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# A Teaching Assistant's Guide to Managing Behaviour in the Classroom

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Susan Bentham

 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group  
LONDON AND NEW YORK

**Also available as a printed book  
see title verso for ISBN details**

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## A Teaching Assistant's Guide to Managing Behaviour in the Classroom

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Challenging behaviour amongst pupils is as much of a headache for teaching assistants as it is for teachers. This book, specifically written with teaching assistants in mind, looks at common behaviour problems in the classroom, explains typical causes of misbehaviour and shows what teaching assistants can do to tackle and tame disruptive students in their care. Using a range of case studies, all of which reflect real-life situations and discussed from the perspective of a teaching assistant, Susan Bentham explores:

- the role of the teaching assistant in relation to School Behaviour Policies
- when and how to reward good behaviour
- how understanding the reasons for disruptive behaviour can help to determine the most appropriate way of dealing with it
- how to implement behaviour strategies that really work.

Mirroring the course content of most Teaching Assistant GNVQ and Foundation degree qualifications, the author adopts a reflective approach to behaviour management. She effectively illustrates how practitioners can learn from their experiences and develop new skills and coping strategies, which will enable them to concentrate on the most important part of their job: supporting learning.

This book is a must-buy for any teaching assistant for whom bad behaviour is proving to be their biggest everyday challenge.

**Susan Bentham** teaches Psychology at Bognor Regis Adult Education Centre, West Sussex.



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First published 2006 by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada  
by Routledge  
270 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10016

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005.

“To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge’s  
collection of thousands of eBooks please go to [www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk](http://www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk).”

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*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Bentham, Susan, 1958–

A teaching assistant’s guide to managing behaviour in the classroom /  
Susan Bentham.—1st ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0–415–35119–7 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Classroom Management—United States—Handbooks, manuals, etc.

2. School children—United States—Discipline—Handbooks, manuals,  
etc. 3. Teachers’ assistants—United States—Handbooks, manuals, etc.

I. Title.

LB3013.B397 2005

371.102’4.—dc22

2005005248

ISBN 0–415–35119–7 (Print Edition)

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To my sons, Matthew and Bobby

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## Acknowledgements

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Susan Bentham would like to thank all her students, past and present, for their timely comments and suggestions. This book would not have been possible without them.



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# Introduction

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This book was written for teaching assistants and aims to offer practical advice on how to handle everyday behaviour problems. As such it is hoped that this book will be a valuable resource for those teaching assistants enrolled on courses to include: NVQ 2 and 3, HLTA award and Foundation degrees. In addition it is hoped that tutors involved in such programmes will find this book to be an extremely useful teaching tool.

This book looks at ways of dealing with students who:

- are never in their seats
- disrupt other students
- continually talk out of turn
- use inappropriate language
- refuse to do what is asked of them
- have difficulty in controlling anger.

The first key point to stress is that dealing with behavioural problems is the responsibility of all those who are working within the school. A teaching assistant has a vital role to play in regard to encouraging appropriate behaviour and dealing with inappropriate behaviour. However, a teaching assistant does not work in isolation and at all times needs to provide feedback to and take advice from teachers and other members of staff.

When discussing difficulties in dealing with behaviour, it is human nature to want to find easy solutions – ‘just tell me what to do’. However, this book argues that behaviour is complex. There can be a number of reasons why a student misbehaves as well as a number of strategies that could be used to deal with the behaviour.

This book offers guidance by outlining a number of tools that a teaching assistant can use to make sense of the behaviour and to develop coping strategies.

These tools include:

- knowledge
  - of roles and responsibilities within the school’s behaviour policy,
  - of theoretical explanations of behaviour,
  - of specific strategies to deal with problem behaviour,
- ways of recording the details of specific incidents,
- ways of questioning or reflecting on what happened, to include strategies that were employed, what worked, what didn’t work and how to improve on current practice.

In discussing and offering guidance on behaviour this book uses many case studies. The case studies describe everyday situations that a teaching assistant could encounter at either primary or secondary level. Although explanations of the behaviours illustrated in the case studies are given and various strategies are put forward, this book does not suggest that these are the only explanations for the behaviour or the only strategies that can be used.

## 2 Introduction

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Essentially, the case studies are designed to encourage teaching assistants to think about what happens within the classroom. In this regard it is hoped that the case studies will serve as a useful learning device. In dealing with problem behaviour there are no easy solutions, for behaviour, like life, can be complicated and messy.

## Chapter 1

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# The role of the teaching assistant in managing behaviour

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### A collegiate approach

It was all a bit of a shock really. It was my first week as a teaching assistant. The class had just divided into small groups to do a writing exercise. The teacher and I were moving around the class to check that all students were on task. The noise was very loud at times and the teacher had to remind the groups to settle down. I noticed that the teacher at times had to struggle to make herself heard. Group discussion is now seen as positive, though I noticed that as I went round the class some of the groups were discussing everything but what they were supposed to.

There was one student who was cutting up little pieces of paper, crumpling them up and throwing them in the wastepaper bin. Sometimes he missed and hit some of the girls sitting at the next table. The teacher told him to stop; he did for a while, then when her back was turned he again started crumpling up bits of paper, though I must admit that at least he was not throwing them anymore. At one point there looked like there was going to be a fight between two boys. One boy got out of his seat and wandered over to the other boy and said there was a nasty smell in the class. The other boy obviously took offence to this and stood up, clenched his fists and asked the other boy if he wanted to repeat what he had said. The teacher intervened at that point, though I don't think she heard what started it, and asked both boys to return to their seats and get back to work. At break the teacher commented that she thought the previous session had gone fairly well. I just smiled and agreed.

As a teaching assistant I realised that I had a role in making sure that students behaved but I was not exactly sure about what my role was.

What could I do or say?

Could I ask the class to be quiet? I noticed one of the senior teaching assistants do this. But if I asked the class to be quiet would I be overstepping my role?

Did the teacher hear what had started that argument between those two boys? Should I have told the teacher that the student had started throwing crumpled-up paper again?

Should I have dealt with it? How could I have dealt with it?

Did I need permission from the teacher to do this?

Would the students listen to me?

This chapter examines a teaching assistant's role in managing classroom behaviour. The first point to make is that promoting positive behaviour is everyone's responsibility. When everyone in the school takes responsibility for behaviour the school is said to be taking a 'collegiate approach' to managing behaviour. What the above case study illustrates is that for a collegiate approach to work, everyone involved must understand their roles and responsibilities and those of others. Issues concerning what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and systems of rewards and reprimands need to be discussed.

From a teacher's perspective:

- a teaching assistant can provide support in keeping students on task;
- a teaching assistant can keep an eye on the class if the teacher is busy working with an individual or a small group;
- a teaching assistant can act as a second pair of eyes and give the teacher valuable information about what is happening in the classroom;
- a teaching assistant can observe students' behaviour and fill in relevant records.

From the teaching assistants' perspective:

- teaching assistants need to know what rewards and reprimands they can hand out themselves and which they must negotiate or check with the teacher first;
- for teaching assistants to do their job effectively, students need to respect their authority
- teaching assistants need guidance from the teacher. They need to know whether they were right in their handling of a situation.

However, both teachers and teaching assistants need each other's support, encouragement and praise. Teachers and teaching assistants need time to talk to each other about behavioural issues. In a sense, it is not only 'good to talk' it is *essential* to talk.

### The behaviour policy

Every school will have numerous policies that deal with behaviour. Most policies are based on rights and responsibilities.

<i>Rights</i>	<i>Responsibilities</i>
To be respected	Respect others
Not to be bullied	Not to bully others. Report incidents of bullying
To feel safe	To behave in a reasonable manner that ensures the safety of others
To receive a good education	To listen to others
To be able to work without interference	To accept support To come prepared for lessons To behave appropriately so others can learn
To work in a pleasant environment	To respect the environment

The school in which you work will have a behaviour/discipline policy, home-school agreements, school charters, an anti-bullying policy and policies on equal opportunities. As a teaching assistant you will need to be familiar with these, in particular your role and the role of others within these policies.

What follows is an example of a behaviour policy following guidance from the Department for Education and Skills (2002).

## **Behaviour policy of Everytown Primary School**

### *Rationale*

This policy aims to create a positive learning environment where there is mutual cooperation, respect and trust. We will reinforce behaviours that exemplify the values of fairness, honesty and consideration. As a school we believe that all positive behaviour should be rewarded and that inappropriate behaviour is dealt with firmly and fairly.

### *Purpose*

- To have a whole-school approach to good behaviour that is implemented consistently across the school by all staff to include teachers, supply teachers, teaching assistants and lunch-time supervisors.
- To use praise to encourage cooperation and consideration.
- To use those students who do behave well as positive role models for other students.
- When reprimanding a student's behaviour to make a distinction between the child and their behaviour. The child's behaviour is being punished as opposed to the child.
- To communicate with and involve parents/carers in any concerns regarding the children's behaviour. Parents and carers have their role to play in helping to create a learning environment where there is mutual cooperation, respect and trust.
- To develop within children an understanding that there are consequences for their chosen behaviour.
- To ensure that there is equality of opportunity and that there is provision to meet educational, social and behavioural needs of children.
- The school will not tolerate any form of bullying. All allegations will be taken seriously and promptly dealt with.

### *Approach to children*

- Listen to and respect children's views.
- Talk to children calmly.
- Be approachable.
- Be fair and consistent.
- Provide clear boundaries of what is acceptable and what is non-acceptable behaviour.
- Be positive.
- Give lots of praise for good behaviour.
- When reprimanding bad behaviour, focus on the behaviour, not the child.
- Build upon what the child can do.
- Never use humiliation.
- Help children to accept and learn from their mistakes.
- Help children to take responsibility for their behaviour.

### *School rules*

- Be courteous and considerate at all times.
- Take responsibility for your own actions.
- Respect the rights and beliefs of others.
- Follow instructions.
- Look after equipment and keep things tidy.
- Be respectful of your own and others' property.
- Walk quietly around the school.
- Keep the school clean and tidy.



*Rewards*

- Praise, both non-verbal and verbal, needs to be sincere. The child needs to be told specifically what behaviour they are being rewarded for.
- Smiley faces, stars and house-points.
- As part of every Friday's assembly two children from each class are chosen for a special mention. They will have their names written in the Golden Book and be given a special sticker to take home.

*Sanctions*

Our school divides unacceptable behaviour into the following.

*Level One:* here misbehaviour will be effectively managed within the classroom by strategies such as rule reminders, giving a choice, warning of consequences, missing playtime, in-class time out and out-of-class time out.

*Level Two:* more serious misbehaviour (i.e. minor vandalism, threatening behaviour, bullying, isolated acts of violence) that can not be managed within a classroom will involve notification and involvement of other staff to include the head teacher. At this stage the student's name will be entered into the behaviour book. At this point the class teacher may involve the parents.

*Level Three:* very serious episodes of misbehaviour (i.e. vandalism of school property, leaving school premises without consent, aggressive behaviour causing deliberate injury) or persistent level two misbehaviour will necessitate the involvement of the head teacher and parents. It is possible at this point that outside agencies such as the education welfare service and the behaviour support team will be involved.

*Severe clause:* in the event of persistent unacceptable behaviour and where other strategies and sanctions have not worked the school will follow the Exclusions – Good Practice Guidelines.

*Supporting children who find it difficult to manage their behaviour*

Some children will be identified as having 'behavioural special needs'. The school, acting in consultation with the parents of the child concerned and where necessary outside agencies, will draw up a behaviour plan. The behaviour plan aims to produce improvement in the child's behaviour over a specified period of time. At this school, the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) runs a chill-out room, where children who have behaviour problems can go to for time out and support. In addition, the SENCO runs specific programmes to develop social skills. While the behaviour of children with 'behavioural special needs' will be dealt with sympathetically and sensitively, unacceptable behaviour will not go unchallenged.

(DfES 2002)

The above example of a behaviour policy is a composite of many behaviour policies. It is a shortened version and many policies will include more details regarding the specific roles of teachers, head teachers, SENCOs, governors and various intervention strategies to use. There will be similarities as well as differences in regard to school policies at a secondary level. As a teaching assistant it is important that you become familiar with your school's behaviour policy and you will need to discuss with members of your school, i.e. teachers, SENCO, what your specific role involves.

Some examples of comments from teaching assistants follow.

I always use praise to reward good behaviour. As a teaching assistant I can give out stickers for good work, trying hard and behaving well. I can also give out team points or recommend a child for a team point. The teacher can give out special rewards such as entering the child's name into the Golden Book. When a child is not behaving, I will try to deal with the situation first. If I think the behaviour is serious enough I can remove or recommend that the teacher remove a house-point. I can also put a child's name on the board and can keep a child back for a few minutes at playtime. However, only the teacher can remove a playtime, enter the child's name into the behaviour log, take the child to the head teacher and talk to the parents.

I work in a secondary school and I write reports on the students' behaviour. If a student works well I will fill in a commendation form; likewise if they have been misbehaving I will write a referral. The teacher, on the basis of the referral note, will discuss with the student their behaviour at the end of the lesson. If the teacher sees fit they will set a detention. Referral notes are an important ongoing record of the student's behaviour.

I work as a teaching assistant in a secondary school attached to the Science department. When we started school this year, the Department Head introduced me to the class and said that I was there to help him support students in his class. He told the class that I was acting on his behalf and if the students disobeyed me that they would have to answer to him. I really appreciated his comments and have felt that the students respect my authority.

### Activity

The aim of the following activity is to help clarify your role within the school with regard to behaviour. The activity looks at daily routines in terms of appropriate behaviour that is expected from students. Once you have outlined how the students are expected to behave, then you need to say what you would do if they did not behave accordingly.

### What is appropriate behaviour?

<i>Routine</i>	<i>Students are expected to:</i>	<i>A teaching assistant will intervene when:</i>	<i>A teaching assistant will inform the teacher if:</i>
• In the playground			
• Standing outside in the corridor waiting to come into the class			
• When entering the class			

*continued*

## 8 Teaching assistant's role

<i>Routine</i>	<i>Students are expected to:</i>	<i>A teaching assistant will intervene when:</i>	<i>A teaching assistant will inform the teacher if:</i>
• Where to sit			
• When wishing to participate in class			
• When coming into the class late			
• When requesting help			
• When working in groups			
• When it is time to leave the classroom			

## Outside support agencies

Schools do not work in isolation but will have support from various agencies. The following outlines of the roles of the major support teams are drawn from the West Sussex Behaviour Guidance (2000). *The behaviour support team* will be involved with primary schools, working alongside teachers in the planning and implementation of behavioural programmes for specific students. The team will also participate in school-based initiatives for primary and secondary schools.

