a multitude of these:

- Don't wait for your ship to come in, row out and meet it.
- A diamond is a piece of coal that has stuck to the job.
- If you can't have what you like, like what you have!

It's surprising how some students seize hold of a saying and use it as an aid. The best sources for these are inexpensive, inspiring books often found at the local newsagency.

### **A study buddy**

A straightforward strategy to assist students to persevere is to seat them alongside a naturally grounded buddy. The buddy is able to model what needs to be done and how to do it. It is more than likely that a series of study buddies will need to be found. Keep on mixing and fine tuning.

### **Linger longer**

Simply moving closer to a student and lingering can help them to keep them to stay with the task.

### **Timers can supply 'an edge'**

Timers can help students grasp that sustained periods of concentration are limited, and they can do it! Visually, it adds an edge to perseverance. Also consider stopwatches, colourful goo timers, buzzers, three-minute egg-timers and the clock; these are all helpful.

### **‘CHUNK’ tasks –**

It's vital that we modify for their inconsistencies with regard to concentration, organisation and planning because they do not have the capacity to do this themselves.

- Give them a chance to talk through how they intend to tackle it – develop the art of self-talk.
- Check in frequently. Maintain momentum by progressively checking in at planned review times together, and at each review meeting break down the remaining tasks into more easily managed pieces.
- Shorten tasks that require persistence.
- Encourage the student to take small breaks and return to the task.
- Don't be afraid to lend a hand and model how to stick with a task.

Gradually, by providing appropriate structures, students develop independence. They learn to conquer time management, plan, ask for help and know how to stay in control.

### **Encourage key-boarding skills**

For some students the mastering of word-processing skills can provide the edge to maintain order and find success. Presentation looks so much better and word processors can help to check spelling, grammar, save work and store it in neatly arranged folders. This is so much better than physically handling and risking losing pieces of paper. Most are ready to start on this by the early primary years.

### **Provide frequent feedback, couched positively**

Clinical trials tell us, over and over, that individuals make the best gains when we set realistic goals and offer them more frequent feedback. So recognise and discuss success. Do it often. The saddest aspect about the impact of these conditions is the insidious secondary damage done to self-esteem.

### **Feedback: try a student-monitoring system**

This is a helpful communication tool for all, and is an efficient way to give feedback on a student's performance. It works for primary, middle and senior school students equally well. The key is for someone (class teacher, home group teacher, or school counsellor) to take an interest in the student and collate information provided by other determined subject teachers. Completing the student-monitoring form only takes five minutes, and sharing it with the student on a regular basis aids in reflective discussion, underpins their perseverance and allows new initiatives to be forged. The information collected through the system is designed to provide everyone involved with accurate baseline data, rather than the student's performance being dependent on opinion, which can sometimes plummet when a hiccup occurs.

### **Watch your language!**

Develop your feedback so it is encouraging. "How do you think you might have done that differently?" This is much better than saying, "You should have done that differently!"

### **Come on, 'rate your day'**

Rating the good and not so good things that happen helps reinforce that although a student may have faced difficulties during the week, there have also been some enjoyable moments. Guiding them to see this balance helps to maintain perseverance.

### **Self-monitoring**

The act of self-monitoring, or tracking behaviour, is proven to have a positive effect on a variety of behaviours. As a student assesses and records their target behaviour the act is a cue for them to make a conscious link between their behaviour and what is happening around them. Self-monitoring can be as simple as a student knowing a task will be completed once the six sub-tasks are done. For example, each time they complete a sub-task they place the matching card in a box, aiding their perseverance. When all six cards are in the box the task is done!

### **Monitoring toilet trips**

One idea to reduce the frequency of toilet trips is to issue the more toilet-dependent students with three, four or five toilet tickets per week. They need to hand over a ticket each time they have to go. Knowing they have to ration their visits motivates students to think just how necessary a visit to the toilet is, and is an incentive to fit toilet stops into recess and lunch breaks. A few ingenious teachers allow remaining toilet tickets to be cashed in at the end of the week for a canteen treat.

### **Monitoring - "How well did you pay attention?"**

This is a practical way for students to monitor their attending skills. Prior to an activity requiring good listening, concentration and cooperation skills let them know that once it is completed you will ask them to record how well they were paying attention. Ask students to mark on a continuum how well they used their attending skills. Discuss them:

- eye-contact
- subtly nodding their head as they listen
- body directed towards the teacher
- feet on the floor
- hands still

This explicit approach keeps in rehearsal how individuals need to look to effectively attend and persevere.

### **Homework**

Oh, were to start? This is such a big topic! (Parenting Tough Kids, Chapter 6, pages 174-201) The golden rule is to go for quality rather quantity. Be aware of the difference between core curriculum tasks versus peripheral busy work. Know your students and shorten homework assignments to coincide with their mood, anxiety, attention span, learning difficulties and the likely emotional fallout particular families have to deal with because of homework. Sometimes, the best decision is to do away with homework altogether, for awhile or forever.

