

# Chapter 5 from TEACHING TOUGH KIDS

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**TEACHING TOUGH KIDS** encapsulates the work Mark is passionate about and won the United Kingdom's prestigious National Association for Special Needs (NASEN) 2011 Book Award in the category of 'Best book to Promote Professional Development'.

## Creating the best start for challenging kids

*Inside Tough Kids with oppositional styled behaviours*

The control of student behaviour has always been a major component of an educator's skill repertoire. Today, as teachers face increasing numbers of students with challenging emotions and behaviour, there is a clear expectation on them to expand the quality of how they go about managing students (Applebaum 2008).

Every so often a teacher will find themselves having to deal with the behaviours of one or two students who battle for attention and power. When challenged they'll become defiant or loud, and occasionally vindictive and intimidating. Oppositional styled behaviours, from even just one student, can be a perilous time. Such encounters place a teacher's reactions under the closest scrutiny of the class, and depending on their responses, either an atmosphere of care, strength and fairness is stirred, or the class can suddenly set itself against a teacher it perceives as mean and unjust. The tone of the classroom can quickly unravel and the confidence of students to learn and participate in a warm interactive class environment falls apart.

Taking on the challenge to find success with oppositional styled students is the focus of this chapter and it starts by acknowledging several key points. Firstly, the best 'disaster recipe' occurs when a teacher displays the same reactive and inflexible traits as these kids. Educators who order students about, who deliver quick ultimatums where students feel backed into a corner invite kids to say and do things that they would not dream of saying or doing in the normal course of events. These kids are truly reliant on intelligent, poised educators who can speak quietly or privately to them when reprimanding, who give time for responses and can cleverly sidestep until the heat of the moment subsides.

Secondly, is the significance of developing and maintaining class cohesion and unity. Teachers who do this well are regularly found sitting in a circle with class members where everyone has the chance to talk about what has happened, how they feel and how things can be made better. These are the teachers who build a sense of community by using words as 'we', 'us' and 'ours'. Through helpful discussions teacher and class are able to negotiate expectations and rules which inherently bring structure, predictability and emotional comfort. They ask students, no matter their age;

"What rules do you think will help our class?"

"What rules should be negotiable?"

"What sorts of understandings are best non-negotiable?"

"When rules are broken must we always punish?"

"How can we work problems out?"

"Is this the best solution?"

In truth, it is not any one single rule that tips the balance, but the act of everyone in the group participating, discussing and owning decisions that makes the difference.

Thirdly, without a plan, some helpful collegiate support and an understanding of what drives you to react the way you do to student misbehaviour, you've lost before you've started. The oppositional behaviours of a few of these kids can easily destroy the belief you have in yourself as a teacher, destroy your classroom tone and wreck the confidence students and parents should have in your ability to provide a safe, productive classroom environment (Axup & Gersch 2008).

### ***What lies beneath behaviour?***

Behaviour always happens for a reason and observation is a good way to understand what may be driving it. Researching the ABC's of behaviour has the potential to provide a valuable piece of the puzzle that busy teachers can easily overlook (Holverstott 2005). Start by working through the questions below.

#### *Antecedents*

- To begin with, when does the difficult behaviour start?
- What sets the behaviour off?
- Who is around at the time?
- Do you think the environment is safe for this student?
- Speculate on the likely triggers for this behaviour?
- Has it to do with; working in groups, interactions at play time, social miscuing, sadness, tiredness, homework, anxiousness, avoidance, excitability, inflexibility, poor planning or language difficulties?
- Where does the problem behaviour usually happen?
- Does it happen at the same time most days?
- Is the behaviour the result of too higher expectation or too little structure?
- Might the problem behaviour be the result of emotional overload? If, typically, by lunch time there is always a blow-up it is likely that the student's coping abilities are running on empty. At this point an unstructured environment is too overwhelming.

#### *Behaviour*

- Record exactly what the behaviour is.
- How frequent is it?
- Is it becoming more or less frequent?
- What does student say?
- What does the student do?
- What does the student want?
- How severe is it really?
- How much of this behaviour really matters? Is it behaviour worth tackling? Why?
- Do you think the behaviour a result of the student's level of physical, emotional, social or intellectual development?
- Might a clever change to routine or a creative 'circuit-breaker' minimise the problem?

#### *Consequences*

- What usually happens following this behaviour?
- What do they do?
- What does the student say?
- How long does it take for their anger to subside?
- Is their calm down time improving or worsening?
- Are they usually prepared to discuss it?
- Do they understand the impact it has on others?
- Or, do they always blame others?
- What is their response when they listen to the thoughts and feelings of others who were affected?
- Do they show remorse?
- What do you say or do?

- Are your responses largely punitive, educative or relational? Is there a balance?

Next, ask a trusted colleague to observe the student and you at the classically challenging times. Ask them to consider the same set of questions. Compare their responses with yours. This provides a catalyst for discussion, deeper understandings and the generation of new ideas. It may be, for example, that the learning environment you have created for the student does not work in their favour. It may be too interactive, too stimulating and offer too many choices. Play with the idea whether the student would benefit by being placed in a less confronting environment at critical times. The concept of Positive Behavioural Support principles (PBS) is always worth visiting (Conroy et al. 2005). PBS emerged in the 1980's and continues to gather momentum. It focuses on reducing the challenging behaviours of students through assessing their behaviours and redesigning the environment to improve their functioning. Results from the clinical research are very clear. When Positive Behavioural Support is appropriately and consistently applied students always experience academic, social and emotional improvements (Hendley 2007).