*The looked after children team* provides educational support to children who are looked after by the authority, that is, children who are in children's homes or foster care. This team work with staff within the school to implement a personal education plan that aims to raise educational standards.

*The traveller education support service* seeks to inform schools of the social and cultural traditions of this group in order to encourage understanding and to help schools deal with any potential disadvantage faced by such students. Lack of an understanding of the culture of travellers may put such children at a greater risk of prejudice and bullying.

*The support team for ethnic minority pupils* deals with any potential problems that might occur due to interaction between different cultures. The team will give support regarding learning English as a second language, supporting bilingual learners and offering training on refugees and asylum seekers and welcoming new arrivals.

*The educational psychology service*, primarily educational psychologists, uses specific knowledge of educational and psychological theory to support schools. In particular, team members aim to advise schools on practical strategies that can be used to help students to behave in a suitable manner.

*The educational welfare service* is concerned with promoting regular school attendance. This service is involved with students whose non-attendance may be due to emotional and behavioural difficulties.

### **Behaviour targets and behaviour plans**

Students with specific behavioural problems (associated with conditions such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) or students who consistently display more serious misbehaviour will often have their own behaviour plans or have behaviour targets written on an Individual Educational Plan (IEP). A behaviour plan will outline the nature of the difficulty, a small number of targets to be achieved, resources available, strategies to be used, details of how progress will be monitored and a date for review.

All targets should be S.M.A.R.T.:

- Specific:* Observable and precise description of behaviour.
- Measurable:* Refers to the number of times (frequency) a behaviour occurs and how long a behaviour goes on for (duration). A target will include details of desired levels of behaviour.
- Achievable:* The student should have the ability to meet the target.
- Relevant:* Targets need to be related to the specific behavioural needs of the student.
- Time-limited:* A realistic and appropriate time frame is given for the student to achieve the target.

### **Case study**

In the following case study, Jane, a teaching assistant in a junior school, describes Rory Smith. Rory is determined always to have his own way. Rory can be charming when things are going the way he wants, but when he has to do something he does not want to do then there is trouble. Rory can be very threatening to other students and his language is a matter of concern. Rory has a behaviour plan.

## Behaviour plan

Name: RS

Area of concern: Intimidating behaviour and inappropriate language

Year Group: 4

Class teacher: Mrs Todd

Review date:

Support by: JW (teaching assistant)

Support began:

Targets to be achieved	Achievement criteria	Possible resources or techniques	Possible class strategies	Ideas for teaching assistant	Outcome
To interact with others without threatening or intimidating them.	Reduced number of incidents in a 12 week period. In the previous 12-week period there were 20 incidents that were recorded in the Red Book.	School policy on bullying. Loss of playground time. Name in Red Book. Social skills input.	Intervene early. Remind student of consequences. Praise efforts towards achieving targets. Keep a record of behaviour.	All of previous. Talk about any incidents that have occurred. Help student to reflect on other ways he could have behaved. What could he have done? Keep a record of behaviour.	
To use appropriate and respectful language.	No bad language over a 12-week period.	Consistent reminders that swearing is not permitted. Praise for appropriate language. Loss of playground time for episodes of swearing.	Remind about rules. Give praise and attention for controlling inappropriate language. Keep a record of behaviour.	Discuss what language is appropriate and why. Discuss alternative strategies for bad language. Keep a record of behaviour.	

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## The role of a teaching assistant

The role of a teaching assistant (TA) is to help students achieve their targets. Teaching assistants will use the strategies suggested on their behaviour plan and keep records of the student's behaviour. These records will assist the teacher and SENCO in deciding whether the strategies that have been used have been successful. The following example details Jane's notes on Rory's behaviour.

After the class science experiment I asked Rory to help me tidy up. Rory mumbled something under his breath. I reminded Rory that it was school policy to be helpful and to talk to each other with respect. I told him that he knew that the consequence for using inappropriate language was to miss break and that he should think carefully about what he should say. I also reminded Rory that when we were feeling like we might say something we shouldn't, we should try to count up to ten slowly and think nice thoughts. Rory just glared at me and said 'Tidy up yourself, you f\*\*\*\*\*g cow!' I followed the agreed strategy. I calmly told him that such language was not appropriate and that, as he knew, the consequence was that he would miss afternoon break. Rory told me that he 'didn't f\*\*\* care' as he was already missing afternoon break. I didn't say anything to him, but referred the incident to the supply teacher. Usually the threat of missing playtime keeps Rory in line, but I have noticed that when he knows he has already lost that privilege, his behaviour just goes to pieces and becomes impossible to control.

In this short write-up Jane includes important observations regarding the effectiveness of strategies being used. Jane needs to communicate these observations to the teacher. Jane's observation that threatening to withdraw a privilege, in this case playtime, is no longer effective in controlling behaviour when the student has already lost that privilege will aid the teacher and SENCO in determining whether the existing strategies for dealing with Rory's behaviour are working or whether they need to be altered.

## Summary

In this short chapter we have looked at behaviour policies and behaviour plans specifically focusing on the role of the teaching assistant. However, behaviour is everyone's responsibility.

## Chapter 2

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# Explanations and strategies

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### Introduction

Often, when talking to teaching assistants about behaviour in the class, they will describe situations which they found difficult to deal with, for example, how the group they were working with would not settle or how a student would simply not do what they were told. What they want to know is what can they do to improve the situation? What can they do to prevent students from arguing? How can they feel more confident when working with students?

As described in Chapter 1, teaching assistants will work with other members of the school, specifically the teacher, in implementing the behaviour policy. Teaching assistants will need to know how their school defines acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and they will need to understand their role within the school's behaviour policy. Most importantly, teaching assistants will need to talk continually to teachers regarding how they deal with students who misbehave. Managing behaviour is everyone's responsibility!

A vast amount of information will be presented within this chapter. This information aims to explain both the reasons behind inappropriate behaviour and the possible strategies that can be used to turn behaviour around. The first point to make is the connection between strategies and explanations.

Simply put, this means that if we can understand why the students are behaving in such a way (what are the explanations for their behaviour) then we can work out what we can do to turn their behaviour around.

You might at this point be saying: 'So all I have to do is to figure out why the student or students are doing what they are doing and then I will know what to do?' At this point I will say 'yes, *but*'. Of course, when someone says '*but*', you know that things are going to get complicated, and behaviour is a complex issue.

Any behaviour can be explained by a number of causes. Let's look at the following example.

Joe is in Year 2. He is supposed to be working on a maths worksheet. However, Joe is playing with an action doll that he has brought in from home. You have reminded him twice of the school rules that he has to keep his toys in his drawer during lesson time but he has ignored you.

*Why is he doing this?*

*What are the possible explanations for this behaviour?*

- Perhaps Joe is testing you. Do you really mean what you say? Can he get away with this behaviour with you? Has Joe got away with this behaviour in the past? Perhaps Joe is getting a lot of attention from the other children in the class.

If this is the case then Joe's behaviour can be explained by past *consequences*.

- Perhaps Joe is having an ‘off’ day. Maybe he is feeling upset and having his action doll with him makes him feel better.

If this is the case then Joe’s *feelings or emotions* are behind his behaviour.

- Perhaps Joe thinks he is a bad boy. Perhaps he has been told off many times and has come to believe he is a bad boy and therefore he has decided that he is going to act like one.

Here we see how a person’s *thoughts or thinking processes* can influence their behaviour.

Whatever the explanation, Joe still needs to put away his toy and start working on his maths sheet, assuming that this is a class rule. However, the explanation of why he is behaving in such a way will influence how you respond to Joe and the strategy you will use.

If Joe is doing what he is doing because of past *consequences*, that is if he has been rewarded in the past for this behaviour (i.e. he likes the attention of an audience), it might be best to have a quiet word with Joe away from the rest of the class (remove the reward).

If Joe is doing what he is doing because of his *feelings or emotions*, that is, Joe is feeling upset, then although he still needs to put away his toy he would also benefit from having the opportunity to talk about why he is feeling upset. It is doubtful that if Joe is feeling upset about something he will be able to concentrate on his worksheet.

If Joe is doing what he is doing because of his *thoughts or thinking processes*, that is, Joe thinks he is a bad boy, then this will need to be dealt with by a concerted effort within the school. You might get Joe to put away his toy for the moment, but if Joe’s thought processes are not tackled then there will be further episodes to deal with.

What the above example shows is that there can be a number of possible reasons or explanations for any behaviour and a number of possible responses or strategies that can be used.

To summarise:

- behaviour can be determined by past *consequences*;
- behaviour can be determined by *feelings or emotions*;
- behaviour can be determined by *thoughts or thinking processes*.

The following three sections examine behaviour from these viewpoints.

## **Behaviour determined by consequences**

### ***Explanations***

Behaviourists believe that the way people behave is determined by previous consequences. Simply put, if you have been rewarded for behaving in a certain manner in the past then you are more like to repeat that behaviour in the future. Likewise, if you have been punished for behaviour in the past then the chances are that you are unlikely to repeat that behaviour in the future. This viewpoint argues that as behaviour is determined by consequences then to change behaviour we need to change the consequences of the behaviour.

In schools much attention is given to rewards. There are rewards for good behaviour in the form of merits, house-points, stickers and praise. However, there are also rewards for inappropriate behaviour in the form of attention, peer approval, power, escape and revenge.

A behaviourist explanation seems very clear and straightforward. However, the explanation becomes complex when you realise that what is considered a punishment and what is considered a reward depends very much on the individual. Consider the following example.



Jody always talks out of turn in class, is never in her seat and can be downright rude to the teaching assistant and the teacher. Jody is often sent out of the class by the teacher. The teacher might think that he is punishing Jody by sending her out of the class to stand in the corridor. However, the teacher notes that during three out of five lessons Jody is out in the corridor.

*So what is happening?*

The behaviourist approach would say that there must be a reward for this ongoing behaviour.

From Jody's perspective she has escaped from a subject she dislikes. Jody knows she has difficulties in maths and does not want to be shown up as inadequate by all those who can do the work. Jody does not like the teacher as she feels he is always having a go at her. However, being in the corridor gives her the opportunity to talk to other students who happen to walk by. Jody enjoys making faces through the window in the door at the other students when the teacher is not looking.

The rewards for Jody's ongoing disruptive behaviour are clear.

On the other hand the teacher finds the class much more manageable to teach when Jody is not there.

So from a behaviourist explanation both the teacher and Jody are being rewarded for their respective behaviours, which are consequently reinforced.

#### *Social learning theory*

Behaviourists also believe that people can learn not only from being rewarded or punished themselves but by watching what happens to other people, specifically if other people are rewarded or punished for their behaviour. This approach is called social learning theory. Social learning theory states that we learn by imitation. The people we imitate are called role models. In order to imitate someone's behaviour there are a number of steps involved.

- 1 We need to pay attention to the behaviour.
- 2 We need to be able to remember the behaviour, as it might be some time before we are in a position to imitate the behaviour.
- 3 We need to have the physical motor skills to imitate the behaviour. If we wished to imitate someone leaping over a desk we would need the physical prowess to do so. Some individuals might need to practise.
- 4 We need to be motivated to imitate the behaviour. Motivation depends on both whether we think we can imitate the behaviour and whether we would want to. Whether we would want to imitate the behaviour depends on whether we see the consequences of the behaviour as rewarding or punishing.

Social learning theory states that individuals are more likely to imitate role models who are seen as similar to themselves, who have been rewarded for their behaviour and who have power or status. We will now return to the example of Jody.

All the students in the class are very familiar with Jody's antics. The question is, would any other students want to imitate Jody's behaviour. Amanda has certainly watched Jody and can describe in great detail what Jody does. Amanda could act like Jody but she chooses not to. Amanda likes the class teacher, she is good at the subject and Amanda would be horrified if the teacher sent her out of the class. Being sent out of the class for Amanda would be a punishment.

Laura, on the other hand, hates the subject and the teacher. Laura watches Jody constantly and knows exactly what she does. Laura looks up to Jody and would like to imitate her, but Laura sees herself as desperately shy and just couldn't do the things that Jody does, much as she would like to.

To recap, behaviourists believe that behaviour is determined by the consequences of previous behaviour. If we are rewarded or if we see someone else being rewarded for behaviour we are *more likely* to repeat or imitate that behaviour in the future. If we are punished or if we see someone else being punished for behaviour we are more likely *not* to want to repeat or imitate the behaviour. However, it is very important to remember that what is seen as punishment or reward depends very much on the individual. This explanation of behaviour states that if you want to change a person's behaviour then you need to change the consequences of their behaviour. This leads on to the next section where we will talk about strategies.

## Strategies

### ABC approach

In order to change a behaviour it is first important to discover why a person is behaving in such a way. This approach requires you to observe someone's behaviour and to categorise the behaviour into antecedent (what happens before), behaviour (what they do) and consequence (what happens to the person as a result of their behaviour). Let's look at the example of Jody within this framework.

	Antecedent	Behaviour	Consequence
10:25	The rest of the class have started the maths worksheet and are on question 4. Jody has not begun the worksheet.	Jody is looking at everyone else working.	
10:30	The teacher calls out: 'Jody! Haven't you started yet? What are you waiting for? Christmas! I don't want any of your nonsense today.'	Jody glares at the teacher.	
10:32	TA approaches and asks if Jody needs any help to get started.	Jody looks up and notices that the other students are now all looking at her. Jody pushes her papers off her desk and yells: 'This is a f***** useless class!'	The teacher replies: 'I told you Jody, I will have none of your nonsense – out of the class'.
10:36		Jody is now standing outside in the corridor, smirking.	
10:37		Jody is having a chat with Joe, another student who is passing.	Joe says he will call her tonight.

*continued*

	<i>Antecedent</i>	<i>Behaviour</i>	<i>Consequence</i>
10:39		Jody is making faces at the other students through the window on the door.	The other students are smiling and trying hard not to giggle.

A structured observation, recording antecedent, behaviour and consequence is helpful in trying to figure out the reasons for a student's behaviour. It is important when carrying out such an observation to be objective and just record what you actually see and not what you think is going on. If we were to interpret this structured observation we could say that Jody's behaviour is being triggered by her inability to do the work, that her behaviour is being rewarded by escaping a situation which she does not like and reinforced by approval from others. There are several possible ways forward.