### **Assistive technologies, especially for students with Specific Learning Difficulties**

- <http://www.ClassMate Reader.com>
- <http://www.naturalreaders.com>
- <http://www.promo.net/pg>
- <http://www.dyslexic.com>
- <http://www.texthelp.com>
- <http://www.quantumtechnology.com.au>

Very early on students with learning difficulty can find benefit from using the keyboard. The computer makes writing look better and it and the spell check helps with spelling. QuickPADs and AlphaSmarts are at the cheaper end of the technology chain, and these little machines function beautifully as simple word processors.

TextHelp Read and Write Gold is a word-processing program intended for use alongside Microsoft Word. It can read out words as they are typed, read back text, check spelling and can automatically correct frequently made errors. It enables the user to listen to what they have written making it invaluable for editing and proofreading work. Similar word processing prediction programs are: Text EaseCT, Clicker 5, Penfriend and Co:Writer.

New technologies have revolutionised how information can be gathered from print. Text displayed on the screen can now be 'read out loud' so that instead of a student constantly tripping over their reading problem, they can access their higher level thinking skills. One site, well worth visiting is [www.nextup.com](http://www.nextup.com) with a product called TextAloud. TextAloud can also convert print so that it can be listened to on an MP3 player or ipod. Other products that can also read text out loud include; Microsoft Reader PC, Read Please and Cliptalk. Also when using the web keep in mind that there are hundreds of free e texts on the web. Simply type 'free E-texts' or 'E-texts' into Google and be astounded by the thousands of free sites that are able to convert text into speech!

Finally, if you're prepared to spend a few dollars, the Nuance Corporation has developed software called Dragon NaturallySpeaking. This new generation software converts what's said into print. The future is here and the price of this product continues to fall dramatically. It is useful for students who have handwriting problems, spelling difficulties or can't type. Training the program doesn't take long and students find it inspiring. These new technologies have revolutionised how information can be gathered and delivered. The technology is affordable, easy to use, ready and waiting. The bigger issue is, are we adaptable enough as educators to accept the challenge and offer students with learning difficulty an additional route to success?

## **Some parents can't do this alone**

### **They will rely on your emotional steadiness**

Just being a steady, positive influence in the life of parents is a real gift.

### **But you have to know your limits!**

Keep examining your energy levels and your attitudes. Know your limits and pace yourself to them. Be involved, be supportive, be constructive, but avoid getting caught in the vortex of chaos and confusion that often surrounds these kids and their families. Make sure you ask for help when you need it.

### **Provide support**

Encourage and link parents with other parents who may have a child with similar difficulties, and deal with it really well. Put parents in touch with organisations and professionals who can educate, be supportive and perhaps offer interventions.

### **Provide information**

Gently feed parents information (from journal articles, magazine articles, websites, television programs and so on) that is likely to restore balance in their lives and be helpful.



## **Build a team**

Meet with parents regularly, and don't forget to invite the student from time to time. Build a team with steady, informed people with whom you can consult and rely on - one so called 'expert' won't fix-up kids with these issues up. Look to include – a learning specialist, a behavioural specialist, child psychiatrist, child social worker, school psychologist, paediatrician and so on. It's vital that everyone involved in 'the team' take care of themselves, and of one another:

- Teach parents to take time out. Teach them to find a baby-sitter and get out every week.
- Allow teachers and parents time to complain about the complexities they face.
- Get help immediately if anyone in 'the team' isn't coping.

## **Tips to strengthen emotion**

### **Normalising attitudes**

A popular idea, and one that seems to be gathering momentum, is organising a meeting with all parents of the class at the beginning of the year to explain the problematic behaviours of one or two students. This opportunity is therapeutic and stabilising for all involved. Nothing is more powerful than parents listening to another parent, and hearing the emotion in their voice as they explain why their child has been identified with Asperger Syndrome, ADHD or Oppositional Defiant Disorder, and what this really means. Such meetings pave the way for improved understandings and cohesion.

### **Developing healthy attitudes**

One idea is to send home graphs asking parents to fill in when their child sat up independently, started to walk, first talked, when their first tooth arrived, when they lost their first tooth, first slept in 'big bed', rode a bike, learned to swim and so on. Constructing a simple graph can be a powerful visual means to highlight and compare diversity. Simple graphs provide good visual reminders that some students learn earlier than others, some learn more smoothly, some are hungry, eager learners, while others need to be led. What matters most in the end, is being in a place where conditions favour acceptance, learning and change. Baumeister's study (The New Scientist, 2002) concluded that sadness, isolation and rejection completely interferes with an individual's self-control and can lead to behavioural difficulties. So no matter what year level you teach program joke-telling sessions, or exchange real life embarrassing moments! Invite success nominations, once or twice a week, ask the class to nominate someone (self-nomination is fine) who has made progress in a particular area. Invite others to share their thoughts about the improvement. Impromptu heartfelt acknowledgment by peers is a powerful connector.