## ***Designing an improvement plan***

Once the ABC's of behaviour have been thought through it's time to get the student on board. A great way to do this is to construct an improvement plan as a valuable agent of change. It doesn't matter what you call the plan. Name it by whatever term best suits your situation or system; a learning plan, a behaviour plan, a way to change plan or a success plan. In essence, it is an explicit tool aimed at providing improved structure, more powerful reinforcers and higher levels of accountability. It is ideal for kids who need more than praise and usual social reinforcers.

Improving student behaviour begins by developing an emotional connection with them. However, finding an emotional connection is often ignored by some because they feel jaded by the difficulties the student has displayed. Their response is to tighten the rules and create more stringent rules; time-outs, detentions, exclusions and suspensions. This may work for a few, but quite a few others become defiant to the disciplinary upgrade. When this happens the optimistic influences that may have guided a student towards making a few positive changes virtually evaporate.

A thoughtful starting point is to talk to the student about what is happening. Explain what you want. A simple question like, "What can I do to help?" can dissolve barriers and trigger new beginnings. Listen to them. Actively discuss what might work to meet your needs and theirs. This sort of conversation has the scope to get teacher and student on the same side of the fence.

Introduce the improvement plan optimistically.

Present it to the student as a way to shake off an old behaviour that is not working for them by replacing it with one that will help them to reach a new goal. Two improvement plan reproducibles are offered at the end of the chapter; '*success plan – go for the cup!*' and '*my new way to do it*'. Take a look at them. Discuss the idea of positive and negative reinforcers. Positive reinforcers are best seen as an investment to fire-up the student's desire to do better, and negative reinforcers strengthen their responsibility to maintain personal accountability.

## ***Positive reinforcers***

A positive reinforcer is a bonus of some kind received by the student that follows a pleasing behaviour. Positive reinforcement is of course best applied immediately following a desired behaviour. As a rule, a social reinforcer such as a smile, a wink, an uplifting comment, a silly face, a nudge, or an "I dare you!" with a laugh is enough to reward, motivate and enthuse. The students who we are particularly interested in often need more tempting reinforcers. Praise alone is not enough. These kids benefit from repeated social and concrete reinforcement as a way to strengthen required behaviours.

Ideally, get the student to participate in choosing the reinforcers that will be on offer. They do not have to be expensive, but need to be meaningful to the student so their desire to do better is captured. More often than not, parents are prepared to support the plan by providing reinforcers selected by the student.

## ***Popular positive reinforcers***

- extra time on the computer
- Lego, Lego technic and Bionicles
- canteen vouchers
- puzzles
- boardgames
- a toy
- a snack
- free time in the library
- free time using the computer
- collector cards
- collectible cars
- music CDs
- a DVD
- a gift voucher
- selecting something from the lucky-dip box
- tokens such as fake money, points, stars, stickers or tickets which may later be exchanged for a
- predetermined item

Although open to question this form of encouragement, built out and well managed over time, can lead to improved internal motivation, which of course, is the ultimate goal. (Cameron & Pierce 1994, 1998; Fabes et al. 1989; Lepper et al. 1996; Maag 2001; Pfiffner 1985; Rockwell 2007; Weiner 1998; Wiersma 1992).

### *Negative reinforcers*

Negative reinforcement occurs when an undesirable behaviour displayed by a student is followed up by an appropriate negative response.

#### *Popular negative reinforcers*

- the temporary loss of a privilege
- missing out on something anticipated
- reduction of free time or play time
- accepting a consequence from the person or group who have been harmed
- moving to a less desirable place in the classroom or spending time in another classroom
- time out, quiet time or rethink time
- internal or external school suspension
- reflecting on an action to someone (the principal, deputy principal, school counsellor or the class)
- verbally apologising
- writing an apology
- taking on additional jobs or tasks (community service)

Negative reinforcers are used to reduce unacceptable behaviour because most agree that when they are carried out suitably and consistently the student's undesirable behaviour usually diminishes. However, unlike positive reinforcement, use negative reinforcers cautiously. Do not overplay them.

### *Define the new behaviour and how it will attract positive reinforcers*

Decide on one or two behaviours that are not working for the student and are worth changing together.

Discuss them and redefine each in positive terms.

It is always best to place the spotlight on strengthening the new positive behaviour. Evidence demonstrates that direct attempts to stamp out unwanted behaviours are far less successful than structuring an increase in the frequency of the

more desirable behaviours (Barkley 2006). As an example, two undesirable behaviours frequently displayed by 10 year old Luke are that he constantly calls out in class discussion and distracts others while they are working.

Redefining the behaviour with a positive spin might see Luke being guided to create these statements:

- “I need to put my hand up and wait to be asked.”
- “When I have something to say I will always put my hand up without calling out.”
- “Before I put my hand up I will count that four people have had a turn first.”
- “Instead of interrupting others in quiet work time I can take one of my tokens and fasten it to the page I am working on.” Two or three tokens are available to Luke in selected lessons. When used in this way they tally up to provide a positive reinforcer. A token may not be used if the teacher has had to provide the prompt for Luke to stop talking first.