#### *Create learning environments that are productive*

If students are interested in what they are doing and if they feel that they can succeed then they are less likely to have behavioural problems. Lorenz (2001) talks of work being set at varying levels as detailed below.

- Instructional level:* Where the student can do approximately 95 per cent of the work by themselves. The student will need support on the other 5 per cent, but this will stretch them.
- Independent level:* Where the student can do approximately 99 per cent of the work by themselves. The problem with this is that the student can become bored.
- Frustration level:* Where the student can do less than 95 per cent of the work. If the student feels that the work set is too much of a struggle then the temptation is to give up and there is a risk that the student will start to behave disruptively.

As a teaching assistant, you have detailed knowledge of what a student can or cannot do. It is important to tell the teacher if you think the work set is just too difficult for the student you are supporting. In this way you can possibly prevent problems before they happen.

In the case study on Jody, having work that is set at the appropriate level would hopefully lead to Jody experiencing success. If Jody felt that she could do the work then maybe she would not have to behave disruptively.

#### *'Catching them when they are good'*

Often, what happens in the classroom is that when a student is behaving well, they are ignored. It is only when the student misbehaves that they get attention and any attention is better than none. It is important to reward students when they are behaving well, that is, 'catching them when they are good'.

However, with some students this can prove rather difficult. Sometimes a student never works sensibly on a task, never sits in a seat without fidgeting and never finishes a set task. In this case, one approach to changing behaviour is to ignore the minor misbehaviour if possible and to reward any behaviour that is appropriate. To begin with you might praise a student for just sitting at their desk quietly, but over time you might expect more and more from them, for example leading up to sitting quietly at their desk and working.

In the case study on Jody, you, as the teaching assistant, might notice Jody sitting at her desk, looking at her worksheet. You could go up to her and say: 'Jody I can see you are really trying to concentrate on the work that the teacher has set'. However, this strategy would only be effective if the work set was within her capabilities. So in a sense what we are seeing is that to really tackle unacceptable behaviour you need to use a combination of approaches.

### *Use praise*

Praise is a very powerful reward, but there are a few points to consider regarding praise.

- Praise must be genuine and seen as such by the person receiving it. It is important to praise effort as well as achievement.
- Praise needs to be specific, that is, the person you are praising needs to know that you are praising them.
- Praise, to be effective, should be informative. It is important to say to the student 'well done', but it is equally important that the student knows why they have done well. In this way they can repeat the behaviour.

An issue regarding praise and giving rewards such as stickers and house-points is perceived fairness. Consider how you would handle the following comment from a very able student.

It's just not fair! Sam always mucks about in class. The teacher is always telling him off. But Sam only has to hand in a page with a few lines scribbled on it and he gets lots of praise, house-points, you name it. I sit in class, I always behave, and I never have to be told off. I spend a lot of time on my work. I can write pages. But I never get as many house-points as Sam does.

### *Language should be positive*

It is very important for teaching assistants to be aware of the language that they use to students. Wherever possible comments and requests should be expressed in a positive manner. A teaching assistant should try to avoid using words such as: 'Don't', 'No', 'Stop'. For example:

'Don't lean back on the chair like that'

could be rephrased as

'Sam, we have a rule in this class for sitting correctly – thanks'.

Teachers and teaching assistants should avoid language that involves:

Labelling:	'People like you will never amount to anything.'
Comparison:	'You will never be as good as your sister.'
Sarcasm:	'Were you born in a barn?'
Distancing:	'I don't want to listen to you anymore.'
Using age as a put-down:	'A three-year-old could do this.'

(DfES 2003)

### *Modelling*

A teaching assistant can model appropriate behaviour or point out other students who are setting a good example. Let's go back to the case of Jody. A teaching assistant, in discussing

behavioural issues at a later point and in private with Jody, could say that she always treats Jody with respect and expects Jody to treat her with respect. The teaching assistant could also point out other students who are behaving well, perhaps mentioning Amanda as an example. The teaching assistant could say, 'Amanda always listens to the teacher and always works hard in class.'

However, the question is would Jody want to imitate Amanda? Would Jody say, 'Yes, I want to be like Amanda', or would she say 'Amanda! That swot!'. Would Amanda appreciate being used as a role model? This illustrates the difficulty in finding an appropriate role model. An appropriate role model is one that is not only behaving in an appropriate manner as defined by the teacher and the teaching assistant but is also a student who is admired by their peers.

#### *Remove the audience*

If you have difficult things to say to an individual, it is always best to have the conversation in private. You could talk to the student after class, or you could have a quiet chat with the student in the corner of the classroom. The reasons behind this are several. If a student finds that arguing with the teaching assistant gains them approval from their peers, it is important to not play their game. As soon as a student becomes argumentative, you could suggest continuing the discussion in private. Also, in a public confrontation with a student there is a danger that the student will feel unable to back down. A private discussion offers the opportunity to listen to what you have to say, without losing credibility within the peer group.

#### *Tactical ignoring: focus on primary behaviour and ignore secondary behaviour*

Rogers (2000) in discussing behaviour management talks about the distinction between primary behaviour and secondary behaviour. Primary behaviour is the inappropriate behaviour that gets the student into trouble in the first place. Secondary behaviour is any other inappropriate behaviour that has occurred in the course of you, the teaching assistant, trying to confront the student's initial inappropriate behaviour. Let's take the following example.

Teaching assistant:	(Notices Rory snatching the ruler from Sam and then hitting Sam over the head with the ruler.) Rory, what are you doing?
Rory:	Miss, it is not my fault. He started it.
Teaching assistant:	Well. It's going to end now. We have a rule in this class regarding how to behave. What do you say to Sam?
Rory:	Miss, you are always picking on me. I'm always getting into trouble. Why doesn't Sam get told off?
Teaching assistant:	(Remaining calm.) What do you say?
Rory:	It's not fair!
Teaching assistant:	(Remaining calm.) Rory? What do you say?
Rory:	Sorry.
Teaching assistant:	Right you two, let's see both of you trying to get some work done.

What this example illustrates is that the teaching assistant remains focused on the primary behaviour (snatching the ruler and hitting another student with the ruler and how this behaviour broke class rules). In this example the teaching assistant tactically ignores the secondary behaviour (complaints regarding whether being told off is fair or not). By focusing on the primary behaviour, repeating your comments calmly in the manner of a broken record, the student soon comes around and apologises for the episode. This strategy can be very useful.

The teaching assistant in this example could have easily responded to the complaints of the student by saying: 'Rory, don't take that tone of voice with me'. But that response could have made the situation worse. What this approach argues is that, sometimes, tactically ignoring minor inappropriate behaviour is actually helpful.

What is difficult with an approach of tactically ignoring behaviour, is to know the limits of what can be ignored and what can't. Imagine if the situation had gone like this:

Teaching assistant: (Notices Rory snatching the ruler from Sam and hitting Sam over the head with the ruler) Rory, what are you doing?  
 Rory: Miss, it is not my fault. He started it.  
 Teaching assistant: Well, it's going to end now. We have rules in this class regarding how to behave. What do you say to Sam?  
 Rory: Sam's a f\*\*\*\*\* idiot and I'm not going to apologise!

Although this episode started off the same, this example is more serious in that Rory has used inappropriate language. The question is whether you can ignore this behaviour or not. Knowing your school's behaviour policy will guide you in this regard. The problem with ignoring inappropriate behaviour, is that it can give the wrong message to the student, in this case that swearing is acceptable within the classroom.

### Checklist of strategies

- ✓ Make use of structured observations that identify antecedents, behaviour and consequences. If possible try to identify what triggers the inappropriate behaviour then remove the trigger. Intervene early.
- ✓ Create learning environments that are productive. Play your role in making sure that tasks set are achievable and sufficiently challenging.
- ✓ Catch students when they are good.
- ✓ Reward and praise appropriate behaviour.
- ✓ Model appropriate behaviour. Point out students who are behaving well so they can act as role models.
- ✓ Remove the audience.
- ✓ Tactically ignore minor misbehaviour. Focus on primary behaviour and ignore secondary behaviour if possible.

## Behaviour determined by feelings or emotions

### Explanations

In the previous section, we talked about how our behaviour could be explained by consequences. However, consequences such as rewards and punishments only tell part of the story. This viewpoint argues that behaviour is determined by emotions and feelings. Therefore, to change behaviour we need to focus on changing emotions and feelings. Much of what we do is influenced by how we feel. However, while behaviour can easily be described in objective terms, describing how someone is feeling is not always so easy. If we are honest about our own feelings, then sometimes we could say that there are times when we are not sure exactly how we are feeling. Sometimes we try to cover up our true feelings. Sometimes we put on a brave face. If this is true for ourselves, then it will be true for the students we are working with. Here we need to use observation skills, noting not only what was said but what was not said, and, importantly, body language in order to come up with

our 'best guess' about how someone is feeling. In a sense, we are using our experience of life to read between the lines. In the previous example of Jody we noted her behaviour as detailed below.

<i>Antecedent</i>	<i>Behaviour</i>
The rest of the class have started the maths worksheet and are on question 4. Jody has not begun the worksheet.	Jody is looking at everyone else working.
The teacher calls out, 'Jody! Haven't you started yet? What are you waiting for? Christmas! I don't want any of your nonsense today.'	Jody glares at the teacher.
The TA approaches and asks if she needs any help to get started.	Jody looks up and notices the other students are now all looking at her. Jody pushes her papers off her desk and yells, 'This is a f***** useless class!'

What is described is a fairly objective account of what has happened. But if we were to try to read between the lines how would we describe how Jody was feeling?

- We might guess that Jody was feeling intimidated by the other students who could do the work. Jody might have felt stupid.
- We might guess that Jody felt the teacher was putting her down and that the teaching assistant was just showing her up in front of her peers as someone who was 'thick'.

As stated previously, it is very difficult to know exactly what someone else is feeling. We have to make guesses based on behaviour. We could ask Jody? But would she tell us? Under what circumstances would she tell us? We will come back to this point.

What we are saying is that one response to feeling bad, inadequate, stupid is to lash out and behave inappropriately. When psychologists talk about feelings they talk about concepts such as self-esteem, ideal self, self-image and self-concept. It is important at this point to define these terms.

- *Self-concept* is the whole us. Self-concept is composed of ideal-self, self-image and self-esteem.
- *Self-image* is how we see or describe ourselves to ourselves. Do we see ourselves as clever, beautiful, artistic, thick, thin, clumsy, etc.?
- *Ideal self* is how we would like to be. We might be a brunette, but really we would much prefer to be a blonde. We might be getting 80 per cent in all our tests, but really 80 per cent is not good enough and what we want is 90 per cent.
- *Self-esteem* is how we evaluate ourselves. It is the difference between the way we see ourselves (self-image), and our ideal-self, the way we would like to be.

Whether we have a low or high self-esteem depends on how we evaluate ourselves. Therefore you cannot assume that a student with high ability will necessarily have high self-esteem. As stated earlier a student may be getting 80 per cent in all tests, but that is just not enough. Likewise, a student who is failing all his subjects might have high self-esteem.

Harter (1982) stated that we evaluate ourselves in four areas:

Cognitive competence:	How intelligent we are
Physical competence:	How good at athletics we are
Social competence:	How popular we are
General self-worth	How good a person do we think we are

To clarify how self-esteem can differ between students, let us go back to the example of Jody.

Jody hates asking for help. Jody hates it when someone helps her. Jody has difficulty with the worksheets, but so do other pupils. Jason struggles with maths, but Jason does not see this as an issue. Jason dreams of being a famous musician. When Jason can't do the worksheet, he just sits there and thinks of what songs his band is going to perform at the weekend. Jason knows that eventually Miss (the teaching assistant) will come round and help him have a go. But he quite likes Miss and enjoys the opportunity to talk to her. Jason knows that he finds maths difficult and that most of the others in the class understand maths better than him, but he knows that he will eventually get it.

It is fair to say from this short case study that Jason and Jody have different views of themselves, though both struggle with maths.

So, to recap, self-esteem is to do with self-evaluation, that is, comparing how you see yourself (self-image) to how you would like to be (ideal self). An individual with high self-esteem will interpret both their successes and failures in a positive manner. Coping positively with those things that you find difficult is an important life skill. Individuals with high self-esteem have this skill, while individuals with low self-esteem need to develop this. Individuals with high self-esteem will differ from individuals with low self-esteem in a number of characteristics (Derrington and Groom 2004).

<i>Individuals with high self-esteem</i>	<i>Individuals with low self-esteem</i>
Are confident in new situations. See new learning tasks as a challenge.	Are hesitant in taking on new learning tasks as they fear failure.
Are able to recognise their strengths and limitations.	Need reassurance. Often need to be the centre of attention.
When they make mistakes or find learning difficult they do not give up.	Tend to blame other people and outside factors when things go wrong. It is never their fault.
Like themselves.	Are uncomfortable with praise. Are very quick to put others down. Putting others down makes them feel better. Often boast and show off. Again this makes them feel better.

It is important to know how self-concept (the whole us) is formed as this will lead to a discussion of possible ways to lift self-esteem. Cooley (1902) outlined the 'looking glass theory' to explain self-concept. Cooley believed that our view of our selves was a reflection of 'how we think others see us'. Mead (1934), expanding on the 'looking glass theory', states that our views of how specific other people see us become internalised into a general view and that this generalised view is constantly being updated through our everyday interactions.



It is in our everyday interactions that teachers and teaching assistants have a role to play in boosting a student's self-esteem.

Teaching assistants need to be aware of

- what they say;
- what they don't say;
- what their body language communicates;
- what the students say, what they don't say and what students' body language communicates.

More recently attention has been given to what is termed emotional intelligence. Goleman (1996) describes an emotionally intelligent person as one who:

- knows and manages their own feelings well;
- reads and deals effectively with other people's feelings;
- can motivate themselves and persist in the face of frustrations;
- can control impulse and delay gratification;
- can regulate their moods and keep distress from swamping the ability to think;
- can empathise and hope (Pickard 1999: 55, 56).

### **Strategies**

To recap, this viewpoint argues that behaviour can be explained by our emotions and our feelings, therefore encouraging positive emotions (compassion, empathy) and helping students to deal constructively with negative emotions (feeling a failure) is one way of promoting appropriate behaviour. In this section we will look at specific strategies.