### **Entitlements or 'special provisions' for students with specific learning difficulties**

A student access card, or similar, states the special provision or provisions the student is entitled to, such as;

- handouts instead of copying notes from the board
- supervision of diary entries
- extra time in tests and exams
- use of computer
- use of calculator
- work marked without penalty in relation to spelling and grammar
- provision of reader or scribe in tests

Access cards alert teachers to a student's entitlements. Having this in place is reassuring to students, especially when busy, committed subject teachers forget.

### **Additional ways to support students with Specific Learning Difficulties**

- Work with them to research how their learning difficulty is recognised by the Government and their education system.
- Visit the IB websites and glean the special provisions in place for students with learning difficulties.
- Invite guest speakers to school to help reinforce to students that learning difficulties are legally compensated for.
- Invite motivational guest speakers to school who have "made it" despite the challenge of their learning difficulty.
- Unite students with learning difficulties; this can be as simple as making the adaptive education or learning centre welcoming for students. At one school, for example, the Adaptive Education Centre is the place to be! It offers hot chocolate in winter, cool drinks in summer and the opportunity for casual conversations where students can plan assignments, have assignments reviewed, debrief and offload their worries.
- In another school they have gone to a new level and organised an advisory group of students to have input into school special provision policy. As you know all manner of issues crop up that the advisory group could deal with.

### **Social skills training/ friendship making**

Always have a social skills program running! Formal social-skill programs teach students to solve social problems positively and act in pro-social ways. They link feelings to behaviour, and develop ways for students to insert thinking between feeling and behaving.

Best outcomes are achieved with the continuing support of significant others, parents, teachers and peers, for maintenance and transfer of skills. While a term of social skills may be better than nothing, the truth is continuing daily input where students are given the right prompts, the right language and cueing at their point of performance over a much longer period is where the best gains are made.

- STOP THINK DO - <http://www.stophinkdo.com>
- Friends For Life - <http://www.friendsinfo.net>
- Resourceful Adolescent Program - <http://www.rap.qut.edu.au>
- Cool Kids Program - <http://www.psy.mq.edu.au>
- Bounce Back - <http://www.bounceback.com.au>
- Rock and Water Program - <http://www.rockandwaterprogram.com>
- Friendly schools and Families - <http://www.friendlyschools.com.au/>
- Program Achieve - <http://www.youcandoiteducation.com>
- Seasons for Growth - <http://www.seasonsforgrowth.co.uk/>
- Tools of the Mind - <http://www.mscd.edu/extendedcampus/toolsofthemind/>

A social skills forum is an ideal situation to explore obsessions and their social appropriateness, the importance of eye contact, what the handshake is really all about, issues concerning physical proximity and so on. These are elusive skills for many students, particularly those with Asperger Syndrome.

### **Try a little DVD therapy**

Stretching a student's social awareness can be aided by watching the behaviours of others in movies and sitcoms. Discuss why characters are funny or sad, what looks unusual about them or why is this character always plays the victim? Discuss why everyone dislikes the angry Basil Fawlty in Fawlty Towers.

### **Social stories**

Sometimes complex social stories can help students understand basic rules or a new requirement.

### **Easing frustration – anger control and cool-down cards**

Develop exit procedures; ways for students to remove themselves from any situation with dignity before their emotion spills over. Developing appealing, easy ways for students to regroup their emotions is indeed a gift we can offer. The idea is that several cool-down cards sit on the teacher's desk. In times of emotional crisis a student can take a card and goes to an assigned 'cool-down' area or person to unwind. Walking away releases the student from the pressure of immediate reform, which of course can push distressed students over the edge. In the meantime show that you will remove yourself, and the class, if you must. In calmer times, discuss why anger is the preferred option. You may be able to work on this and make some headway, but support from parents and input from counsellors, psychologists and psychiatrists is also necessary. The objective is to gradually disarm anger as the preferred way to function. This often takes much more time than is appreciated, perhaps years.

### **Collate and distribute community groups**

For students with unusual personality styles and self-regulatory problems, the socially fluid and exacting school environment can be just too taxing, despite the best of intentions from committed educators. For these children and teens, their best social connections often take place outside of school where they are able to connect with others through a common interest. When this occurs, and they find acceptance, the emotional balance immediately tips in their favour. So consider gathering up the contacts of clubs and associations that might offer the chance for students to improve their confidence as they develop their 'socio-emotional muscle'.

### **Got a support team?**

A support team to buoy the emotional resilience of children and young adolescents is routinely employed. The approach aims to gather external sources of support to raise the motivation and perseverance of students. Encourage students to consider their needs. Help them to develop and record their perfect support team. The team may include mother, father, tutor, teachers, relatives or friend – anyone at all. Select those who students trust and know can deliver whatever is asked. Next to each team member's name, assign their role or roles.

