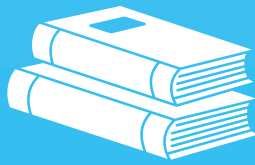
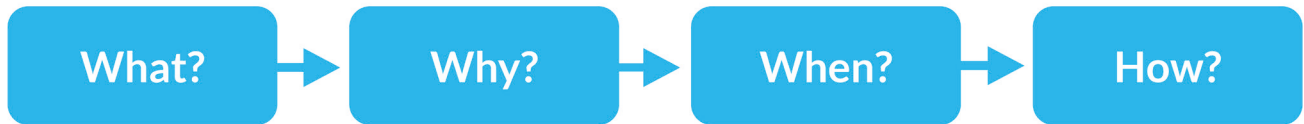


Theory Guide:



Behaviour

Behaviour: Overview



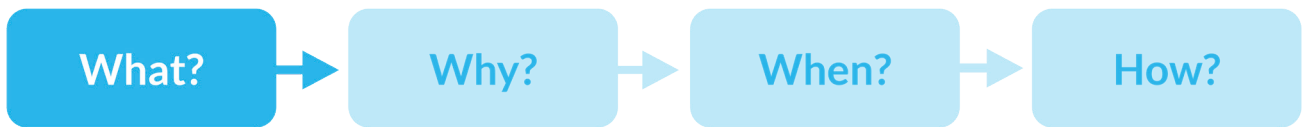
In this theory guide you will understand:

- what aspects of behaviour are important for learning
- why it is so important for teachers to support behaviour for learning
- when it is important to consider behaviour for learning
- how teachers can support behaviour for learning



Behaviour:

What aspects of behaviour are important for learning?



A positive culture for learning is one where students feel safe, supported and behave in ways that support their learning. Teachers need to be intentional, proactive and responsive to create and maintain a culture that catalyses learning. A positive culture is underpinned by positive relationships, support, and consistently high expectations. It is best seen as a whole-school endeavour. However, there are things teachers can do to improve their practice as individuals too. Make sure any approach you take is in line with your whole-school policy, as consistency at the whole-school level is important (Rhodes et al., 2019).

There are three areas to creating a positive culture for learning that this guide covers: **strong relationships**, **teaching learning behaviours** (including paying attention and various lesson routines) and **managing misbehaviour**. Within each, it is possible to be both proactive, i.e. use approaches that reinforce positive behaviour so that misbehaviour does not occur, and responsive, i.e. manage misbehaviour appropriately when it does occur.

Strong relationships between teachers and students affects student effort and attainment (Rhodes et al., 2019). Teachers can be proactive by getting to know their students quickly. They can build approaches into their everyday routine.

For example, an effective approach can be to have an entry routine where the teacher greets students positively at the door and creates a productive norm at the start of the lesson. Teachers may also think that praising students is a way to build relationships and create a positive culture for learning. How praise is used will determine if it motivates students or not. It needs to be honest, not aimed at controlling the students' behaviour, and praise needs to be earned (Willingham, 2005).

Teaching learning behaviours is an approach where teachers view behaviour as intimately linked to learning. Teachers do not assume students know how to behave. They proactively communicate clear expectations, model and reinforce them. Learning behaviours include paying attention, listening to the speaker etc. as well as resilience in the face of challenge, commitment to understanding new ideas etc.

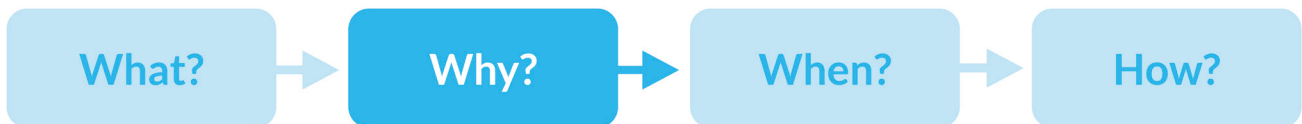
Attention is a crucial learning behaviour. For our purposes, we will think about focusing students' attention on the important aspects of the lesson by making it clear when and how they should attend, what they should attend to, and by minimising distractions. Students report experiencing many distractions in lessons, including background noise and other students (Hobbiss, 2019). These can interfere with their ability to attend to what they should be learning.