#### *The role of a teaching assistant: support or stigma*

One of the key functions of teaching assistants is to encourage a sense of self-worth in the students with whom they are working. As a teaching assistant you will try to help the students to feel good about themselves, to feel positive about being in school and to encourage them to work to the best of their abilities. As a teaching assistant you will strive to boost the self-esteem of the students with whom you work. However, students can interpret a teaching assistant's support in different ways. One student might be very happy to receive support in one class but not in another. In our example (p. 21), Jason enjoyed the teaching assistant's support, however Jody's reaction was to see the teaching assistant's presence as proof that she couldn't do her work and an indication to the other students that she was a failure. So here we see that a teaching assistant's help can be seen as something positive or something very negative. The word often used to describe this negative effect is stigma. Stigma implies that you are seen as different and that this difference is a cause of shame. As a teaching assistant it is important to be aware of possible reactions to the support you offer. A student who finds it difficult to be singled out and supported might find it easier to accept support as part of a small group.

#### *Language should not undermine self-esteem*

In the previous section we looked at how behaviour was determined by consequences. We talked about how the language we use with students, in particular when forming requests, should not be seen as a put-down or a punishment, but instead the language should be framed positively. Obviously put-downs lead to low self-esteem.

<i>Situation</i>	<i>Response: put-down</i>	<i>Framed positively</i>
Everyone else in the group has finished their work except Sam. It is now break-time.	TA says, 'What do you mean, you haven't finished the work? How much time do you need?'	TA says, 'I see you have worked very hard on this worksheet [praising effort and hopefully boosting self-esteem]. You still need to complete the next three questions [stating a fact]. We will do this next time.'

### *Corrective feedback should be constructive*

It is easy to give feedback to a student when they have done a great job. 'Wow that painting is brilliant!' 'Fabulous!' 'You got all the questions right.' But what do we say when students have not understood? What do you say when they have completely messed up the worksheet? And more importantly how do you say it in a way that will not undermine their sense of self-worth and confidence as a learner? Consider the following example.

Teaching assistant: Sam, let me have a look at your work? (You notice that every answer on the sheet is wrong.)  
 Sam: Am I right? Do I get a sticker?  
 Teaching assistant: Sam, I can see that you have tried very hard (praising effort, boosting self-esteem) but I think we need to look at these questions again.  
 Sam: You mean I am wrong? (Sam seems visibly upset, picks up his textbook and throws it across the room.)

What is interesting about the example is that even though the teaching assistant was very careful not to use the word 'wrong', the student very quickly realised that his answers were wrong. Could the teaching assistant have responded differently? Perhaps more attention should have been paid to the worksheet that he had been given in the first place. As we stated in the previous section, work should not be given to a student if the work is beyond their capabilities.

One rule in giving constructive feedback is that for every one thing that you tell the student that they didn't do, or that they should have done, you need to tell them *four* things that they have done well. Usually you will mention three good points, one point in need of attention and then finish off with another good point. Of course, the praise has to be genuine and has to be seen as such. We will return to our example.

Teaching assistant: Sam, let me have a look at your work? (You notice that every answer on the sheet is wrong.)  
 Sam: Am I right? Do I get a sticker?  
 Teaching assistant: Sam, your handwriting has really improved. All the numbers are on the line correctly and written very neatly. Well done! You have worked very hard this session and have not been out of your seat once. (Praising what Sam has done will boost self-esteem.) However, I think we need to look at these questions again.  
 I know what you have done. You have added the numbers instead of subtracting. If this was an addition question, it would be correct. (Finding a reason for his mistake, but also affirming his understanding of maths, thereby, boosting self-esteem.) Let's have another go at these questions later.

## 24 Explanations and strategies

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Sam: Do I get a sticker?  
Teaching assistant: Yes, Sam, you certainly deserve one.

There are times when everyone needs corrective feedback. There is a real art in giving corrective feedback in a constructive manner, that is, in a way that preserves self-worth and encourages the student to keep trying. Of course, the easy way out of the situation would be not to pick up on students' mistakes. Then the student would feel good, they wouldn't get upset or angry, but, of course, they would not be learning.

### *Making a distinction between the behaviour and the person*

When a student misbehaves, it is important to separate the behaviour from the person. Let's return to the example of Sam.

Teaching assistant: Sam, I can see that you have tried very hard (praising effort, boosting self-esteem) but I think we need to look at these questions again.  
Sam: You mean I am wrong? (Sam seems visibly upset, picks up his textbook and throws it across the room.)

One way of approaching this situation would be to say:

Teaching assistant: Sam, you are a naughty boy!

Or you could say:

Teaching assistant: Sam, you know that throwing books is not allowed in the class.

In the second approach the teaching assistant is making a distinction between the student and the behaviour. The behaviour is wrong. The first approach made connections between the behaviour and the person. Because the behaviour was wrong, the person was also wrong and naughty. The difficulty with this approach is that it can lead the student to identify with the label, 'I am naughty'. In a sense this label becomes part of their self-image, their personal description of themselves. If students believe themselves to be naughty then they could act accordingly.

### *Modelling emotional awareness*

In the explanations section we looked at a very impressive definition of emotional intelligence. Teachers and teaching assistants have a role to play in helping the student to recognise and deal with emotions. Teaching assistants can model emotional awareness by talking about their own emotions and how they deal with them.

Consider the following sympathetic interaction.

Jody: I just can't do maths!  
Teaching assistant: Maths is difficult.  
Jody: When I can't do something, I just want to give up.  
Teaching assistant: It's important to keep trying. When I was learning to drive, I just couldn't get the hang of reversing around the corner. No matter what my driving instructor said, I just couldn't do it. I felt stupid, especially since everyone else seemed to be able to do it so easily. I wanted to just pack it in. But I kept trying and eventually I did it.  
Now, about last session when you swore at me.  
Jody: Miss, I never!

- Teaching assistant: Now, Jody, I imagine that the reason you swore was that you were very upset about the fact that you were finding the maths worksheet difficult.
- Jody: Miss.
- Teaching assistant: But Jody, I have feelings and when you swear at me, it makes me feel very upset.
- Jody: Sorry, Miss.

### **Active listening**

Active listening is about effective communication, about demonstrating to the person with whom you are talking with that you have really heard what they have been saying and, importantly, that you understand what they are saying. Active listening is a very useful technique in any work situation but it becomes absolutely essential when you are trying to deal with episodes of inappropriate behaviour, whether you are trying to make a student behave or discussing with a student all the possible reasons for their misbehaviour. Active listening involves many techniques and the application of various skills as outlined below (Nelson-Jones 1993).

#### ***Knowing the difference between me and you***

It is important to remember that each individual, including yourself, has their own unique perspective of both themselves and of others. For example, you might think that a student has a problem managing their anger, as they are very quick to lash out at any student who has an argument with them. However, the student might consider an aggressive response to be a matter of ensuring respect and credibility and that as a teaching assistant you could not possibly understand. The first step in active listening is to try to get inside the student's mind and see the world from their perspective.

#### ***Maintain an attitude of respect and acceptance***

This involves accepting that each individual has their own unique thoughts and feelings. Active listening involves listening to what a student says without making judgements. Thus, when the student says that hitting someone is all about 'street cred', to dismiss the idea of 'street cred' as just nonsense would not be respecting or understanding their point of view. Of course, that is not to say that punching someone in order to preserve your 'street cred' is right or acceptable!

#### ***Sending good body and voice messages***

We can communicate to the student that we are listening through the use of positive body language. This would include having a relaxed posture, facing the student, maintaining eye contact, leaning slightly forward. With a very young child it would be important to get down to their level. It is vital not to get too close; invading an individual's personal space is seen as threatening. Likewise, we need to moderate our tone of voice, so as not to appear frightening or threatening. If a student has lost control, it does not help if the teaching assistant loses control as well. The best approach is to try to remain calm. By remaining calm there is less chance of aggravating the situation. If a student has lost control it is better to position yourself at an angle to the student rather than directly in front of them, as that might seem confrontational. On the other hand, if we want to communicate to the student that we mean what we say, a firm, no-nonsense tone of voice is needed.

#### ***Reading others' body language***

As we become aware of what our own body language communicates to others, it is also important to start reading what the students are communicating through their body language. As a teaching assistant you spend many hours supporting the same students and over time you begin to pick up on each student's unique body language. Often there are

certain non-verbal behaviours that indicate when a person is in the process of losing their temper. These non-verbal behaviours include:

- levels of activity – the student could become restless, leave their seat or become very quiet;
- facial tension and expression;
- eye contact – the eyes could widen or there could be a reluctance to maintain eye contact.

As you gain experience in your role you will begin to pick up on these non-verbal clues and possibly be able to intervene before the situation gets out of hand.

#### *Verbal and non-verbal techniques*

These techniques include the use of openers, small rewards, open-ended questions, rewording and reflecting feelings. These techniques would not be effective when a student is in the middle of an outburst. However, it is possible that these techniques could be used as soon as you realise that a student is becoming agitated. Or they can be employed when the dust settles and you have the opportunity to discuss their behaviour with the student.

- *Openers* – These are statements that give the student permission to talk. For example: ‘You seem upset . . . are you alright?’
- *Small rewards* – These are non-verbal responses you give to a student to communicate that you are listening. Non-verbal responses include nods, raised eyebrows, good eye contact and soothing voice sounds.
- *Open-ended questions* – Questions such as ‘How are you feeling?’ encourage the student to keep talking.
- *Rewording* – This involves listening to what a student is saying, re-phrasing what they have said in your mind and then saying this back to the student. This strategy communicates to the student that you are listening, it helps you to understand what the student is saying and it may also help the student to understand what they are saying.
- *Reflecting feelings* – This involves not only listening to what a student is saying, but noting the manner in which they are speaking as this gives clues to how the student is feeling. For example: ‘you say you are fine but your hands are shaking’. Sometimes you can also reflect back to the student what you think may be the reasons for their feelings.

At this point let’s look at an example. Celia, a teaching assistant in a secondary school comments on Brad.

Brad is a student whom I support. He has difficulty controlling his temper. I noticed another lad in the class, Bill, pass him and say out loud that there was a terrible smell in the classroom. I could see Brad tense his shoulders. I knew that was not a good sign. I walked quickly over to Brad and asked if I could have a quiet word with him at the back of the classroom.

The first point to notice is that the teaching assistant intervenes early and takes Brad to a place within the class where she can have a private word. At this point the conversation went as follows:

Teaching assistant: Are you alright, you seem quite tense.  
(This was an opener.)  
Brad: Miss, it’s Bill.  
Teaching assistant: (maintains eye contact, nods) mmmmm.  
(This is a small reward.)

Teaching assistant: What did Bill do?  
(This is an open question.)

Brad: He said there was a bad smell in the classroom.

Teaching assistant: You are upset because Bill said there was a bad smell in the classroom?  
(Rewording.)

Brad: I could punch him!

Teaching assistant: You are feeling angry because Bill said there was a bad smell, perhaps you feel angry because you think he might be making that comment about you?  
(Reflecting feelings and reasons.)

Brad: Yeah.

The teaching assistant, by acknowledging Brad's emotions, has diffused a potentially difficult situation. Of course, there is the issue of what you should say to Brad, once you have helped him to become aware of his emotions. Brad needs to examine how he thinks about this situation. We will come back to this example in the next section.

### *Removing the audience*

In the previous example the teaching assistant had a conversation regarding a sensitive issue in private. In a private conversation you can talk about more personal issues and feelings. If this conversation were to occur within earshot of the other students, the student in question would be mindful of how what he said could be interpreted. Had the student in this example had an audience, he might have felt the need to punch the other student in order not to lose face. In a sense we are talking about dealing with students in a sensitive manner that preserves their self-esteem.

### **Checklist of strategies**

- ✓ Support or stigma? Be aware of how students perceive support? If students find it difficult to accept support a gentle approach is needed.
- ✓ Be aware of all aspects of communication. Use active listening techniques.
- ✓ Language should be positive.
- ✓ Corrective feedback should be constructive.
- ✓ Corrective discipline should make a distinction between the behaviour and the person.
- ✓ Teaching assistants can model emotional awareness.
- ✓ Remove the audience. Say important things in private.

## **Behaviour determined by thoughts or thinking processes**

### **Explanations**

This viewpoint argues that behaviour is determined by the way we think. Therefore, to change behaviour we need to focus on changing our thoughts or thinking processes. In this section we will deal with how students think about inappropriate behaviour. Many psychologists talk about how children's thinking changes with time. Of particular interest in this section is the work on moral development, how children learn what is right and what is wrong and how their thinking regarding moral development changes with time.

The first theory we will look at is outlined by Piaget. Piaget (1970) believes that there are three stages of moral development as detailed in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Piaget's theory of moral development

Stage	Age	Features
Pre-moral	0–5 years	Children have very little understanding of rules or other aspects of moral development, although children begin to develop this as they near the age of 5.
Moral realism	5–10 years	<p>Children are rigid in their thinking.</p> <p>Rules are important and must always be obeyed. For example, it is important to tell the truth ('You smell!') even if it means hurting someone's feelings.</p> <p>Consequences are more important than the intentions. If you accidentally break your friend's toy, you are still naughty.</p> <p>The naughtier the behaviour, the greater the punishment should be.</p> <p>Naughty behaviour will always be punished in some way.</p> <p>There is no concept yet that punishment should include some notion of making amends; that is, if you purposely break your friend's toy you should try to fix it or buy them another one.</p>
Moral relativism	Upwards of 10 years	<p>Children can think more flexibly about moral issues.</p> <p>They realise that people have different rules about what is right and what is wrong.</p> <p>They realise that sometimes it is OK to break a rule. For example, sometimes you need to lie, so as not to hurt someone's feelings.</p> <p>When deciding what is wrong, the child now takes into account the intentions of the individual as well as the consequences.</p> <p>'Tommy didn't mean to break my car, he just stepped on it, as he didn't see it. Tommy is not naughty it was just an accident!'</p> <p>Children believe that the punishment should fit the crime and that the guilty party should try to make amends.</p> <p>Children are aware that sometimes people who misbehave do get away with it.</p>

Source: (Eysenck and Flanagan 2001)

Kohlberg (1981) outlined another theory of moral development as detailed in Table 2.2. Kohlberg believed, as did Piaget that moral reasoning developed with time. Research evidence indicates that in children between the ages of 10 and 16 there is an increase in moral reasoning at level 2, conventional morality (Eysenck and Flanagan 2001). Although somewhat complex, these theories on moral development are important to be aware of. We will come to the reasons why this is so shortly.