## **Mentoring**

New research tells us that mentoring relationships are more valuable than we ever dreamt. Mentoring is a steady, revitalising treatment for students dealing with learning problems, emotional worries, social difficulties and immaturities.

Four years ago the 'Behaviour Education Team' at Catholic Education Office in South Australia asked if I'd be prepared to design and present continuing workshops to assist a variety of staff to become mentors to students in need of that little extra care and encouragement. I agreed in a heartbeat! Being part of a transforming process for kids where the value of relationship is placed first was enticement enough. To me, few things are as compelling as the opportunity to be an agent of change in the lives of young developing human beings. Too often in schools the focus is on the action; busy classrooms, packed curriculum, rapid exchanges between teachers and students, back to back learning tasks and the quest for immediate and measurable learning outcomes. Since the inception of the program, an array of school staff – teachers, educational support officers, school counsellors, principals, assistant principals, office staff, librarians and grounds personnel - have been trained in the 'art' of mentoring students. They are quietly taking special care of more than 300 of the most vulnerable students in South Australian Catholic schools. This program has become the quiet achiever building capacity in Schools to companion students needing that extra reassurance and guidance. Already the data is in line with the data collected from the DECS mentoring programs. It demonstrates that quality mentorship benefits everyone involved in the process; the mentee, the mentor and the culture of the system.

Useful mentoring links

- <http://www.thesmithfamily.com.au>
- <http://www.youthmentoring.org.au>
- [http://www.creativeideasforyou.com/Mentor\\_Teacher\\_1.html](http://www.creativeideasforyou.com/Mentor_Teacher_1.html)
- [http://www.creativeideasforyou.com/Mentor\\_Teacher\\_3.html](http://www.creativeideasforyou.com/Mentor_Teacher_3.html)
- <http://www.dsf.org.au/>
- <http://www.mentoring.org/>
- <http://www.decs.sa.gov.au/mentoring/>
- <http://www.bigbrothersbigsisters.org.au>
- <http://www.youthengagement.sa.edu.au/pages/mentoring/CommunityMentoring/>
- <http://www.coachingnetwork.org.uk/Default.htm>

## **Tips to restructure pro-activity**

### **A 'think strip' or 'wrist band' can buy time**

Many children face difficulty in controlling their lightning reactions. The 'think strip' and 'wristband' are simple tactile tools to help them think about, and take some control over, their impulsiveness. They serve to memory jog the link between feelings, behaviour and outcomes. Think strips can be contacted to school desks, doors, the back of rulers, pin up boards or on placemats at the dinner table; anywhere to help strengthen the decision-making process.

### **Display clear-cut boundaries**

Together, develop unambiguous boundaries and when you must, unemotionally stick to them. Only say what really needs to be said, and once you've said it follow through. Threats and brow beating are destructive. Quite quickly students pick up on the futility of hollow threats.

### **Directions and choices**

When delivering an instruction or choice keep it simple. Write it down.

### **Use a minimum of words**

Be concise. Use different voices, different intonations and colourful language. It's strange, but the novelty factor heightens the ability to receive and remember information. Even try whispering!

### **Pre-teach**

Delivering new information a day or so before it is required boosts student understanding during the lesson that's to follow. This approach allows new concepts to be assimilated more easily.

### **Accept signals from the student**

When a student has not caught on to the instruction teach them to use a private signal to alert you that they need re-instruction. This expands the level of nonverbal communication between the student and teacher. It also promotes the student's capacity to refine their engagement and independence.

### **New assignments**

Reflect on how you present assignments to students. Is the assignment always accompanied by a written task sheet? A task sheet ensures students have the opportunity to read and re-read to ascertain instructions. It also helps parents to understand the task, rather than having to rely on unreliable student recall. Does your task sheet contain specific resources and websites to help students with their research, rather than allowing them to become lost as they try to 'Google' information? Deliberately design the layout of the task sheet. Keep it uncluttered. Simplify the visual impact by limiting the content and unnecessary educational jargon. Finally, it is a sensible idea to stagger assignments to avoid overload. This of course requires much greater planning and coordination at secondary levels!

### **Provision of alternative curriculum delivery and assessment**

A big part of steering students with learning difficulty towards success has to do with shifting the ways we deliver and assess curriculum. I recall a year 10 student saying, "Doesn't my teacher get it? If he only wants me to write essays all the time then all he's testing is my spelling and writing difficulty, and I'll just keep showing him that I've got really bad spelling and writing. That's my disability!" Traditionally within schools, the accepted way for a student to gain information has been rooted in reading print. Then once they have acquired the information, they have been expected to produce print in essay-type formats to prove their understanding. Gradually educators are beginning to truly recognise the significance of individual learning styles and how to cater more creatively and effectively through drawing on a diverse range of products; surveys, debates, jingles, concept maps, simulations, lyrics, experiments, dances, conferences, slide shows, class meetings, newsletters, story maps, charades, collages, designs, sociograms, interviews, raps, personal journals, dvd's, opinion polls, lists, calligraphy, recipes, audio tapes, illustrations, etc.