Be very specific about the new behaviour and how it is to be targetted. The student needs to be clear about how they need to look, act and sound (Marron 2002). Think, “is the expectation I have developed reasonable for this student’s age, maturity, personality, capacity and so on?”

### *Filling out the improvement plan*

Write the newly defined positive behaviour into the improvement plan. The higher the student’s involvement at this stage the more likely you are to tap into their internal sense of pride, and this more than anything, will help carry the new behaviour forward. Specify exactly how often and how much of this new positive behaviour is required to achieve the positive reinforcer and reach the final goal.

Next, encourage the student to select a negative reinforcer and record it onto the improvement plan. Try to choose reinforcers they will seek to avoid as this increases their personal accountability. Explain that the negative reinforcers will only be used when their old behaviour gets in the way of their new thinking. Agree when and how the negative reinforcer will be used. A valuable idea is to decide on a ‘secret signal’ between you and the student as a quick reminder to them to stay with the new positive behaviour. Students identified with ADHD are naturally impulsive and are less inclined to be able to see too far ahead. Our planning has to do this for them. Discuss and role-play how the student might show their frustration without threatening their chances of success. Work out a safe place or a safe person they can retreat to if they are feeling overwhelmed, put out or angry. If, however, they choose to ignore the signal and allow their unthinking behaviour to take over, then the predetermined negative reinforcer becomes the consequence.

To make the plan official ask the student to sign off on it. The addition of your signature reminds them that you want to inspire a successful change.

Select a place to keep the plan.

An idea is to take several photographs of the student performing the new target behaviour. Once printed, the photographs can be attached to the improvement plan as a reminder of the new behaviour being strengthened.

Sometimes using an *improvement plan* in combination with a *tracking chart* similar to ‘blast off’, ‘go and fly your kite’, ‘you can count on Winston’s segments’, ‘staying on track with my dragon chart’ and ‘staying on track with my duck chart’ at the end of the chapter is an influential visual reminder for kids to stay on track.

Place the improvement plan and the tracking chart where they can be seen as often as needed. Each lesson, each morning, every afternoon or at the end of each day encourage the student to add a sticker, a colour or whatever has been agreed. Most kids prefer a reasonable degree of privacy and confidentially when using this process, and this is more so as they become older. Always discuss with the student just how public or private is comfortable for them.

### *Different students respond best to different systems*

Younger children, especially those who are busy, impulsive and forgetful respond best to immediate feedback and positive reinforcers for using their new thinking. This helps to keep the new goal fresh in their mind. A consistent drip-feed that nurtures small changes seems best, rather than “if you’re good all week, you can have a reward”. Older

children are able to respond to more complicated token styled systems which have longer delays built in between behaviour and reinforcement.

### *What is earned cannot be taken away*

Anything a student has worked for and earned remains theirs. When the student's old unthinking behaviour gets in the way of the new positive behaviour, despite a reminder or two, the prearranged negative reinforcer is attracted. When this happens, as it will, do not interpret the plan or the student failing. Your job is to create the opportunity for a restart without the connotation of failure or loss of dignity. Use the hiccup as an insightful moment to learn from. At this point it will simply take the student longer to reach their goal.

### *Train to proficiency*

Once the program starts, use the plan every lesson or every day over the agreed period. Talk about it, talk it up and review progress. Praise the student's effort and perseverance as well as success.

Once the plan expires, the next step is to extend the standard required to earn a positive reinforcer. This is referred to as building the program out. Never hesitate to change the appearance of the improvement plan to add interest, and gradually, aim to virtually replace concrete rewards with social reinforcers. As the student begins to adopt the new behaviour more regularly you may consider looking at and targeting a new behaviour that could do with some fine tuning. Finally, a common pitfall is to keep on working at behaviour too long after the goal has been achieved. Remember, this approach is not about achieving perfection, it is about normalising behaviours.

## ***Inside Oppositional Defiant Disorder***

Occasionally the struggle to connect with a student and find optimistic ways forward is far, far more challenging. A few of our students meet the criteria, or would meet it if they had the opportunity to gain identification, for Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD). These students have a strong reactive need to control, to have their own way and will use socially exploitive, emotionally explosive or totally annoying ways to get what they want. Typically they temper tantrum, argue, bend and defy the rules of adults. They blame and annoy others, get annoyed by others, then pay them back and deny any responsibility. Remarkably, these young individuals appear to tolerate the negativity they attract, and seem to thrive on the conflict, anger and condemnation of others. Yet, in between the torrid times when their emotional coping skills are not being put to the test these kids can be warm, compassionate and a joy to be with.

### ***Case study, Rebecca's 'Golden Snitch' improvement plan***

Rebecca's plan for success was inspired by her love for Harry Potter. Rebecca, her class teacher, the assistant principal and her parents struck the improvement plan together. The plan was later discussed with staff members who have contact with Rebecca. Each was given a copy.