The next research to be outlined involves the relationship between parental styles of discipline and moral development. Although this talks about the actions of parents, this can be applied to the classroom.

Table 2.2 Kohlberg's theory of moral development

Level 1	<i>Pre-conventional morality</i> – At this level what is considered right or wrong is determined by whether you are punished or rewarded. Thus, pushing in line is <i>wrong</i> because you will be told off, or, helping the teacher is <i>right</i> , as getting a sticker will reward you.
Level 2	<i>Conventional morality</i> – In this stage individuals behave either out of a desire to win approval from others or out of a fear that others will somehow blame them if they misbehave. At this stage it is not only the consequences of your behaviour that are important but the social aspects – that is, what others think of you. At the end of this stage individuals believe that it is one's duty to obey the laws and rules of society.
Level 3	<i>Post-conventional morality</i> – This is the highest level of moral development. Here, the individual develops more abstract notions of justice and morality. Here, individuals can appreciate the difference between the letter and the spirit of the law.

Research (Hoffman 1982) has revealed that there are three styles used in trying to encourage moral development as detailed below.

- *Power assertion* – includes physical punishment, spankings, harsh words, removal of privileges.
- *Love withdrawal* – this involves withdrawing attention and affection from the child if they misbehave: 'I won't like you if you do that'.
- *Induction* – this involves reasoning and explaining why a certain action is wrong, specifically stressing the effect that the behaviour has on other people.

Brody and Shaffer (1982) reviewed many studies relating parenting styles to the child's moral development. Their findings are given below.

- *Induction* (reasoning) improved moral development in 86 per cent of studies.
- *Love withdrawal* (withdrawing affection and attention) improved moral development in 42 per cent of studies.
- *Power assertion* (harsh words, removal of privileges) improved moral development in 18 per cent of studies. However, it was also found that *power assertion* had a negative effect on moral development in 82 per cent of studies. Zahn-Waxler *et al.* (1979) found that *power assertion* results in children who are aggressive and do not care about others. Possibly this is true because the child is learning to imitate the aggressive techniques that are used on them.

This research has important implications for teaching assistants, as the lesson to be learnt is that the way to encourage appropriate behaviour is to use reasoning. The theories of moral development, although complex, can give a broad idea of how an individual child is thinking about what is right and wrong. In a sense you start with the level of reasoning that a child has reached and then try to move them forward. So for children at Piaget's stage of moral realism (5–10 years) or Kohlberg's pre-conventional morality you will need to talk about rules, the consequences of rules and the difference between consequences and intentions.

A more recent development in this area concerns cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). Maladaptive behaviour, in this case inappropriate behaviour in the classroom, is due to irrational or faulty thinking. This approach acknowledges that emotions and thoughts are interconnected. Perhaps one reason for inappropriate behaviour is that the student does not think, but simply reacts. Instead of thinking for the student, a teacher or teaching assistant needs to develop an awareness of the student's own thinking processes. A way



forward (Gourley 1999, Hymans 2003, De Bono 1999) is to help students to broaden the way they look at situations, to encourage students to look at situations from different perspectives and to help them realise that there are different ways of responding to situations. This brings us to the next section on strategies.

## **Strategies**

### *Corrective language*

In simple terms corrective language relates to how we tell a student off for misbehaving. There are many ways to tell a student off, but what we are interested in are methods that will:

- preserve self-esteem;
- encourage and develop reasoning and thinking skills;
- lead to the student behaving appropriately in the future.

A number of techniques that can be employed are discussed below.

#### *Does the student know what they are supposed to be doing?*

When a student displays inappropriate behaviour you need to ask yourself why they are behaving in this way. Do they know what to do? Have they forgotten what to do? Do they just need to be reminded? The four versions outlined below offer some alternative responses to the scenario of the teaching assistant observing Amanda throwing her apron on the floor, dumping her paint tray and brush in the sink and hurrying off to break.

#### **VERSION 1**

Teaching assistant: Amanda. Were you born in a barn?

This comment, although reflecting the teaching assistant's exasperation with Amanda's messy ways, might not prove to be effective. This remark does not tell Amanda what she has done wrong, nor what she should do. The remark is also phrased as a put-down. Amanda could easily think that the teaching assistant is just having a go at her. There is also the issue of whether Amanda would understand the teaching assistant's remark.

#### **VERSION 2**

Teaching assistant: Amanda we have a rule in this class for cleaning up our equipment. Thank you.

In this example the teaching assistant reminds the student of the rule. Hopefully by focusing on the rule, the reminder is not seen as a personal put-down. By saying 'thank you', the teaching assistant is communicating to Amanda that she believes that she will tidy up. However, this example does not specifically state what Amanda should do or why she should behave in such a way.

#### **VERSION 3**

Teaching assistant: Amanda we have a rule in this class for cleaning up our equipment. Paint pots and brushes should be washed out, dried and put away. Aprons should be hung up. When equipment is put away properly it means that it will be ready for the next person to use. You wouldn't want to use a paintbrush that was all dried up with paint and you wouldn't want to put on an apron that was dirty. Thank you, Amanda.

This version again focuses on the rules, but it goes beyond them and states the reasons behind the rules and the personal consequences for others of not following the rules. This will help Amanda to develop more complex ways of reasoning. However, perhaps here the teaching assistant is doing too much of the thinking for Amanda. Perhaps Amanda needs to be encouraged to think for herself.

#### VERSION 4

Teaching assistant: Amanda we have a rule in this class for cleaning up our equipment. Paint pots and brushes should be washed out, dried and put away. Aprons should be hung up.

Amanda, what happens if we don't clean the paint brushes and we don't hang the aprons up?

Amanda: I wouldn't like to wear an apron if someone stepped all over it?

Teaching assistant: That's right, Amanda! When equipment is put away properly it means that it will be ready for the next person to use. Thank you, Amanda.

#### Double questions

When you notice that someone is not doing what he or she should be doing it is useful to ask the student:

- what are you doing?
- what should you be doing?

These questions encourage the students to think about what they are doing as shown in the following exchange.

Teaching assistant: (Notices two students looking at a magazine rather than completing their worksheet.) Girls, what are you doing?

Amy: Magazine, miss?

Teaching assistant: What should you be doing?

Amy: Doing the worksheet.

Teaching assistant: Yes, I will come and have a look at your work in a minute.

#### When – then

In a sense this can be seen as a type of agreement between you and the student. You are stating what they have to do before they get to do what they want. Again, this involves reasoning.

Teaching assistant: When you have cleaned up the paint equipment, then you can go out for break.

#### Partial agreement

This technique can be useful when you are in a situation where you are asking a student to do something and they are trying to argue why they shouldn't have to do what you say. This situation is particularly common in secondary schools and in part is due to older students' ability to reason. Let's return to the example of the girls and the magazine.

Teaching assistant: Girls, what are you doing?

Amy: Magazine, miss?

Teaching assistant: What should you be doing?

Amy: Miss Todd, who was with us last week, let us have our magazine out? She said we could have our magazine on the desk.

Teaching assistant: Well, maybe Miss Todd did say you could have your magazine out (partial agreement) but I am asking you to put it away and get on with your work.

#### ***Making students aware of the impact of their behaviour on others***

In this technique you give feedback or tell the student what they are doing, the effect this has on others and how this behaviour makes you feel. Again, what you are trying to do is to make students more aware of the reasons for rules and the consequences that breaking the rules has for others.

Teaching assistant: Tom, can you please stop making frog noises. Thank you.

Tom: (Still keeps making noises.)

Teaching assistant: Tom, making those noises is going against one of our classroom rules. When you make those noises, I can't hear myself think and I certainly can't hear what the others in the group are saying. That means I can't help them get on with the questions on the worksheet. I don't know how they are feeling, but that noise gives me a headache and makes me feel angry.

Tom: Sorry, Miss.

#### ***Time to respond***

Sometimes it is helpful, after asking a student to do something or not to do something, to give them time to respond. Again, let's look at the example of the girls and the magazine.

Teaching assistant: Girls, what are you doing?

Amy: Magazine, miss?

Teaching assistant: Put it away.

Girls: (Look defiant and start flipping through magazine.)

Teaching assistant: (Towering over the girls and raising voice) I said put it away now!

In this example what the teaching assistant has done is to back the students into a corner and provoked a confrontation. Hopefully, the girls will put the magazine away, but what will the teaching assistant do if they don't? In this example the teaching assistant's approach has possibly made the situation worse. This situation could have been avoided if the teaching assistant had taken a slightly different approach. Rogers (2000) refers to this as the least to most intrusive approach. Rogers (2000) argues that it is best to intervene in the least intrusive manner possible and move on to a more direct manner, or more forceful approach if, and only if, required. The least intrusive or a more softly-softly approach would go like this.

Teaching assistant: Girls, what are you doing?

Amy: Magazine, miss?

Teaching assistant: Can you put the magazine away and get on with your work. I will come and check in a few minutes.

In this example the teaching assistant communicated to the students what they should be doing and, importantly, gave them time to think about it and time to respond. This prevented a confrontation. However, if the girls refuse to put away the magazine and are still looking at it when the teaching assistant goes back to check then a more direct approach is needed. Usually at that point a discussion regarding choices and consequences would be appropriate.

#### ***Language of choice***

This is a more direct approach that is used when the student clearly does not want to do what you have asked them. Again, this approach focuses on encouraging the student to

actively think about what they are doing and what they are going to do next. Here, you are helping the student to look at the possible consequences of their actions and to make a choice about how they are going to behave. Let's look at the example of Brad, where Brad was angry when Bill made a comment regarding a bad smell in the classroom. The teaching assistant is having a quiet word with Brad.

Brad: I could punch him!  
 Teaching assistant: Well Brad, you could punch him, but what would happen if you did?  
 Brad: I would feel better?  
 Teaching assistant: What else would happen?  
 Brad: I would get a detention.  
 Teaching assistant: Yeah, you would get punished. You have a choice about what to do. I don't know what Bill meant when he made that remark, but I know that you have been behaving well in class and it would be a shame to spoil that. Again, you have the choice. You could punch him and get into trouble or you could sit down and carry on with your work.

Brad listened to what the teaching assistant said, went back to his seat and carried on with his work. At the end of the lesson the teaching assistant gave him a commendation note for his behaviour in class.

In this example a discussion about the consequences of actions and stressing that the student has a choice encouraged the student to think about their actions and, in the end, behave appropriately.

#### *Emphasise the relationship between behaviour and outcomes*

This strategy involves what happens when the student does not make good choices, for example in the previous scenario, if Brad went back to class, walked up to Bill and punched him. This strategy involves trying to get the student to think about their behaviour, why they did what they did and how they are going to make amends. Again, the emphasis is on trying to get the student to think about their behaviour.

Rogers (2000: 38) recommends that the student thinks about the following.

- What did I do?
- Why do I think this happened?
- What rule did I break?
- What do I need to do to fix things up?

Encouraging this line of reasoning helps the student to repair and rebuild relationships. This is essential because at the end of the day the students will still be in the same class and you, the teaching assistant, will still be working with those same students.

#### *Involve the students in rule making*

This technique can be particularly useful when working with small groups. Instead of waiting for the group to start to play up, you give them clear guidance and reminders of how you expect them to behave. For example, 'In this group, we have a rule regarding speaking – when we want to speak we put our hands up' or 'In this group, we have rules about how to listen'. Sometimes it is very useful to have the group discuss and decide on group rules among themselves. In this case the advice is that:

- you clarify or explain to the students the need for the rules;
- that you have as few rules as possible;
- that the rules are written in a positive manner, i.e. 'We will listen to what each other has to say', rather than, 'We will not interrupt'.

Table 2.3 Special needs

<i>Difficulties in:</i>	<i>Conditions where these difficulties might occur</i>	<i>Impact on behaviour</i>	<i>Ways in which a teaching assistant can help</i>
<p>Coordination</p> <p>These students might appear clumsy. They could have problems with fine motor skills (handwriting, tying their shoelaces, getting dressed after PE) or gross motor skills (jumping, running, kicking a ball).</p>	<p>Dyspraxia, Down's syndrome</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frustration can easily develop as the student struggles to do tasks which most students find easy.</li> <li>• The student might be teased by other students or not included in games or activities.</li> <li>• Isolation and frustration can lead to low self-esteem and incidents where the student lashes out at others.</li> </ul>	<p>Praise the student often to raise self-esteem.</p> <p>Be aware of the student's limitations and do not put the student into situations or give them tasks that they can't do.</p> <p>As far as possible try to make life more manageable, for example allow them extra time to get changed for PE.</p>
<p>Limited auditory short-term memory</p> <p>These students will have difficulties in remembering instructions and directions. If the teacher asks the students to take their textbooks to the back of the class, put their work on her desk and then go and stand by the door, a student with difficulties in this area might get to the back of the class and forget why they are there.</p>	<p>Dyslexia Dyspraxia Down's syndrome</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This student might appear not to be doing what they should be doing but this is not because they are being disobedient, it is simply because they have not understood the instructions.</li> <li>• The student may not have completed their homework because they simply forgot.</li> </ul>	<p>Be on hand to remind the student of instructions.</p> <p>Encourage the student to ask others or yourself if they are not certain.</p> <p>Do not give complex instructions.</p> <p>Ensure that the homework that is set is written correctly in the planner.</p>
<p>Lack of organisational skills</p> <p>Here the student has difficulty in remembering what to bring to school, what they need for each lesson and where they should be at a certain time.</p>	<p>Dyspraxia Dyslexia Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A student who consistently forgets to bring the proper equipment to class and who forgets where they should be will be told off.</li> </ul>	<p>A teaching assistant can provide reminders to the student. It has on occasion been known for a teaching assistant, especially in a large secondary school, to meet a student at the beginning of the day to check that they have all their equipment and that they know what they should be doing.</p>
<p>Social skills: understanding others</p> <p>This child will have difficulties in maintaining friendships. They will often lack empathy. They will find it difficult to understand others' verbal and non-verbal behaviour. They will not be good at reading facial expressions or understanding emotions.</p>	<p>Autistic spectrum disorder (ASD)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Such individuals can annoy their peers without realising. For example, a 14-year-old lad with ASD goes up to a large sixth former and comments in a loud voice: 'Your spots are enormous. Do you squeeze them?' The 14-year-old with ASD is surprised when the sixth former then punches him.</li> </ul>	<p>The teaching assistant, together with the teacher and the SENCO, will implement specialised training packages.</p>

Obsession with routines	Autistic spectrum disorder (ASD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An individual with an obsession with routines can become extremely upset and angry when things do not happen as they should. For example, imagine break-time is at 10:30 and the assembly is running over time because Reverend Smith still has a few things to say. Laura, who has ASD, gets up from her seat and announces to Reverend Smith that it is 10:30 and it is break-time. Sally, who is sitting beside Laura, tells her to sit down. At this point Laura starts to scream that it is 10:30, and now it is 10:31!</li> </ul>	Again, the teaching assistant, with the teacher and the Senco, will implement specialised interventions such as social stories.
Inattention	Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A student who is inattentive will have difficulty staying on task and is easily distracted. Such a student can be told off many times a day for not doing what they should be doing.</li> </ul>	This student will need constant reminders of what they should be doing. This student will benefit from structure and routine and will not easily cope in a class where there are many distractions.
Hyperactivity	Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In this case a student will not be able to keep still. They will be out of their seat more often than they are in it. This student is constantly fidgeting. Obviously this student could be told off many times in the school day.</li> </ul>	Such a student will benefit from a very structured classroom environment, where everyone has their own desk and very clear rules regarding appropriate behaviour are firmly in place.
Impulsiveness	Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) Autistic spectrum disorder (ASD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This student will blurt out answers before the teacher asks them, will have difficulty waiting their turn and often acts without thinking. These behaviours can lead to the student being told off by the teacher or their peers.</li> </ul>	Encourage thinking skills and self-control.