Routines have an important role to play for students and teachers. Routines are well-established ways of behaving to improve the efficiency of a task (Teach First, n.d). Every behaviour repeatedly expected of students could be turned into a routine, e.g. entering the lesson, handing out books, transitions such as moving from the carpet to the desk, getting students' attention, packing away, collecting in homework etc. When practised enough times by students, routines can become habitual. Habits are behaviours triggered by cues in the environment and carried out unconsciously. Think of students who, as soon as a stack of sheets land on their desks, begin to hand them out silently and efficiently. This is an example of a routine that has been turned into a useful habit.

Managing misbehaviour is an inevitable part of a teacher's role. The purpose is to get learning back on track (Ofsted, 2019). Knowing how to do this quickly and avoid escalating the situation (and losing more learning time) is a skill that can be learned. It can also mean working a bit harder with some students to restore the relationship when it has been damaged in some way.

Behaviour:

Why is it so important for teachers to support behaviour for learning?



To understand this, we can look at the costs of not creating a positive culture for learning - one of which is low-level disruption. Low-level disruption is a big problem in schools. Research suggests that the average lesson may be interrupted more than 2000 times/year and over half of interruptions led to subsequent interruptions, compounding the loss of learning time (Kraft and Monti-Nussbaum, 2021). It is not just an issue for new teachers. More experienced teachers can also find behaviour a challenge. Given the pernicious effect low-level disruption can have, it is worth teachers' time and focus as a priority.

Low-level disruption can affect teacher retention too (Kokkinos, 2007). If teachers do not feel well supported in their efforts to manage student behaviour or have the skills to effectively manage it, they may experience frustration and ultimately, burnout.

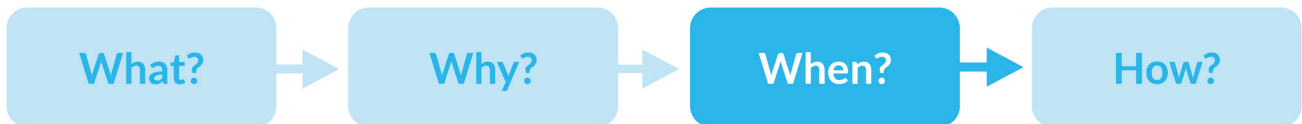
Additionally, if students are not paying attention, they cannot hope to follow instructions or think hard about an idea in order to learn and develop their understanding of it. Recall a time where you lost your keys, couldn't find your car, or forgot the number of your hotel room. It was likely that you just did not pay attention in the first place. Attention is crucial for memory, so we must make sure students focus their attention on the important things. It is easy to assume students are listening when they are not. This is not always because they are 'off task'. Sometimes teachers talk over students while they are writing or preparing for a task. This will mean they miss what is being said. It is crucial for all teachers (experienced or otherwise) to think carefully about how to manage students' attention (Boxer, 2022).

Routines are powerful for a variety of reasons. First, we can think of routines as crucial for supporting students to focus their attention on important aspects of the lesson. Routines are done in the same way each time. This means students do not have to think very hard about how to do them. Routines for routine processes mean students can therefore focus their attention on the most important differences in lessons: the content they need to learn. Lessening the burden on their cognitive resources also means students are less susceptible to distraction (Lavie, 2010).

Secondly, routines are time efficient. This leaves more time for learning the important material in the lesson. Since teachers often feel there is too much content for students to learn and not enough lesson time available, making procedures routine where possible is ideal. Thirdly, routines are predictable, which creates a sense of safety for students and perhaps especially benefits students with special educational needs.