#### *The Quaffles*

Rebecca can always earn a Quaffle per lesson, and for each recess and lunch period when she shows these behaviours:

- is prepared to listen
- follows instructions
- works constructively
- tries to complete tasks
- speaks and treats other respectfully

#### *The Golden Snitches*

When Rebecca has earned three Quaffles she automatically qualifies for a Golden Snitch. Gaining two Golden Snitches means she can celebrate her success by having an immediate 10 minute reward time. However, the option exists for her to save four Golden Snitches because with four Snitches in hand Rebecca is able to enjoy

a 20 minute success time at the end of the day. She may choose to celebrate with a friend or enjoy it alone. Reward times include time using the computer, playing with Lego/Bionicles, continuing a jigsaw puzzle, drawing, reading her book, scrap book, reading and so on.

The following is also written into Rebecca's success plan and was written with Rebecca steering the process.

*Rebecca knows her early warning signs that lead to anger. She knows her*

- arms go tense and sometimes she clenches her fists
- shoulders become raised and her body feels tight
- her arms fold across her chest
- voice becomes raised
- head says argue and win!

*Things that make Rebecca angry are when someone*

- is mean to her (teachers or students)
- steals her ideas
- tells her that she can't do something that she's been expecting to do

*Agreed action for staff to follow when things are starting to go wrong*

- Say, "Are you working towards a Quaffle, Rebecca?" This reminder replaces statements as, "calm down" or "don't be silly" or "If you continue to behave like this you will lose a Quaffle!" These statements inflame Rebecca's annoyance.
- If Rebecca isn't able to modify her behaviour staff will ask her to do something else that will help her feel happier. In her case this means reading her novel for ten minutes, going to her buddy class or finding her designated safe teacher for ten minutes.
- Once Rebecca feels more settled she is expected to return to class.
- If Rebecca refuses to follow the steps above, or returns to class and stays angry and disruptive the principal, deputy principal, school chaplain or school counsellor will be asked to take her to a quiet place to help her find a better way forward.
- If she chooses not to participate in this, or returns to class and is disruptive again one of her parents or a nominated relative or family friend will collect her from school and take her home. As strange as it may seem Rebecca enjoys being at school and going home is not something she wants. At home Rebecca is expected to complete school work that has been pre-packaged in an envelope to replace the work she has missed out on at school.
- Reentry the next day is contingent on this work being done. The next day is always seen as an opportunity for everyone to make a new and optimistic start.

*Behaviours that attract the reminder, "Are you working towards a Quaffle, Rebecca?"*

- When she is finding it hard to follow an instruction
- When she starts to argue (teachers have been taught how to deescalate her argumentative way)
- When she refuses to have a go at the task or refuses to participate in a discussion to modify it
- When she begins to treat others disrespectfully
- When she is becoming disruptive

*Behaviours that attract an automatic go home with no warning*

- Hitting, punching, slapping, pulling hair, pinching, kicking, pushing and spitting
- Continually touching to annoy others
- Running away from teachers
- Damaging school property or the belongings of others
- Using disrespectful language to teachers and students

Three go homes result in a one day internal suspension.

For instance, when 13 year-old Rebecca hears a sudden or outright "no" or feels as though she has been treated unfairly she turns the matter into a war that she must win. She becomes unrelenting in her quest to get her way. It matters little

to her whether the battle rages in the privacy of her own home or whether it's in the public arena in front of peers in the classroom. Typically, she'll say,

*"No!"*

*"You can't stop me!"*

*"You can't make me."*

*"I can and I will."*

*"You don't matter."*

*"I'm the boss, not you!"*

*"I don't care."*

*"I don't care what you think."*

*"Wait till you're not looking."*

She must prove to the adult, or the group, that they are wrong or unfair and will go to extraordinary lengths to do so, even if it means retreating under her desk and making incessant baby noises; blah, blah, blah, blah or goo, goo, goo, goo.... to thoroughly annoy and disrupt.

Besides being identified with ODD Rebecca also has a diagnosis of ADHD. ODD is a condition frequently associated with ADHD and being identified with both makes a world of difference. Children and adolescents with ADHD alone do things without thinking. Basically, they are impulsive. The addition of Oppositional Defiance Disorder takes Rebecca's responses, especially when she feels she's been treated unjustly, to new dimensions! The precise causes of ODD are not known yet. Researchers suggest that oppositional behaviours appear more frequently when there is either too much or too little available structure. When rules and expectations are too rigid, too demanding and too punitive oppositional behaviours seem to escalate. Conversely, structures that are flimsy, loose and inconsistent also promote difficulties. It appears that the best recipe to reduce the volatile emotion around ODD, is a style that aims to balance appropriate and consistent structures with low emotional responses, care and quality dialogue. A style much easier written than practiced in the classroom!

Rebecca's parents say that as a toddler she was far more pedantic and demanding than her younger sister. She was tough work from the beginning! These days she can still be expert at dividing her parent's opinions and authority. She cleverly exploits their natural differences. Their emotional resilience and relationship is always at risk because it is always being tested. They often disagree on how best to handle her tricky behaviours. Yet, they know that airing their disputes in front of Rebecca limit their chances of success. At times Dad accuses mum of allowing Rebecca to press her buttons and spending too much time either justifying or arguing with her. Mum accuses dad of coming down too hard with too little warning. Parenting Rebecca is certainly not easy. Indeed, dealing with a child or teen with ODD (and ADHD) is one of the most stressful situations parents face.