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### Checklist of strategies

- ✓ Encourage appropriate behaviour by encouraging reasoning.
- ✓ When using corrective language it is helpful to ask yourself the following: Does the student know what they are supposed to be doing?
- ✓ Using double questions – ‘What are you doing?’, ‘What should you be doing?’ encourages students to think about their actions.
- ✓ Partial agreement and the use of when–then statements can be useful.
- ✓ Making the student aware of the impact of their behaviour on others helps them to become more aware of the reasons for rules and the consequences that breaking rules has on others.
- ✓ Giving a student time to respond to a request allows time for thinking and avoids unnecessary confrontation.
- ✓ Using the language of choice helps the student to look at the possible consequences of their actions and to think before acting.
- ✓ Involving the student in rule making encourages thinking skills.

### Special needs

One consideration that we have not looked at is the issue of special needs. Sometimes students with a specific statement of special needs will have particular difficulties with behaviour that you will need to be aware of. When dealing with a student with specific special needs, a teaching assistant will need clear advice and guidance from the teacher and SENCO. Table 2.3 looks at some of these issues. A more detailed discussion of special needs can be found in *A Teaching Assistant's Guide to Child Development and Psychology in the Classroom* by Susan Bentham, published by Routledge.

### Summary

In this chapter we have looked at many explanations for inappropriate behaviour and we have also looked at a number of strategies that can be helpful. These explanations and strategies have been discussed in separate sections dealing respectively with:

- behaviour being determined by consequences;
- behaviour being determined by feelings or emotions;
- behaviour being determined by thoughts or thinking processes.

Such a distinction has proved useful in presenting relevant information. However, the reality is that in a classroom situation when a student is not doing what they should be doing, that student's behaviour will be determined by a combination of consequences, feelings and thoughts. In addition, there could be special educational needs or difficulties contributing to their behaviour.

In the reality of the classroom there are no easy answers. Theories and strategies are useful to be aware of as they can help you in dealing with students on a day-to-day basis. Which strategy or combination of strategies works with which student is for you to discover. One method of helping you to discover which approach works best is that of reflection. The rest of the book will focus on common difficulties and will use reflection as a method of trying to discover a way forward.

## Chapter 3

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# The student who is never in their seat

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Students refusing to remain seated pose a common problem for teaching assistants. What do you do with the student who finds it difficult to remain in their seat? This might not seem to be a very serious problem, but having to give persistent reminders to a student to stay in their seat reduces the time you have to support other students. Two case studies describing such situations follow.

### Primary school

#### *The event*

Sarah who works supporting a Year 1 class outlines the first scenario.

I was working with the Yellow Group. Yellow Group had all drawn a picture of their trip to the local park. The teacher had explained to me that I was to encourage the group to take turns talking about their pictures, asking them why they had chosen to draw what they did.

To begin with I quickly reminded them of the rules of working together – that we must listen to each other. It all went well for the first few minutes. Everyone, including Matthew, was sitting up straight and paying attention. I first talked to Chloe. Chloe had drawn a lovely picture of a pond with ducks and was telling the group how much she liked ducks. It was at this point that I noticed that Matthew was under the table. I asked Matthew what he was up to and did he think he could listen to what was going on when he was under the table. Matthew said he was looking for his pencil that he had dropped but now he had found it. Once Matthew was sitting up at the table, I smiled at him and reminded him of the group rules.

Next it was James's turn to talk about his picture of a train. There is a small train that runs through the park. James said he likes trains and that the train reminded him of 'Thomas the Train'. I then noticed that Matthew was not at the table but over at the other side of the room. I left the group to go and collect Matthew and asked him what he was doing. He just grinned and said that he needed to get something in his drawer. I told Matthew that he knew it was a rule that he should ask permission to leave the group. Matthew said that he did know and that he would behave, and with that I escorted him back to the group.

Next it was Amanda's turn to talk about her drawing of the flowers that she had seen in the park. I commented that Amanda must really like flowers. Amanda said that she did and that she helped her mother in the garden. Well, would you know it, I turned around and Matthew had gone off again. I left the group and again asked him what he was playing at. Matthew said that he had to ask his friend about a birthday party they were to go to after school. I again reminded him of the rules and he said: 'Sorry, I keep forgetting'.

When we got back to the group, Amanda commented that Matthew must have ants in his pants. All the children laughed and Matthew made a show of wriggling around and



scratching his bottom. The children laughed even more. At that point it was time to go out to break.

I commented to the teacher that Matthew was out of his seat more than he was in it. In a space of ten minutes, he had been under the desk once and over at the other side of the room twice.

### **On reflection**

*Why do I think Matthew is behaving in such a way?*

Matthew is just not very good at listening or taking turns. Matthew has a real problem staying in his seat, although when he is really interested in a subject there is no problem with him being out of his seat.

*What strategies did I use?*

I followed the correct procedures. At the start of the session I reminded the group of the rules regarding listening and I reminded Matthew of the rules several times during the lesson. I feel I remained calm with Matthew for most of the time.

*What worked? What didn't work?*

Reminding Matthew of the rules seemed to work in the short term, however, he just did not seem to be able to remember them.

*How can I improve my practice?*

I am always having problems with Matthew; I feel that there is something that I am missing. Perhaps I am not firm enough?

## **Secondary school**

### **The event**

Jill works in a secondary school supporting students in Year 9. She listened to what Sarah had said and remarked that she supported a student just like Matthew.

Let me tell you about yesterday with Jason. We were in a Year 9 maths class and we were to divide into groups and start completing the exercises from the maths book on rotation. I was in a group with Jason, Mark, Marie and Vicki. I first made sure that all the students had their work books, textbook and pens. While I was flipping through Vicki's textbook to find the right page, I noticed Jason over by the window. I happened to catch his eye and he quickly returned to his seat. He just remarked that it was miserable weather and that he hoped I didn't have my laundry on the line. I told him that we were not in class to talk about my laundry but to do the work assigned on rotation.

All the students had managed to find the right page and we were looking at one of the examples. I was explaining to Marie about rotation, when I noticed that Jason had darted to the back of the class. I again gave him the look and he quickly returned with a set of sharpened pencils. He stated that he thought everyone would appreciate these. Marie remarked about how thoughtful Jason was. Jason is a very popular young man. I thanked Jason for the pencils, but said to the group that we must really get down to work.

We started the next question and I was just explaining a point to Marie when I noticed Jason at the other end of the room. I went over to Jason and asked him what he was doing.

He said that Carla had her hand up to ask a question and as the teacher and I were busy, he went over to see if he could help her. Carla just happens to be his girlfriend. I took Jason over to a quiet corner and said that all this being out of his seat meant that I couldn't spend as much time helping the others and that this made me feel upset and that I felt this wasn't fair on the others. Jason apologised and came back to the group. We only had five minutes left. Jason did remain in his seat, however he did very little work.

### **On reflection**

*Why do I think Jason is behaving in such a way?*

I think that basically Jason is a born charmer and that he just craves attention.

*What strategies did I use?*

I used 'the look' to bring him back on task. I reminded him of what he should be doing and I had a quiet word with him about how his actions were affecting the others.

*What worked? What didn't work?*

Giving him 'the look' worked in the short term, but it was only when I had a quiet word with him that he finally remained in his seat?

*How can I improve my practice?*

You can't help liking Jason, however his out-of-seat, all-over-the room behaviour does wind me up. Although eventually he settled, I wasted valuable time getting him to stay in his seat. Perhaps I should have had a quiet talk about his behaviour earlier in the session.

### **Self-assessment questions**

- What do you think are the possible explanations for Matthew and Jason's out-of-seat behaviour?
- What specific strategies do you think the teaching assistants used?
- What would you do if you were the teaching assistant?

### **Making sense of behaviour**

Both of the above case studies describe students, though of varying ages, who have the same difficulty in remaining in their seats. Although we only have limited information, we can attempt to make educated guesses (based on what we have discussed about behaviour) regarding why they are doing what they are doing. Hopefully the various explanations will suggest strategies that will help them to remain in their seats. The rest of this chapter will look in turn at the three views (behaviour determined by consequences, behaviour determined by emotions and feelings, and behaviour determined by thoughts and thinking processes) in regard to both explanations and ways forward – that is, practical everyday strategies that a teaching assistant can use.

## Behaviour determined by consequences

### Explanations

Here we remember that behaviour is determined by the consequences of the behaviour. One of the first suggestions from this viewpoint is to carry out a structured observation focusing on antecedents, behaviour and consequences.

From what we have read we could write the following analyses of Matthew's and Jason's behaviour.

<b>Matthew</b>		
<i>Antecedent</i>	<i>Behaviour</i>	<i>Consequence</i>
TA speaking to group regarding rules of working together.	Matthew sitting quietly.	
TA talking to Chloe about her drawing of pond.	Matthew under the table.  Matthew explains that he was looking for his pencil and that he had found it.	TA stops talking to Chloe. TA asks Matthew what he is doing under the table.  TA smiles at Matthew and reminds him of group rules.
TA talking to James about his picture.	Matthew over at other end of the room.  Matthew grins and says he needed to get something from his drawer.  Matthew says 'yes' and that he will behave.	TA leaves group, finds Matthew and asks him what he is doing.  TA reminds Matthew that he needed to ask permission to leave the group.  TA escorts Matthew back to the group.
TA talking to Amanda about her picture.	Matthew goes off to talk to friend.  Matthew says 'Sorry', I keep forgetting'.	TA leaves group. TA asks Matthew what is he playing at and reminds Matthew of rules.  TA escorts Matthew back.
Amanda says Matthew has got ants in his pants.	Matthew and children in the group laugh. Matthew wriggles and scratches his bottom.	Children laugh even more.

This viewpoint argues that if behaviour is ongoing, as in the case of Matthew leaving his seat, then there must be some sort of reward or pay-off for the student. What then is Matthew's reward for leaving his seat? There are several possibilities.

### Attention

The teaching assistant only paid attention to Matthew when he was out of his seat. In fact the times when Matthew left his seat corresponded to the times when the teaching assistant

was talking to someone else. The teaching assistant was very gentle in reminding Matthew of the rules. Perhaps Matthew liked the teaching assistant coming to collect him and did not see her gentle reminders as being told off.

#### *Avoidance*

Perhaps Matthew is unable or unwilling to participate in the group activity. Perhaps Matthew is bored with the activity?

#### *Approval and attention from peers*

Matthew received much attention and laughter when Amanda said he had ants in his pants.

<b>Jason</b>		
<i>Antecedent</i>	<i>Behaviour</i>	<i>Consequence</i>
TA busy making sure all students had books. Working with Vicki flipping through textbook.	Jason at window.	TA happens to catch his eye and gives him 'the look'.
Jason back in seat. Group working on maths problem.	Jason remarks that it was miserable weather and he hopes that the TA hasn't got her laundry on the line.	TA tells him that they are not in class to talk about laundry but to do work.
TA explaining to Marie about rotation.	Jason at back of the class.  Jason back with group bringing a set of sharpened pencils. Jason remarks, 'I thought everyone would appreciate these'.	TA gave him the 'look'.  Marie comments on how thoughtful Jason was.  The TA thanks Jason but reminds him that the group must get down to work.
TA explaining a point to Marie. Carla has her hand up.	Jason at other end of room talking to Carla.  Jason states that he was helping Carla as she had her hand up but both TA and the teacher were busy.  Jason apologises. Goes back to group. Remains in seat but does very little work.	TA leaves group to collect Jason. Asks Jason what he was doing?  Takes Jason over to a quiet corner and tells him the consequences of his behaviour for the others, that is, that 'I (TA) couldn't spend as much time helping the others and this made me feel upset'.

Again, this viewpoint argues that if behaviour is ongoing, as is the case of Jason leaving his seat, then there must be some sort of reward or pay-off for the student. What then is rewarding Jason for leaving his seat? Again, there are several possibilities.

**Attention**

In this scenario as in the case of Matthew, the teaching assistant paid attention to Jason when he was out of his seat. Jason left his seat when the teaching assistant was paying attention to someone else. Although the teaching assistant gave Jason 'the look' for being out of his seat, she thanked him for returning with a set of sharpened pencils.

**Avoidance**

Perhaps Jason is unable or unwilling to participate. There does seem to be some indication that Jason could be finding the work difficult as even when he does remain in his seat, he does not do much work.

**Approval and attention from peers**

Jason received positive feedback from the others for bringing them a set of sharpened pencils. Presumably, Jason received pleasurable attention from talking to his girlfriend. What these two examples show is that even though these boys are displaying the same inappropriate behaviour, the reasons for their behaviour could be very different. Of course, as the teaching assistant involved with these two boys you would be in a much better position to determine what is specifically rewarding the behaviour. These observations of student behaviour are important and need to be discussed with the classroom teacher.

**Strategies*****Try to discover what is triggering the inappropriate behaviour, then remove the trigger***

This involves some educated guesswork and entails looking for patterns in the structured observation. If Jason's or Matthew's out-of-seat behaviour is being caused by avoiding a task that they cannot do, or being bored with a task that is not sufficiently challenging, then the teaching assistant needs to discuss with the teacher more appropriate work. It is important that students are given work that they can succeed at. If both Jason's and Matthew's behaviour is being rewarded by the attention they receive then this leads us on to the strategy of rewarding and praising appropriate behaviour.