Behaviour:

When is it important to consider behaviour for learning?



Proactively: teachers need to be intentional and proactive about creating a positive culture for learning. This means knowing and communicating high standards and expectations of behaviour from the moment they meet their classes. During lessons teachers should proactively reinforce positive behaviours by modelling and highlighting them.

Immediately: usually, it will be important to tackle low-level disruption straight away to minimise the disruption to learning time. Note, we say usually, as there are very few pieces of advice about teaching that apply in every circumstance. This can be done swiftly and least-intrusively so the focus is back on the learning.

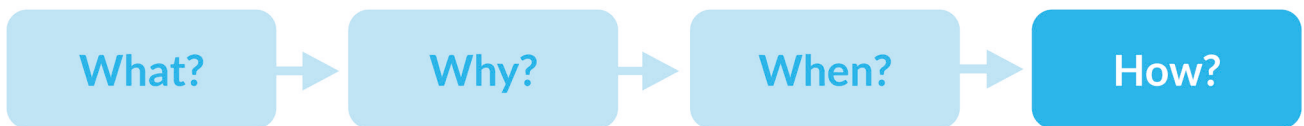
Consistently: one of the most important principles in creating a positive culture for learning is consistency. One way of creating consistency is to embed routines. Getting students into routines early saves as much lesson time as possible which can be devoted to learning. This can often take practice upfront, but the time investment should soon pay off. Using the same routine each time is a good way to reinforce it. Another way to create consistency is, as far as possible, to apply the same rules in the same way. Students are often highly sensitive to unfairness. (Note though that there will be some exceptions where students need particular support with their behaviour.) Consistency works best when it happens across the whole school. It is not always possible for teachers to control this though. Where they cannot, they must strive for a consistent approach to upholding high standards in their lessons.

Whenever someone is speaking: everything a teacher says to their students is important. Students should be listening to their teacher and to each other. They cannot pay attention though if they are doing something else, even if that thing seems task-focused (Boxer, 2022). So, whenever a teacher needs to tell students something, they all need to stop what they are doing and show visible signs that they are paying attention.

Transition points: these are times when students are moving from one task to the next. They are therefore a time when students' attention can wane. Ensuring attention is carefully managed from one task to the next is key.

Behaviour:

How can teachers support behaviour for learning?



Key principles from the research and ideas we have summarised in the previous sections:

Behaviour needs to be taught: never assume students know what you are thinking. State, model and reinforce your expectations.

Be proactive: take action to prevent poor behaviour occurring by acknowledging positive behaviour.

Be positive: it's easy to see all the poor behaviour in the room and ignore positive behaviour. Flip this so that you first acknowledge the good behaviour. This can be a powerful way to remind students of what they need to do.

Be consistent: embed effective behaviour techniques into your practice so you are predictably using them. As far as possible, treat students in a consistent manner.

Make it routine: wherever possible, make repeated behaviours into a routine so students can focus more on the content of the lesson.

Eliminate distractions: if students are to attend to important information, the environment must be as distraction-free as possible. This means it might be a good idea for them to work in silence if they need to concentrate on their work. Teachers can unwittingly create distraction by speaking over students when they are doing something. Stop students and get them fully focused before speaking.

It is not possible to list a complete set of techniques for teachers to learn that will solve every problem in this area. It is too complex. However, there are techniques teachers learn that may help solve the problems they are experiencing.

Any technique will only be effective if it is linked to a well-understood problem. Reflect on and define the problem you are trying to solve or do so with your coach. Then, you can use our problem-technique tool for suggestions as to techniques you can adopt, adapt and test.

Problems related to this area:

- *How do I create a positive culture for learning?*
- *How do I deal with low-level disruption?*
- *How do I focus students' attention?*
- *How do I make behaviours routine?*

Define your problem. What do you think might be the cause? Why?

Behaviour:

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