In Rebecca's case school is less problematic and less emotionally charged. This is because her teachers have built some very obvious structures and expectations for her to work within that she sees as essentially fair. What's more, the staff's consistency, predictability and low emotional response appears to assist her steadiness. When things go wrong the first step is to use the improvement plan Rebecca helped to create. The improvement plan plainly states the positive behaviours the school wishes to see from Rebecca and how using these will attract good things. It also details how they will respond to Rebecca's unacceptable negative behaviours if she chooses to use them at school.

### *Essentials to support oppositional styled kids*

Teachers who have experienced the volatile emotions that live with oppositional behaviours quickly learn a few essentials that really help. These same principles apply to both children and adolescents:

#### *Relationship*

Managing the emotion and behaviour of kids with oppositional behaviours is hard. The best starting point is to show that you like them (Glen & Nelson 1989). And, if this is difficult work hard to find a thing or two about them that you can like! Actively showing care towards them is essential because these kids have inbuilt radar that tells them when a teacher doesn't like them, and making up lost ground can be very, very tough. Find moments to exchange a laugh with them. Tell them you care. Actually ask, "What can I do to help?" Kids often know what will work best for them and draw



strength from a teacher's perseverance. Remember, when things go wrong, as they most certainly will from time to time, do your best to show emotional dependability and steadiness. There's no mistake about it, these kids are reliant on poised adults at school; perfect role models. They are dependent on adults, who want to engage them and can treat them with respect, especially when redirection is required. Their connectedness, desire to learn and emotional steadiness will remain keenly connected to the quality of their teacher's input. Continuing reassuring communication is doubly important for kids with oppositional behaviours because given the amount of conflict that bubbles away in their life it is easy for them to feel unloved or unwanted by their parents and teachers. If we allow them stay in this place for too long they bunker down, become hardened to the needs of others and erratically lash out as a means of self-protection.

### *Think fast*

As soon as you find yourself in conflict with an oppositional student know that you got to make a good decision fast. If you cannot or do not, the behaviours of these kids will quickly skyrocket out of control. Very quickly decide whether this is really worth perusing? Decide on what is reasonable as an outcome that the student and you can live with? Think, how can I achieve this without raising their emotion past the point of no return? And, always have 'Plan B' in the back of your mind in case you make the wrong call!

Every now and then, a situation can be successfully diffused by merely changing the subject, distracting the student and not 'buying in'. Precisely the same tactics we use more naturally with much younger children. This is the moment to mention several questions teachers should never ask kids who are flexing their oppositional behaviour in front of other students. They are;

"What did you say? Repeat that!"

"You're on step three now. What do you think of that?"

"Why did you do that?"

"Tell me what that was all about?"

These questions, especially when accompanied by strong teacher emotion and finger beckoning, invite students to protect their dignity and to do this they will launch a forceful, desperate verbal reprisal superseding anything you anticipated.

### *Wraparound: a team intervention*

Build a team who can reliably support one another because it is too much to ask the class teacher or the student to deal with this alone. As a rule teams are comprised of the student's parent or parents, school leadership, key teachers, a child psychologist or psychiatrist and perhaps interagency personnel. Getting the team together for regular review meetings always reap benefits simply because they get everyone talking. The spirit is to review what's happening, what's working and what's not. It presents a forum to discuss, make changes and plan. Outcomes from meetings do not have to be perfect solutions, but ideas that are workable and progressive often make a world of difference. It can be uplifting for students to meet with their team from time to time (Eber et al. 2008). For students to see and hear each team member caring, participating and wanting the very best for them can be therapeutic. As they meet with the team they are also reminded that what they have to say is very important. Teams that do best also value the idea of team maintenance. In other words, everyone within the team takes care of one another because they openly acknowledge this is genuinely hard work. This translates to;

- Teaching parents how to take time out. How to find a baby-sitter, get out and maintain their relationship.
- Allowing teachers and parents the opportunity to complain about the complexities they face.
- Responding constructively and with sensitivity when a team member is having trouble coping with the student's behaviours.

### *Bad patches*

Every so often kids with Oppositional Defiant Disorder tend to hit a bad patch. This is just the way it is. Sometimes a trigger can be found, but often it seems impossible for anyone to work out why what's happening is happening. At this point it is best to stick with the sensible, grounded ideas the team has already developed. Try not to lose confidence or become derailed. This is the time to trust in one another and trust the thought and effort you have developed to manage this erratic condition.

### *Dispel poor reputation*

Part of taking a proactive role for these kids and their parents concerns what we quietly do behind the scenes. It is surprising how often a young person's poor choices from the past combined with mindless, unforgiving gossip seals their fate in a school community. When appropriate work to promote the facts and insert new information with a positive spin on the grapevine. Actively dispel damaging mythology that impedes the spirit progress and transformation.

### *Keep talking with parents*

By actively participating with and supporting parents we help to underpin the quality of our own professional practice. Gently feed parents information from newspapers, journals, magazines, websites, youtube and television programs that is likely to be helpful. Encourage parents to link with other parents or staff members who may have a child with similar difficulties, and deal with it really well. Place parents in touch with organisations and professionals who can educate, be supportive and offer practical interventions. As the student's emotions are better managed at home you are likely to reap advantages as well.