***Rewarding and praising appropriate behaviour***

In this instance this means praising Jason and Matthew for remaining in their seats. As Jason is in Year 1, stickers could be given. Perhaps the teacher will organise a reward chart, where for each session during which he remains seated he earns a gold star. A certain number of gold stars can then earn him 15 minutes on a favourite activity of his choice. Certainly, there are rewards and commendations for students in secondary school.

***Intervene early***

This strategy would involve the teaching assistant picking up on the fact that students were getting restless and at that point involving them positively in the group activity. If the students then participate positively in the group activity then the student can receive praise for appropriate behaviour.

For example, Matthew's teaching assistant could ask all the students to think of a question that they could ask the student who was showing the picture. She could involve Matthew by asking him to question the student about the picture. She could then thank Matthew for his contribution. Jason's teaching assistant could involve Jason by asking him to work with

another student and then praise Jason and the other student for working together (assuming that they work together in a positive manner). A more straightforward approach would have the teaching assistant sitting close by the pupil, so that the teaching assistant would immediately know if the student were about to wander off. An issue in both of these case studies involves when to become firm, when to show the students that you mean what you say.

#### *Point out role models*

In the early years it is possible to point out to students those other students who are brilliant at sitting in their seats and doing the work. More care needs to be taken with this approach at secondary school.

### **Behaviour determined by feelings or emotions**

#### **Explanations**

As stated previously, negative feelings, such as a fear of failure, are seen as threats to our self-esteem. Ways of dealing with threats to our self-esteem include becoming upset, angry or avoiding the situation. Does this possible explanation fit the examples of Jason and Matthew? Possibly, one of the reasons for Jason's out-of-seat behaviour could be his reluctance to do maths?

#### **Strategies**

##### *Assistance can be seen as valued support or as a source of shame*

If a student's out-of-seat behaviour is due to avoiding a task that they cannot do then they will need additional support to succeed. The difficulty is knowing how to support a student in a manner that maintains and boosts their self-esteem. Some students will be only too willing to ask for and accept help. Some students will not like to ask, will not like to be helped and will not want to do different work from their peers. The first step is to be aware of the student's reaction and to discuss their reaction with the classroom teacher.

Some students will benefit from working in a group who are at the same level. Sometimes students will appreciate working in a different environment on a catch-up session away from their peers. In the case study involving Jason, perhaps the out-of-seat behaviour could have been avoided if the teaching assistant had sat down with Jason and gone over the rotation question with him to determine what he could do?

##### *Teaching assistants can model emotional awareness by talking about their emotions and how they deal with them*

The role of a teaching assistant is to help students to deal with situations which they find difficult. A teaching assistant can talk about how they feel when they find a task difficult. Such a discussion might help with Jason if difficulty with maths is the reason for his out-of-seat behaviour. This discussion will need to be handled sensitively.

### **Behaviour determined by thoughts or thinking processes**

#### **Explanations**

This viewpoint states that what we do can be explained by our thinking processes. In both case studies the teaching assistant spent considerable time reminding the student of the

rules. In the example of Matthew, the teaching assistant reminded the group of the rules at the beginning of the session and reminded Matthew every time she had to bring him back to the group. Matthew always promised to behave but at the end admitted to the fact that he kept forgetting. In this case study there was no mention of reasoning with Matthew regarding why rules were important, however this strategy was used with some effect with Jason.

### **Strategies**

*Using double questions, 'What are you doing', 'What should you be doing?' encourages the student to think about their actions*

The teaching assistant asked Matthew what he was doing under the table and what he was doing when he was over at the other side of the room. The teaching assistant asked Jason what he was doing talking to Carla. Both teaching assistants received explanations but perhaps they needed to ask the students what they *should be doing*, this would have encouraged the students to think about the rules for themselves.

*Making the student aware of the impact of their behaviour on others helps them to become more aware of the reasons for rules*

In the case study involving Jason, the teaching assistant used this strategy effectively. However, although it had the result of keeping Jason in his seat, he did not do very much work. This could indicate that there are other reasons why he is getting up from his seat. Although reasoning might work on a short-term basis, unless the root cause of his out-of-seat behaviour is found, the behaviour could continue.

Would this style of reasoning work with Matthew? It would be useful to try this approach. Matthew did say that he knew the rules but that he kept forgetting. Perhaps what Matthew needs is some visual reminder? Suppose Matthew loved trains, then perhaps he could wear a badge that reads: 'Thomas says "Stay in your seat"'.

*Giving the student a choice and stating the consequences*

For both students perhaps the teaching assistants could have intervened earlier and said firmly that they had a choice to remain in their seat and do their work or have their behaviour reported to the teacher.

### **Self-assessment questions**

- After reading the suggestions in this chapter, how would you have dealt with the students who were never in their seats?
- Think of a situation where you have had to deal with a student's out-of-seat behaviour. Use the techniques in this chapter to think of both explanations for the behaviour and strategies that could turn the behaviour around?

### **Summary**

This chapter has discussed possible explanations and strategies for dealing with students who are never in their seats. In doing this we have looked specifically at two case studies. What we have discovered through this discussion is that there are a number of possible explanations for the behaviour as well as a number of possible strategies that can be used to deal with it. Which strategy, or combination of strategies, you should use in the classroom very much depends on the individual student and the particular details of the situation.

**Remember**

- ✓ Write down notes of what happened.
- ✓ Reflect on what has happened. Ask yourself:
  - Why do I think this student is behaving in such a way?
  - What strategies did I use?
  - What worked? What didn't work?
  - How can I improve my practice?
- ✓ Try to record your recollection of the events in the form of a structured observation noting the antecedents, behaviour and consequences.
- ✓ Discuss your thoughts with others (teachers, SENCO, other teaching assistants).
- ✓ Look for possible explanations for behaviour. Consider the consequences, feelings and emotions, and thinking processes as being part of the explanation as well as suggesting ways forward.



## Chapter 4

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# The student who disrupts other students

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Dealing with students who disrupt other students is an ongoing task for most teaching assistants. Ideally, the teaching assistant is looking for long-term as well as short-term solutions. What follows are two case studies that describe students who continually disrupt others.

### Primary school

#### **Background**

Ryan works in a primary school as a teaching assistant. Much of Ryan's time is spent supporting John. John is in Year 3. John has difficulties getting on with the other students in his class. Most of them see him as annoying at best. Although John does seem to have a following among some of the boys in the years below, Ryan states that John sees himself as being tough, a 'bit of a lad'.

#### **The event**

Ryan describes what happened on one Monday morning.

It started during carpet time. The teacher was reading a story to the class. John was sitting behind Dana. Dana has very long blonde hair, which she wears in braids. While the teacher was reading the story, John very gently started to play with Dana's hair. Dana turned around and told him to 'piss off'. The teacher reminded Dana and John to listen. John just looked all innocent. Dana turned back around to the front. At that point, I gave John one of my 'looks'. John seemed to behave himself for a while and then he started again. I think John was trying to tie Dana's braids in a knot. Dana turned around and pushed John over. The teacher at this point intervened and asked both Dana and John to sit at the back of the class as they could not sit still on the carpet. Dana started to protest that John had started it, but John just smirked.

When the time came to do group work. John was sitting beside Kevin and Luke. All the boys seemed to be getting on with their writing. Kevin was working extremely hard. Kevin has difficulty with writing and really has to concentrate on his letter formation. I was at the end of the table helping Luke when I noticed John watching Kevin. Then, John picked up his maths textbook and dropped it inches away from where Kevin was working. Kevin jumped and accidentally scribbled all over his page. Kevin was naturally very upset and yelled: 'Look at what you made me do'. John replied: 'Oh, does a little noise scare little Kevin?'

I called John over and asked him if he thought that was a nice thing to do. He replied that it was just an accident and that he had no way of knowing that Kevin would be so scared and that he shouldn't have to say sorry as it wasn't his fault anyway. I am not sure whether I believed him or not but I decided to give him the benefit of the doubt and said that even

if it was an accident he still should apologise. He turned to Kevin and said: 'Sorry for scaring you Kevi-poo'.

I mentioned all of this to the teacher at break. She stated that disrupting other students was beginning to be a habit with John.

### **On reflection**

*Why do I think John is behaving in such a way?*

I am not sure. Perhaps he is bored? Perhaps he is just trying to get attention?

*What strategies did I use?*

I tried to give John one of my 'looks' at carpet time. I tried reasoning with him regarding the incident with Kevin and I asked him to apologise.

*What worked? What didn't work?*

I just don't know what to do with John. I feel I work very hard containing him. I have tried reasoning with him, pointing out the consequences of his actions, but it does not seem to make a difference. In a sense, I feel like whatever I say is just not getting through to him. Sometimes I think I am being too soft with him.

*How can I improve my practice?*

Perhaps I could have done more in circle time to have prevented him from disrupting Dana. I think I should have made him apologise properly.

## **Secondary school**

### **The event**

Julie, who works in a secondary school, reported that she had a student who was constantly disrupting other students.

Let me tell you about a lesson with Laura in English. I was working with a group of students including Laura on looking at the character of Hamlet. The group of students were working really hard, trying to look up quotes. Then Laura's pen ran out of ink. Well, to Laura this was the end of the world. Laura screeched, 'My pen's run out of ink. Do any of you others have a pen?' At this point all the others start searching for an extra pen. I told the group to get on with the task and that I would give her a pen.

A few minutes later, Laura remarked that her old Auntie Ethel had a dog named Hamlet and didn't I think Hamlet was a strange name for a dog. Before I knew it, all the others in the group were discussing wild and wonderful names for dogs. I said that this was all very interesting but we were not doing what we were supposed to be doing. Well, no sooner had we got down to work, it must have been only minutes, when Laura's nail had broken. Actually, it wasn't broken, it was only chipped. Laura was distraught and pleaded with the other girls to find her a nail file. At this point all the other girls had tipped their bags out on their desk and were searching for a nail file. I told Laura that this wasn't the time or the place and that she could sort out her nail at break and that now she had to get on with her work.

Unfortunately, the teacher at that point asked all the students to face the front, as he wanted feedback from the class about what they had found. Our group had done very little,

if any, work. I always find Laura a disrupting influence on the group. It's not that she does major things like arguing with others, or taking their pens or shoving people in line, but it is always a catalogue of little things that she does or says, or things that just seem to happen to her.

### **On reflection**

*Why do I think Laura is behaving in such a way?*

Laura is just a drama queen. I don't think she means to disrupt the group. At least I don't *think* she means to, though at times I wonder.

*What strategies did I use?*

I constantly reminded Laura of what she should be doing and I spent a lot of time trying to refocus the group.

*What worked? What didn't work?*

Reminding Laura and the others only worked to a certain extent.

*How can I improve my practice?*

Perhaps I should be more firm with Laura? The problem is that Laura is very likeable, it is just that her head is in the clouds, so to speak. However, I don't think I am doing her any favours and I certainly don't think I am working effectively with the group.

### **Self-assessment questions**

- What do you think are the possible explanations for Laura's and John's disruptive behaviour?
- What specific strategies do you think the teaching assistants used?
- What would you do if you were the teaching assistant?

### **Making sense of behaviour**

Both these case studies describe students who are displaying the same inappropriate behaviour. Although we only have limited information, we can attempt to make educated guesses (based on what we have discussed about behaviour) regarding why they are doing what they are doing. Hopefully the various explanations will suggest strategies that will help to deal with this disruptive behaviour. The rest of this chapter will look in turn at the three views (behaviour determined by consequences, behaviour determined by emotions or feelings, and behaviour determined by thoughts or thinking processes) in regard to both explanations and ways forward – that is, practical everyday strategies that a teaching assistant can use.

### **Behaviour determined by consequences**

#### **Explanations**

Here we remember that behaviour is determined by the consequences of the behaviour. One of the first suggestions from this viewpoint is to carry out a structured observation focusing on antecedents, behaviour and consequences.

Based on what we have read we could write the following analyses of John's and Laura's behaviour.

<b>John</b>		
<i>Antecedent</i>	<i>Behaviour</i>	<i>Consequence</i>
Circle time. Teacher reading story. John sitting behind Dana.	John starts to gently play with Dana's braids.  John looks all innocent.	Dana turns around and tells him to 'piss off'.  Teacher reminds both John and Dana to listen.  'I (TA) give John one of my "looks".'
Teacher reading story.	John behaves himself for a while.  John starts playing with Dana's hair again.    John smirks.	Dana turns around and pushes John over.  Teacher asks both Dana and John to sit at the back of the class.  Dana protests that John started it.
John, Kevin and Luke now engaged in group work. Kevin concentrating on writing. TA helping Luke.	John picks up his maths textbook and drops it inches away from where Kevin is working.	Kevin jumps and accidentally scribbles all over page. Kevin visibly upset. Kevin states: 'Look what you made me do'.
Others in group watching.	John replies, 'Oh does a little noise scare little Kevin?'	TA calls John over and asks him if he thought that was a nice thing to do.
Others in group watching.	He replies that it was just an accident and that he had no way of knowing that Kevin would be so scared and that he shouldn't have to say sorry as it wasn't his fault anyway.  Kevin replies, 'Sorry for scaring you Kevi-poo'.	TA says that he should apologise.

The behavioural viewpoint argues that if behaviour is ongoing then there must be some sort of reward or pay-off for the student. Why is John behaving in such a way? Is John being rewarded for his behaviour?

*Is John's behaviour being rewarded by attention?*

John is getting attention for his behaviour, but at first glance it would seem not to be the attention a child would like to receive. John is being told off by the teacher and the teaching

assistant, and his fellow pupils are angry with him. But is any attention better than none? Is being told off better than being ignored? In this short case study there is no mention of John being praised for appropriate behaviour.

*Is John's behaviour a means of avoiding what he should be doing?*

There is not enough information presented in the case study to answer this question. But it could be a possible explanation.