### **The purpose of meaning**

All students learn best when the task presented is seen as meaningful to them. This helps to secure their engagement. As long as they are engaged they are less likely to tune out, to become distracted and start to distract others.

### **Teach test-taking skills**

Use low-key tests as an ordinary teaching vehicle. Assess manageable portions of information continuously. This is such a help for students with poor concentration and those who suffer badly from anxiety. For a few students doing away with timed tests and always allowing extra time to complete tasks is life giving.

### **Teach memory helping techniques**

Memory weaknesses are common within this group of students, so teach ideas to underpin memory. Make a game out of the things that need to be remembered. Employ some of those basic junior primary games to help remembering. Secondary students love them because they work! Remembering tricks like acronyms, mnemonics, flash cards, rhymes, silly ditties, drawing pictures to scaffold ideas and concepts are sensible, sustainable supports.

### **Note taking**

These techniques do not come easily to students with distractible traits or to those with Learning Difficulties. Start by explicitly teaching students how to highlight notes and how to note take. If you must, provide lesson notes to students and expect them to highlight the central points during the lesson. Another idea is to encourage the drawing of pictures to support key ideas in the note taking. Sometimes photocopying the notes of another student can be useful.

### **Grab the chance to rewrite history**

Part of taking on a proactive role for these students and their parents concerns what we do 'behind the scenes'. Work at promoting the facts, inserting new positive information on to the grapevine and dispelling the mythology that is so often a part of their reputations.

### **Self-talk**

Many of us have influential inner critics living inside. Our students are no different. Those despicable inner critics provoke almost irresistible negative moods and thoughts! Teach students how to switch their positive self-talk on. Studies reveal that self-talk training results in an increase in task persistence and helps to self-regulate learning and behaviour (Westwood 1999). Moreover, we know that students identified with ADHD lack intrinsic self-talk capacity. This of course is why they procrastinate and are less task-oriented and efficient.

## Looking and listening

Do your students know what they need to look like in order to give themselves the best chance to receive and remember information? This seems so basic, but students with distractible traits, or students who are from homes that encourage distractible traits, do not have a temperament to do this. They need to know that there are a set of behaviours that will help them to look, listen, remember and follow directions. Use SLANT - it's long been said that deadly accurate listening cannot happen unless we SLANT.

- **S**it up
- **L**ean forward
- **A**ct interested
- **N**od
- **T**rack the teacher

Use the five L's -

- **L**egs crossed
- **H**ands in **L**aps
- **E**yes **L**ooking forward
- **E**ars **L**istening
- **L**ips closed

## Use RICE

Never automatically repeat yourself. Once the instructions supporting the task have been given, and you know you've catered for the students' auditory and visual memories, put on something special – a hat, a coat, a jacket, plastic glasses, a scarf or gloves – which indicates you are not available to speak to anyone for ten minutes. Tomlinson (1999) explains the four-step RICE method to assist children in developing independent listening skills. A valuable life skill!

- **R** Recall. Try to remember what was just said.
- **I** Imagine. If recalling does not work, use logic. Imagine the instructions most likely given
- **C** Check. If recalling and imagining do not help, check with a friend.
- **E** If the friend doesn't know, try the **E**xpert-for-the-day. Experts are students selected who wish to help out.

## Manufactured 'lunch time' environments help! (alternate lunches)

Many of the kids who run into trouble at lunchtimes are those we affectionately term, 'the fringe dwellers'. They are not connected to a regular peer group and tend to live on the outside. Some live on the outside simply because they are too young emotionally. Some are too loud, too boisterous too dogmatic, too explosive and too unpredictable. These kids know that they're on the fringe and a few try to enter groups by doing things to get noticed.

A few others actually have a group, but their group delight in immature behaviours that tease, intimidate and wind up others at play time. On other hand, some present as painfully shy. Initiating, let alone maintaining a relationship, is extraordinarily difficult. To survive the highly social rigours that school presents, they may spend recess and lunch sitting on a bench intently reading a novel. Sadly, this instinctive survival behaviour draws further attention to the social awkwardness they wrestle with.

Through planned structuring it is possible to reduce troubling lunchtime behaviours in schools. Ideas can begin as simply as the student being picked up by a parent and taken home for lunch several days each week, or reserving the Lego or computer for a student and their friend for the last 15 minutes of lunch.