## ***A personal reflection: student misbehaviour and you***

Dealing with student misbehaviour and the gamut of emotion that accompanies it is stressful for teachers. In fact, student misbehaviour is one of the biggest factors influencing teacher stress and burnout (Maag 2008). Educators who do best learn to live by the Four Goals of Misbehaviour; often referred to as the most effective tool in helping to understand the behaviour of children (Dreikurs & Soltz 1964). The Four Goals of Misbehaviour were coined by psychiatrist, Rudolf Dreikurs who was inspired by Alfred Adler's work (Adler 1929). Dreikurs suggests that children usually misbehave for one of four reasons. Typically there is a struggle for attention, power, revenge or a display of inadequacy. A valuable way to understand which of the four misbehaviours you might be facing is to identify exactly how you are feeling. When you feel annoyed, and the student doesn't seem to respond to your care or direction, they probably want attention. When you feel threatened or defied, the student probably wants power. When you feel hurt or scared they probably want revenge and when you feel you have tried everything without success the student's objective is probably to show their inadequacy (Dreikurs et al. 1998).

Adler and Dreikurs assumed that adults who earned the respect of children by showing them respect truly taught children the depth of respect, as well as how to do it. They thought that most problems around misbehaviour were the result of poor relationship where encouragement had diminished or disappeared. Both believed that improvements in a child's behaviour had to be linked to a deliberate strengthening in the relationship with the adult. Dreikurs also acknowledged that as the balance of power in society and schools moved away from the traditional, power over children to a freer, more democratic structure the relationship between adults and children was tested. In essence, they promoted a common sense, practical approach to help educators respond to student misbehaviour more effectively, and there are two central points embodied in their work. The first is that educators who do best when confronted with student misbehaviour are those who choose to shift their focus from feeling as though they must defeat the child's misbehaviour in order to win. A better way to proceed is to respond in ways that are likely to convince the child to abandon their misbehaviour. The second point is that none of us can really squash or defeat a child's misbehaviour. Constantly directing our energy and power at the child's misbehaviour will not turn the child or adolescent into a likeable, responsible or happy person. The solution lies in looking beneath the behaviour to find what may be driving it and what can be addressed (Dreikurs & Soltz 1964).

To successfully live and work by the Four Goals of Misbehaviour the idea is to stop, just for a moment, and reflect on what is actually happening inside you. This is the moment to examine the feelings that will likely drive your initial response to the problem behaviour.

- Recognise the feelings. What are they?
- How intense are they?
- Why is this student's behaviour influencing your emotion so deeply?
- Is it wise to allow these feelings to drive your response?
- What is it you really want to achieve?
- Will this emotion contribute or diminish a truly constructive solution?
- What is it this student really wants?

When a teacher can steer him or herself away from being over reactive to a student's misbehaviour their level of emotional upset decreases, and this in turn provides them with increased levels of emotional control to make much better decisions (Maag 2008). As we become more aware of the emotion aroused in us by student misbehaviour we are likely to find that the best way to respond is to do virtually the opposite to what the initial flush of feeling suggest. Otherwise it is too easy to instinctively react and overreact to poor student behaviours in emotionally demanding ways that are unhelpful.

Effectively applying the Four Goals of Misbehaviour takes thought and practice. It asks educators to review how they respond and think about student misbehaviour (Dinkmeyer & Dreikurs 2000). They challenge educators to reconstruct their thinking, because for a long time we have been caught up within a format of *behaviour management* that duped us into thinking how we responded to student misbehaviour was less important than the rules embedded in the *school's behaviour management policy*. The Four Goals of Misbehaviour also bring us closer to the motivations behind poor student behaviour. So often what they do is an awfully clumsy attempt to fit in, find purpose, keep dignity or feel a sense of belonging. What they do may be disobedient and disruptive, but for some it is a style that has progressively emerged because somehow they believe it works for them (Nelson 1987).

Attempting to live by the Four Goals of Misbehaviour is well worth the effort because they offer truly therapeutic and educative understandings. As soon as we enter the arena of examining feelings, our own and our students, we begin to manage differently and more successfully. More than this, we activate a process of emotional growth within ourselves.

## ***Responses around the Four Goals of Misbehaviour***

### *1. Students who seek attention*

#### *Student thinks ...*

- 'I matter most when everyone is busy with me.'
- 'Keep looking at me. Keep talking to me. It's my turn!'
- 'The busier I make you and others with me the more I matter.'

#### *Teacher thinks ...*

- 'This kid is driving me mad!'
- 'You want to keep me busy with you, but I've got 29 others!'
- 'Back off. Give someone else a go.'
- 'You are not being fair.'

#### *Teacher feels ...*

- Annoyed
- Irritated
- Fed up

#### *Acting on these feelings the teacher will ...*

- Reprimand
- Get angry
- Use sarcasm
- Confront
- Punish

*When the teacher does this the student thinks ...*

'Yes! It's all about me again!'

'I really do matter.'

'She's sent me out of the classroom. Look I'm the only one standing here. I really do know how to get her attention!'

**Best approach ...**

- Discuss what you want with the student. Share with them that it is harder for some kids to wait and understand the needs of others. Reassure them you can help and want to help.
- Develop a positive plan that involves the student receiving recognition from you, the class, the principal or their parent as more appropriate behaviours are achieved.  
Work on catching the positive behaviours; catching kids doing well and commenting on it is the best way to get the behaviours we want.
- When things go wrong and the student will not respond to a predetermined reminder, use a straight forward consequence that you have previously discussed together.
- Respond pleasantly and deliberately build out your response frequency. A little clever, tactical ignoring can go a long way!
- A very practical approach is to develop the 'helping hand' initiative used with Luke earlier in this chapter. Hand the attention demanding student several 'helping hand' tokens at the beginning of the lesson. The idea is that each time they want you they must put their hand up. As you respond they hand one of the tokens over to you. Once all the tokens have been handed over the understanding is that you are not available to them for the rest of the lesson. Tokens that have been saved by the student can be added together to provide a more powerful positive reinforcer.