Other initiatives developed by schools include -

- Asking the student (and a friend) to water the indoor plants throughout the school (develop a roster).
- Regular 'interest groups' and 'clubs' for students at lunch times are really helpful – 'the fringe dwellers' are often the first to take advantage of these; The plant patch – a supervised gardening group, Science club, Wetland friends and so on.
- Café de School – a room set up as a café with magazines, cups, jugs of water and board games. Students can bring and use their - ipods, hand held computer games and so on.
- Create *THE ZONE* (a supervised outside/inside activity based area). An invitation for the student to join *THE ZONE* is mailed home. It also contains their entry "tag". Each time the student arrives at *THE ZONE* their "tag" is hole punched. Five holes in the "tag" rewards them with a canteen voucher. What an incentive! On certain days they can bring a friend as well. *THE ZONE* really is the place to be! An integral part of this concept is to include parent education.

The possibilities are endless. What is critical idea is to provide the student with a focussed and structured environment, especially in the second half of lunch as their emotional tolerance begins to wane. Other ideas –

- There's the student radio station at Semaphore Dominican School (and it's not the cool kids that it attracts, but cool kids listen to it with fervour. Go figure!)
- Set up a supervised games room or a supervised part of the yard
- Convert an old shed into a toy-car racing track
- Recently, as a trial, one school placed an extra teacher in the yard each lunch time. While on duty they either chose to play the sport the students were playing or wandered with the intent to positively talk with students and hand out awards and canteen vouchers for spotting great efforts. The outcome was amazing, especially because teachers targeted the students who traditionally had difficulty.

### **Peer mediation and peer counselling**

Peer mediation is another way of solving conflicts between students that occur at recess and lunch (Cognitive Behavioural Training: A How-to Guide for Successful Behaviour, page 184). The peer mediation program promotes the theme that conflicts can be managed by talking and negotiating. All peer mediators are involved in a training program to learn how to promote:

- Win/win conflict resolution skills
- Decision and choice-making skills
- Leadership skills
- Listening and speaking skills
- The skill to present a fair argument
- A culture of resolution rather than punishment

At playtimes students choose to ask a mediator for help. The trained mediator will remind students to be honest with each other and to think of solutions that will work for both. While peer mediation is an excellent vehicle for students to offer community service to their school, it is also extraordinarily useful to involve students known to have their own social and conflict resolution difficulties. The very act of supporting others and consistently following the principles of the program helps to reinforce and underpin their own thinking.

### **Tips on transitions**

We know from experience that preparing students in advance for changes to routines, for unstructured time and brand new occasions is truly helpful. Students identified with Asperger Syndrome in particular have a strong need to know what is going to happen so they can prepare for it. When they can't work out what is going on they can easily become anxious, reactive and disruptive.

Ideas to prepare for transitions include –

- For the first day at a new school. A successful strategy is to organise three, four, five or six orientation visits to assist the student to familiarise themselves with the new situation before they begin. Expert educators use their digital cameras and capture the student with their home group teacher in their new classroom, at the canteen with the manager, in their art class with the art teacher, with their special education teacher, and so on. An added idea is to include the photographs of students (with their Christian names) who will be in their new class or home group.
- Finding the personal resources to cope with starting back at school after a short break, to listen to a guest speaker, to attend assemblies or go on excursions and camps can be challenging for a number of students. Worries about uncertainties can throw students into disarray. One idea is to use the rehearsal technique. Pre-plan by rehearsing how the event might unfold. Pinpoint and discuss the times that may prove most challenging, and role play ways to cope. Rehearsing helps students of all ages to intellectualise the feelings likely to arise, which in turn supports greater composure when the time comes.
- Even, the apparently basic day-to-day transitions, such as lining up for class, walking across the yard with the class, entering the classroom after recess or lunch, or entering the class of another teacher, can cause turmoil and upset. To avoid these situations, limit the time the child spends in these environments. For example, instead of getting them to line up, arrange to meet them at a nominated place on your way to class, or arrange for a buddy to walk with the student when moving between classes.
- Simple ideas as having a small morning, daily or weekly timetable that the student can stick to their desk so they have a clear idea about what is happening and what requirements they need for each lesson. Over-structuring should be seen as a basic survival technique for the student, the class and yourself!

### **Read student reports**

Competent professionals build on the judgement and opinions of those who have worked with students previously. Previous plans, reports, profiles and notes should not colour a competent teacher's judgement. Comments such as 'I don't read the children's files before I start teaching them' or 'I like to make up my own mind' cannot be interpreted as helpful or professional. Capable teachers read children's files because they know their first interaction with the student and the parents will be the one that counts most.

## Tips to set goals

*"Goals do several things. They narrow the attention span to the task. They provide hope. They provide anticipation of pleasure which triggers the body's feel good chemicals, the endorphins!" (Jensen, 2002)*

### Goals - dreams with a plan

Creating a vision of the future and setting a goal can be a powerful transformation tool. Discovering what an individual wants or dreams, and the advantages of achieving it, can initiate a process of change. Look at what's possible. Begin by choosing one thing that can quickly be put into place, and achieved. This sparks momentum.

### Goals - dreams with a time line

Sometimes when you work with a student to set a goal, they won't know what they want. However, it's not the quality of the idea that tips the balance - it's the act of asking, suggesting and participating with students which makes the greatest difference. According to Australian researcher Allan Luke, one of the most significant things that teachers can do to improve student learning is to set goals that challenge, rather than setting "do your best" goals. He coins the phrase, "placing the rope" in front of students so that they have to reach out to grab it. One idea is to try 'the one page miracle'. Divide a blank page into 5 or 6 spaces. In each space, place one of these headings; learning, behaviour, confidence, emotion and motivation encourage students to generate a list of things that 'could make a difference'. You'll be pleasantly surprised! Look at what's possible. Begin by choosing one thing that can quickly be put into place, and achieved. Goals spark momentum!

### A behaviour change tool - praise

Question which behaviours you automatically respond to. Experienced teachers know that specific positive comments, the idea of 'catching kids being good' and telling them, have to substantially outweigh critical or negative comments. This is one of the most effective behaviour change tools at our disposal. A few genuinely placed words can go a long way. Also bear in mind that behaviour always tells us something. Our task is to find out what the student's behaviour is saying, and observation is our greatest tool.

### A behaviour change tool - design a 'way-to-change' plan

When praise and occasional social reinforcers are not enough to bring about a behavioural change for a student, a program which relies on greater scaffolding and more powerful reinforcers is best suited. The starting point is to get the student on side so they can see value in making a change. This clever, mutually designed strategy helps students to reach new goals by increasing their accountability. It is optimistic and encourages pro-social participation. Approach the plan determined to make it a successful experience. Lively visual monitoring devices help students to stay excited about their goal, but remain secondary to a well developed plan.

### Borrowing from the future

Encourage a student, or your class, to write an end of semester report they would like in the future. This is an engaging and energising activity. The exercise is useful for students at all year levels. Best results occur when there is a trusting relationship, willingness to goal-set, and a copy of the last school report. The activity provides plenty of smiles, but also compels students to face old criticisms, devise new goals and think about how to convert them into a new.

### Have a plan

The other dimension to setting goals is to formulate your own plan. If you don't the outrageous behaviours of some of these kids will destroy the belief you have in yourself as a quality teacher, your classroom tone and the confidence of other students to be able to learn in a safe class environment, long before it begins to damage them. A sobering thought is the fact that we will encounter students with these challenges in increasing frequency in the future.

You have to determine where you want to go rather than being swept there. A simple start is to start with a blank sheet of paper and begin writing what you want, how you'll do it and who you need continuing help from to do it. Determine priorities. Put them on time line of stages and attach review meeting dates. DECS offers Negotiated Education Plans (NEPs) for students eligible for support under the 'Students with Disabilities' policy. Unfortunately, eligibility is reserved to a few who have severe difficulties. Nevertheless, I see a number of my resourceful colleagues adapt the NEP, available for download from the DECS website, as a fabulous structure to hinge their learning plan on. It's a great idea because with so much to do, it's so easy for busy teachers to let things slide. In doing this, teachers put in train a therapeutic process for the student, and often for their parents as well.

## Find out more about 'Positive Behavioural Support'

Positive Behavioural Support is a proactive approach. It focuses on reducing the challenging behaviours of students by assessing their behaviours and redesigning the environment to increase the quality of their functioning. It starts with building a relationship, because without relationship all you have is a loot bag filled with limited sterile tricks that may work intermittently. A few of my favourite PBS include –

- Understanding the importance of identifying the challenging behaviours? Understanding why they happen, what sets them off and when they happen? These are the keys to replacing punishment with effective interventions.
- Question whether the environment created is comfortable, safe and functional for the student (e.g. is the problem behaviour the result of an environment that's just too unstructured?)
- Developing self awareness – as students become aware of their behaviours, and the consequence of how they impact on others, they move to a position to make adjustments and try new ideas.
- Develop problem solving skills – introduce a simple framework for students to deal with confusing or stressful situations that explicitly lead them to sort through the difficulty, cope and bounce back.
- Catch the positive behaviours!
- Be consistent – teach new appropriate behaviours, one at a time, to replace the old unwanted behaviours. Train to proficiency!
- Validate feelings – Acknowledge how the student must be feeling. Separate feelings and behaviour during conversations. In this way teachers can develop trust with students.
- Model self talk.

Results from the clinical research are clear. When Positive Behavioural Support is appropriately applied students experience academic, social and emotional improvements (Hendley, 2007). For more information on PBS;

- [www.aase.edu.au/2004\\_Conf\\_papers/S.Vanderaa.pdf](http://www.aase.edu.au/2004_Conf_papers/S.Vanderaa.pdf)
- [www.pbis.org/schoolwide.htm](http://www.pbis.org/schoolwide.htm)
- [www.education.tas.gov.au/school/educators/support/positivebehaviour](http://www.education.tas.gov.au/school/educators/support/positivebehaviour)

## Tips for change-ups and energizers

A mood lift is anything a teacher does to introduce fun, amusement or interest into the day. They are useful when the attention, concentration or the mood of the group is starting to wane. Typically, the engagement and enthusiasm of students seems to ebb during long double lesson periods or later in the afternoon. Fun and laughter are good medicine and lift the spirit of everyone, yet not surprisingly, mood lifts and delightful energizing activities are often one of the first things to dry up when the going gets tough in our classrooms.