## 2. Students who seek power

*Student thinks ...*

'I matter when I'm in charge.'

'I have to be the boss.'

'This is my classroom. Everything must work around me.'

'I have many ways to show my power and importance.'

*Teacher thinks ...*

'Why, you little ....'

'You have no right to push like this. I'm the one who went to University and studied for years. I deserve to be in control.'

'It's my classroom, my workplace and I have the system to back me up.'

*Teacher feels ...*

Threatened

Vulnerable

Humiliated because their authority is publicly challenged

Defeated

*Acting on these feelings the teacher will ...*

Threaten, ridicule, shout, humiliate and punish to grab back power.

Give in, and then randomly seize opportunities to reassert their claim power.

*When the teacher does this the student thinks ...*

'Let the games begin! Bring out your best weapons. They'll be no match for mine.'

'I really am the boss. Just look how hard you're working to keep up with me.'

'It's my classroom and you are mine!'

And, the power struggle intensifies.

**Best approach ...**

- A good start is to accept that this is not easy. Enlist support from colleagues, leadership and parents.

- Appreciate that power seekers become power drunk. They love to battle. It is in their habit and they have little idea how much they are reliant on perceptive adults to defuse situations for them.
- Try to remove yourself from becoming part of their power struggle. After all, there is no point in challenging a teacher who remains emotionally steady and highly logical.
- Talk with the student about what you want. Acknowledge that this may be hard for them, but you want to help.
- Do more of the unexpected. Take the wind out of his or her sails by doing the opposite to what they think you'll do. Humour, without sarcasm, can be wonderfully therapeutic for everyone. And, many a situation can be rescued by simply changing the subject, just like we do with four year olds.
- Look for opportunities to encourage cooperative behaviours and find good moments together. Agree with the student, say, "You're right I can't make you do something you don't want to do." Tell them that when things go wrong you will listen and always attempt to find a way forward. However, if they choose not to participate, and continue to disrupt, your only choice will be to use the straight forward consequence that you have negotiated together.  
This is most certainly the time to maintain strong class unity. You need to group to be with you and understand what you are doing. Create opportunities through class discussions concerning fairness, responsibility and expectations.
- Be practical and tactical. Think hard about the behaviours really worth tackling. A sensible rule of thumb is to allow most of the student's low level annoying behaviours to slip by and only pick up on the ones that honestly matter. In other words, choose your battles wisely and learn the art of avoiding and side-stepping. Learn to be an adaptable chameleon!
- Avoid defending your position, opinion or instruction. Unfortunately, as soon as you do the oppositional student feels they have gained power and the situation becomes poised to escalate. Instead, respond with comments like:
  - “If you want to stay change the subject.”
  - “If you want to stay stop complaining.”
  - "I like you way too much to argue about this.”
  - “This is the way it stays.”
  - “Regardless, this is how it is going to be.”
- Using these phrases sparingly, but repetitively with confidence usually helps to gently de-escalate a situation. In addition you may choose to remove yourself from their space and walk away, and if they follow, keep walking.

### 3. *Students who seek revenge*

#### *Student thinks ...*

- 'You should have never done that to me.'
- 'I'll get you back.'
- 'I'll show you how it feels.'
- 'You weren't fair, now suffer the payback.'

#### *Teacher thinks ...*

- 'How dare you do that!'
- 'Things will never be the same between us again.'
- 'I'll give you a punishment to even up things.'
- 'I'm over you.'

#### *Teacher feels ...*

- Hurt
- Disappointed
- Scared
- Enraged
- Fed up and wants no more to do with the student

#### *Acting on these feelings the teacher will ...*

- Tighten up the latitude usually afforded to the student.
- Impose a hefty punishment to rebalance the scales of justice.

Rely on disciplinary support from superiors.  
The teacher remains emotionally distant from the student.

*When the teacher does this the student thinks ...*

'You want a war? I'll give it to you!'  
'You're not worth anything. You're pathetic.'  
'I've got some new rules for you too.'  
'You hurt me, and then I'll hurt others.'

**Best approach ...**

- As you would expect, an over-reliance on reprisal or payback has severe limitations with these kids.
- Try to find some sort of ground to build or rebuild relationship, even if it is slow.
- Keep working at building trust, cooperation and loyalty.
- Avoid retaliation at all cost.
- It can be restorative to focus on the student's strengths. For example, create situations where the student can use their strengths or interests to help others.
- Find opportunities where the student can participate, feel good about what they are doing and succeed. As an example, Liam who was 11 years could not participate at school as part of a basketball side. He would find fault, wildly criticise and get even with others when things didn't go his way. However, as soon as Liam became the umpire a new constructive and conciliatory persona emerged.
- Promote the understanding that no one fails when things go wrong. The times when things go badly are fabulous opportunities to learn! Help them see that without trying and possibly failing, they will never find their true potential.