A great way to discover a few wonderfully innovative ideas is go to your computer and 'Google' energizers or group activities. You'll be amazed by the creative ideas on offer. If you're not a spontaneous sort of person, you can program so it looks like you are! The best advice is to develop a repertoire of old-favourites that you know will work and gradually experiment with new things! Try talking louder or faster, speaking more softly, change the style of presentation, using an odd voice or an accent, tell a joke, invite jokes, give students a minute to solve a brainteaser, continue your trivia quiz, then get back to the lesson. A mood lift or change-up is simply an energising break!

Here are several starters -

### Play Speed Ball

This works equally well for junior primary classes right through to upper secondary. This game is quick and reinvigorates. Have students stand next to their seats. Throw a beanbag or a foam ball towards a student. Once the student has caught the ball they engage eye contact with someone new, call their name, and throw it directly to them. When a student misses the catch they are out of the game. They sit down and return the ball to the thrower. The last five students standing win.

### Wink murder is an old favourite

Choose a detective from the group and ask them to leave the room for a few moments. The group needs to be very quiet. Choose a murderer. The detective returns and stands in the middle of the circle or at the front of the group. The murderer secretly winks at members in the room. As they receive the wink they must fall to the ground and 'die'. And, it's fine for the person dying to be very dramatic. The detective's task is to find the winking murderer before too many die.

### Try bobsledding

This is a team relay. Form teams of 4 to 6 players. Each team sits in a line and each team member wraps their legs around the person in front of them. Place a masking tape marker on the floor about 5 metres from the start to mark the end of the track. On "GO", teams must only use their hands to slide their way to the end. If a team breaks apart, they must get back together before they continue. The first team with all members over the finish line wins!



## Play Mr. and Mrs. Right

Have everyone stand. Explain to the group that when you say "right" everyone must take a jump to the right. When you say "left" everyone must take a jump to the left. Read the story below quite quickly. Begin ...

This is a story about Mr. and Mrs. WRIGHT. One evening they were baking cookies. Mrs. WRIGHT called from the kitchen, "Oh, no, there is no flour LEFT! You will need to go out to the store RIGHT away."

"I can't believe you forgot to check the pantry before we started," grumbled MR. WRIGHT. "You never get anything RIGHT!" "Don't be difficult, dear," replied Mrs. WRIGHT.

"You could have LEFT by now and been on your way. It will only take twenty minutes if you come RIGHT back. Go to the Post Office up on the main road, and turn LEFT at the stop sign. Then go past the fruit shop we usually go to, and turn RIGHT, and there it will be on your LEFT," declared Mrs. WRIGHT as her husband LEFT the house.

Mr. WRIGHT found the store and asked the shop assistant where he could find the flour. The shop assistant pointed and said, "Go to Aisle four and turn LEFT. The flour and sugar will be on your LEFT."

Mr. WRIGHT made his purchase and walked RIGHT out the door. He turned LEFT, but he couldn't remember where he had LEFT his car. Suddenly he remembered that he had driven Mrs. WRIGHT'S car and that his car was in the driveway at home RIGHT where he had LEFT it. He finally found the RIGHT car and put his things RIGHT inside. Eventually, a weary Mr. WRIGHT found his way home. Mrs. WRIGHT had been waiting impatiently. "I thought you would be RIGHT back," she said. "I LEFT all the cookie ingredients on the kitchen counter, and the cats got into the milk. You'll just have to go RIGHT out again."

Mr. WRIGHT sighed. He had no energy LEFT. "I am going RIGHT to bed," he said. "Anyway, I need to go on a diet, so I might as well start RIGHT now. Isn't that RIGHT, dear?"

## HAPPY FACE collections

Discuss with the class, a particular behaviour you want to see more of; improved cooperation, having a go, looking tuned in, the most beautiful smile, the quickest or most creative answer. Explain that each time you see a great attempt you'll stamp their blank Happy-face card with a happy face stamp. At the end of the nominated time collect up the cards ready to bring them back out in several days. Finally, when a card becomes full the student achieves a predetermined reward. It's a simple approach and can be varied to suit your circumstance.

## Raffle ticket give away

Instead of happy face stamps, give away raffle tickets that can be collected by students and cashed in later for prizes. This really is a way to motivate students. And, when executed with finesse it works beautifully with much older students too! Negotiate how many tickets students will need to earn particular rewards and display this on the "Red-hot ticket giveaway menu." Now you're ready to start.

Mood lift and energising possibilities are limitless!

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