Once again, preserve class cohesion. Run group discussions on ways to highlight the good things about students in the class. Have fun with class and take advantage of the team building and energising activities in Chapter 7 to lift the spirit of the class.

Consequences for these kids require careful planning. They are rarely as straightforward as you might hope. A suspension away from school for a day or two where the student revels in playing computer games at home is not appropriate. Neither is having the student sit out from a string of their favourite lessons, watching on, seething and feeling humiliated in front of their peers. Often, the best consequence is to negotiate with the student a way to repair whatever their act of revenge damaged or hurt. However, don't embark on this while your emotions, or theirs, are running high. Sometimes it's wise to bring in a mediator to help steer this such as the school counsellor, principal or a clever colleague.

- Teachers who do well with this behaviour are those who know how to help the student return to the class group without feeling an awful loss of dignity or sensing their return is resented.

#### *4. Students who display inadequacy*

*Student thinks ...*

'I'm helpless. My teacher can do it for me.'  
'I can't. I might get it wrong.'  
'I won't. I don't want to fail.'  
'I never have. I never can. I never will.'

*Teacher thinks ...*

'I've tried everything.'  
'I don't know what to do?'  
'It's useless!'  
'This is beyond me!'

*Teacher feels ...*

Discouraged  
Pessimistic  
Thwarted  
Desperate

*Acting on these feelings the teacher will ...*

Feel demoralised  
Blame the student  
Blame inadequate structures within the school  
Blame the student's mother, father or past teachers  
Give up and fuel the student's reputation that their difficulty is intractable

When the teacher does this the student thinks ...

'You have to keep helping me. I've always needed help.'

'You know I worry, you can't let me become depressed.'

'If you can't help me then no one can.'

'So, you're giving up on me too. I thought you would.'

### ***Best approach ...***

- Sometimes these kids have endured distressing experiences that have caused them to feel deeply hurt, humiliated and discouraged. Others appear to have had a blissful life and there is no accounting for their helplessness. Whether their displays of inadequacies are real or imagined, all of these kids wear a badge of honour that says, "I can't do this myself. You can't expect me to."
- Show patience. Be a skilful model and believe in the value of seed planting.
- Use optimistic talk, genuine encouragement and never give up.
- Set a few achievable goals together, chase them and celebrate!
- Develop an encouragement plan that involves the student (and others in your class) formally receiving recognition from you, the class, the principal, the school or their parent to recognise achievements.
- It can be uplifting to focus on the student's strengths. Construct opportunities where these kids can find success. Acknowledge the positives, but refrain from overdramatic or insincere praise. All kids can identify it immediately and most hate it. Become expert at encouraging what the student has done (process focused praise), rather than praising the student himself or herself.
- Avoid criticism, although if you have developed a trusting relationship, balanced constructive feedback is helpful.
- Share the load and involve others (peers, parents, teachers, professionals and so on) who are able to offer something to this student along the way.
- Gently assist the student to appreciate more about themselves. So they might be able to appreciate their functioning in a broader, more positive context.
- Develop the understanding that things often go wrong. So much of life is all about regrouping from the unexpected. These kids need a contingency plan; they need to know what to do when things change, unfold in an unexpected direction or go wrong. They benefit from pre-rehearsed options. This may be as simple as working out how they can signal for assistance in class to gain clarification.

### ***Conclusion: strength through composure***

The intent of this chapter is to confirm that managing the challenging emotions and errant behaviours of students with oppositional behaviours is genuinely difficult. These taxing behaviours can quickly wipe out a teacher's self belief, devastate the tone of their classroom and wreck the confidence students and parents have in their ability to provide a safe, productive learning environment.

Teachers who do best are those who display strength through composure, even when under duress. A few are able to do this quite naturally. Most of us however, have to learn how to do this. Our perspective is always enhanced when we consciously monitor our reactions against where we sit in the Social Control Window and take Dreikurs' Four Goals of Misbehaviour into regular account. Astute educators also draw on community. They actively build class unity as a means to navigate more steadily through these difficult times. Similarly, they look for collegiate support and will build a team who can reliably support one another because it is too much to ask one educator to deal with this alone. Getting the team together for regular meetings is productive simply because they get everyone together; talking, thinking and caring.

While the understandings and approaches presented will not cure Oppositional Defiant Disorder, they will when used consistently, dampen the problematic behaviours. Surrounded by planned and emotionally steady management at

school and at home many children with oppositional behaviours improve, and a surprising number eventually outgrow their difficulties.

### ***Useful websites***

<http://www.aacap.org>

<http://www.addadhdadvances.com/ODD.htm>[http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcArticles.nsf/pages/Oppositional\\_defiant\\_disorder](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcArticles.nsf/pages/Oppositional_defiant_disorder)

<http://www.conductdisorders.com/aboutus.htm>

<http://jamesdauntchandler.tripod.com/>

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/oppositional-defiant-disorder/DS00630>

<http://www.mentalhealth.com/dis/p20-ch05.html>

<http://www.psychology.org.au>

[http://www.aacap.org/cs/root/facts\\_for\\_families/children\\_with\\_oppositional\\_defiant\\_disorder](http://www.aacap.org/cs/root/facts_for_families/children_with_oppositional_defiant_disorder)

<http://addadhdadvances.com/ODD.html>