<b>Laura</b>		
<i>Antecedent</i>	<i>Behaviour</i>	<i>Consequence</i>
TA working with a group in an English lesson. Task involved finding quotes that describe the character of Hamlet.  Group working quietly. Laura's pen runs out of ink.	Laura screeches, 'My pen has run out of ink. Do any of you others have a pen?'	The group stops work and begins to search for a pen.  TA intervenes and tells the group to get back to work as she will give Laura a pen.
Group works quietly for a few minutes.	Laura remarks that her old Auntie Ethel had a dog named Hamlet and didn't TA think that Hamlet was a strange name for a dog.	The group discusses wild and wonderful names for dogs.  TA states that this is all very interesting but that the group needs to get back to work.
Group works quietly for a few minutes.  Laura chips her nail.	Laura is distraught as nail has chipped. Pleads with others to search for a nail file.	The girls tip their bags out and search for a nail file. TA reminds Laura that this isn't the time or the place and that she needs to return to work.  Teacher calls the class back to discuss their group work.

Again, this viewpoint argues that if behaviour is ongoing there must be some reward for the behaviour from the student's perspective. Why is Laura acting in such a way? Does Laura really have her head in the clouds as the teaching assistant has suggested?

*Is Laura's behaviour being rewarded by attention?*

Laura is getting attention from both the teaching assistant and her friends. Although Laura is being told off it is in a very gentle manner.

*Is Laura's behaviour being rewarded by avoiding working on the task at hand?*

Although there are no comments made by the teaching assistant on Laura's interest in Hamlet, this explanation definitely seems to be a possibility. The group spent very little time on the task at hand. Despite the teaching assistant's comments that Laura has her head in the clouds, perhaps these disruptions are actually more planned than Julie imagines.

Even though both case studies describe students who disrupt other students, a careful analysis of their behaviour seems to indicate that there are differing explanations. What this shows is that writing an event in a structured format can suggest possible explanations. It is important that you discuss your observations and reflections with the teacher.

### **Strategies**

#### *Try to discover what is triggering the inappropriate behaviour then remove the trigger*

It is possible with John that he is disruptive when he feels he is not receiving attention. One way of dealing with John's behaviour is to give him attention when he is behaving, the 'catch them while they are good' approach. As a teaching assistant this could be possible when working with a student on a one-to-one basis or within a group. Of course, it is harder to give John attention when he is sitting with a group, but it could be something as simple as a smile and a thumbs up sign when he is sitting attentively.

With Laura it is possible that her behaviour is triggered by being asked to do a task that she is unable to do or a task that she finds insufficiently challenging. Which brings us to the next point.

#### *Play your role in making sure that tasks set are both achievable and sufficiently challenging*

It is important to discuss with the teacher not only the learning objectives of the lessons but also the capabilities of the individual students whom you are supporting. Once you are aware of what a student can and cannot do, work and questions to stimulate group involvement can be considered. If Laura were asked a question on the character of Hamlet that she understood and could answer then maybe she would not need to make remarks about her Auntie Ethel's dog.

#### *Intervene early*

If the teaching assistant knows a student well, then it is possible to intervene just when you think a student is considering doing something that they shouldn't be doing. For example, after the first incident when John was pulling Dana's hair, the teaching assistant could have positioned himself closer to John. Perhaps the teaching assistant could have asked John to move? This would have prevented the later incident where both John and Dana were asked to sit at the back. The degree to which a teaching assistant can intervene needs to be negotiated with the teacher and ground rules need to be established. Should the teaching assistant have immediately involved the teacher regarding the incident with Kevin? What if the teacher was very busy with another group? Again, these issues need to be discussed with the teacher.

Likewise, with Laura, the teaching assistant could have intervened at an earlier stage. Perhaps before the students began to discuss the set task, the teaching assistant could have reminded the group that all questions and comments raised needed to concern the work that the teacher had set.

### **Behaviour determined by feelings or emotions**

#### **Explanations**

Negative feelings, such as fear of failure are seen as threats to our self-esteem. Ways of dealing with threats to our self-esteem include becoming upset, angry or avoiding the situation.

Does this explanation fit the examples of John and Laura? Let's first look at the example of John.

On the surface John seems full of himself and he appears confident. But is he? In Chapter 2 we examined characteristics of individuals with high and low self-esteem. The characteristics of those with low self-esteem were:

- being hesitant in taking on new learning tasks, as they fear failure;
- needing reassurance – often need to be the centre of attention;
- tendency to blame other people and outside factors when things go wrong – it is never their fault;
- being uncomfortable with praise;
- being very quick to put others down as putting others down makes them feel better;
- boasting and showing off. Again, this makes them feel better.

Although the description of John's behaviour is limited, from the information available there are indicators, i.e. needing to be the centre of attention, tending to blame other people, being quick to put others down, that seem to indicate that low self-esteem could be an explanation for the disruptive behaviour.

With the limited information presented in the case study regarding Laura it is difficult to say whether self-esteem is an issue. It is possible that if her disruptive behaviour is a way of avoiding tasks that she finds difficult then there could be an underlying issue of a fear of failing.

### **Strategies**

#### *Teaching assistants need to be aware of all aspects of communication*

They need to be aware of what they say, what they don't say and what their body language communicates. Likewise they need to be aware of what the students say, what they don't say and what their body language communicates. The way we communicate to students can be perceived as a 'put-down' or as a means of raising self-esteem.

When John states that dropping the textbook was an accident, the teaching assistant, Ryan, replies: 'I am not sure whether I believed him or not but I decided to give him the benefit of the doubt'. Although Ryan is making a real effort to believe in and work with John, is his body language communicating the same message to John? Did John feel that Ryan didn't believe him and that the teaching assistant really thought that John was a nasty piece of work?

What did Ryan really feel about John? And what if this book dropping behaviour was in fact deliberate? From what has been written it does not seem to have been an accident. Should the teaching assistant, if he thought the behaviour was deliberate, have confronted John about this? And if he had confronted John how should he have done so? Not an easy matter. Should the teaching assistant have accepted John's apology to Kevin? Should he have made John apologise again? What if Ryan still felt that John did not mean it? Should he praise John for making the effort to apologise? Such concerns are certainly issues to be discussed with the teacher.

In the case of Laura what was Julie, the teaching assistant, communicating? Julie commented that she thought that perhaps she was not being firm enough. At one point Julie states: 'I said that this was all very interesting but we were not doing what we were supposed to be doing'. Although Julie was reminding Laura about what she should be doing she was also rewarding her behaviour, boosting her self-esteem by saying that these comments were interesting. Raising self-esteem is always good, but perhaps the teaching assistant needed to focus more firmly on what Laura should be doing. Perhaps Julie could have said, 'These comments on dogs' names are very interesting but they are not helping us answer the

question. In future save your comments for later and try to think of something to say about the play. I know you can make some clever suggestions if you try.'

This comment, although still boosting self-esteem, more clearly focuses on the required appropriate behaviour.

#### *Corrective discipline should make a distinction between the behaviour and the person*

This is a very hard skill to learn. In the case of John how do you tell him off, but in a way that maintains his self-esteem? Let us assume that John deliberately dropped his maths textbook to upset Kevin.

The teaching assistant could say: 'John, dropping the book deliberately and making Kevin ruin his work was wrong. I know that you can be a kind person and I expect you to try and be kind to your fellow students.'

Here the teaching assistant is giving out two clear messages: one – that the behaviour is clearly wrong, and two – that the student is really a kind person and can do better.

#### *Teaching assistants can model emotional awareness by talking about emotions*

In the case of John, the teaching assistant could try and talk about emotions. It is important to do this in private. The teaching assistant could ask John how *he* would feel if someone ruined *his* work then ask John to imagine how Kevin might feel about his work being ruined. All this requires sensitive handling which will need to be discussed with the teacher.

In the situation with Laura you could take her to one side and explain to her how her frequent disruptions make you feel.

### **Behaviour determined by thoughts or thinking processes**

#### **Explanations**

This viewpoint states that what we do or don't do can be explained by our thinking processes. In the example of John, the teaching assistant involved, Ryan, tried to get John to think about the consequences of his actions by asking him if he thought what he had done was a nice thing to do. John didn't seem to be aware of the consequences or, if he was, he was not admitting to them. However, perhaps Ryan needed to ask John more specific questions if he wanted John to think about the consequences of his actions.

From the details in the case study it seems that Ryan had this discussion with John in front of the other students. This could have made a difference.

In the case study regarding Laura, the teaching assistant reminded both Laura and the group of what they should be doing. But could she have done more?

#### **Strategies**

##### *Reasoning helps to develop an individual's awareness of what is right and what is wrong*

Using double questions with any age group, 'What are you doing?' 'What should you be doing?', encourages students to think about their actions. Perhaps putting such questions to John and Laura would be helpful? When noticing John pulling Dana's hair the teaching assistant could have said:

Teaching assistant: John, what are you doing?

John: Who, me?

Teaching assistant: John, what should you be doing?



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John: Sitting quietly.  
Teaching assistant: Good.

When Laura is desperately searching for a nail file the teaching assistant could have said:

Teaching assistant: Laura, what are you doing?  
Laura: Miss, my nail.  
Teaching assistant: What should you be doing?  
Laura: Looking at my book.  
Teaching assistant: When should you sort out your nail?  
Laura: At break.

*Making the student aware of the impact of their behaviour on others helps them to become more aware of the reasons for rules*

This strategy is more effective when conducted in private. For example, you could have the following discussion with Laura.

Teaching assistant: Laura, how much work did we do as a group today?  
Laura: Miss.  
Teaching assistant: We didn't seem to do very much, what with looking for your pen, and nail file and talking about Auntie Ethel's dog.  
Laura: So. I can't help it if my pen runs out and my nail breaks.  
Teaching assistant: What about the others in the group? As we didn't do the work in class, you will all have to do it at home tonight. Do you think that it would be easier to do the homework if we had discussed it today in the lesson?  
Laura: Yeah.  
Teaching assistant: What can you do next time?  
Laura: Not make such a fuss.

Would this work? It is possible, but it is also possible that Laura could say that she couldn't care less if she disrupts the group and that the others couldn't care less about the homework. What then? Perhaps all you can do in such situations is what the teaching assistant did in this case study—continually try to refocus the group's attention on the task.

### Self-assessment questions

- After reading the suggestions in this chapter, how would you have dealt with the disruptive behaviour?
- Think of a situation where you have had to deal with a student's disruptive behaviour. Use the techniques in this chapter to think both of explanations for the behaviour and strategies that could turn the behaviour around?

### Summary

This chapter has discussed possible explanations and strategies for dealing with students who disrupt other students. In doing this we have looked specifically at two case studies. What we have discovered through this discussion is that there are a number of possible explanations as well as a number of possible strategies that can be used to deal with it. Which strategy or combination of strategies you should use in the classroom very much depends on the individual student and the particular details of the situation.

**Remember**

- ✓ Write down notes of what happened.
- ✓ Reflect on what has happened. Ask yourself:
  - Why do I think this student is behaving in such a way?
  - What strategies did I use?
  - What worked? What didn't work?
  - How can I improve my practice?
- ✓ Try to record your recollection of the events in the form of a structured observation noting antecedents, behaviour and consequences.
- ✓ Discuss your thoughts with others (teachers, SENCO, other teaching assistants).
- ✓ Look for possible explanations for behaviour. Consider the consequences, feelings and emotions, and thinking processes as being part of the explanation as well as suggesting ways forward.

## Chapter 5

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# The student who continually talks out of turn

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Students who talk out of turn pose a common problem for both teachers and teaching assistants. On some levels this is a minor behavioural problem but it can take up valuable lesson time as the next two case studies illustrate.

### Primary school

#### The event

Nicky works in a junior school as a teaching assistant and supports a Year 5 class. Nicky describes an incident where she was working with a group of students on fractions.

I always have difficulty with this group, or to be more specific I always have problems with Georgia. This day we were doing fractions and before we looked at the worksheet we were reviewing a few basic concepts such as numerator and denominator. I was showing the group some flashcards and asking them in turn what was the numerator and what was the denominator. The lesson went something like this:

- Nicky: (Shows the card 10/12.) Georgia, can you tell me the numerator and denominator?
- Georgia: (Takes her time, others in the group begin to shuffle their books.)
- Nicky: Georgia, I can see you are really concentrating, can you tell me the answer?
- Georgia: The numerator is 10 and the denominator is 12.
- Nicky: Well done, Georgia! (Selects another card.) Rod, can you tell me the numerator and denominator? (Shows card 21/24.)
- Georgia: The numerator is 21 and the denominator is 24.
- Nicky: Yes, Georgia, you are right, but it is Rod's turn. Remember, we are taking turns in answering the question.
- Georgia: But I was right, wasn't I, Miss? I was right!
- Nicky: Yes, Georgia, you were right, but we are taking turns. OK, Rod. What do you say for this card? Remember group, it is Rod's turn. Let's give him some time to think.
- Georgia: The numerator is 5.
- Nicky: Yes, Georgia. But, Georgia, what did I say? We take turns. The rest of the group waited quietly while you were thinking. You need to show the others the same respect that they showed you. Rod, what is the denominator?
- Rod: 10.
- Georgia: Doh, it's not 10, it's 12! This is boring!
- Nicky: Georgia!

Anyway, at that point I decided to give up on the flashcards and move on to the worksheets.

### On reflection

*Why do I think Georgia is behaving in such a way?*

On the one hand I know that she is just very eager to please and to show you that she knows the answer, yet she can be very cruel and insensitive to the other children. I don't know why she does it. She has taken part in social skills sessions in the past, but taking turns is still a problem. She must realise that she irritates the others?

*What strategies did I use?*

I praised Georgia. I tried reminding Georgia of the rules.

*What worked? What didn't work?*

Praise works well with Georgia. However, although I tried to remind her of the rules, I don't think I was very effective.

*How can I improve my practice?*

Maybe I need to be more firm.

### Secondary school

#### The event

Amanda, who is a teaching assistant in a secondary school, was listening to what Nicky was saying and replied that she has a student who also continually talks out of turn. However, this student, Darren, was in Year 9. Amanda described a specific incident.

Well, it was yesterday in science, we were in groups and the task was to revise for the exam. We were going over the section on plants, parts of the plant, the concept of photosynthesis. We had little cue cards and a board and dice and the students had to answer questions. In a sense it was a bit like Trivial Pursuit. The session went like this:

Amanda: Now, you all know that the test on this section is next week. To help you revise we are going to play a game.

Darren: Great, Miss, I like games. Can we play monopoly, cluedo and what about strip poker? What about a drinking game? (The other students laugh.)

Amanda: No, Darren. Weren't you listening? We are going to play a game about science. Now (speaking to the group) I want to explain the rules. As soon as we go over the rules we can start. Now, this game is a bit like . . .

Darren: Rules? Why do we have to have rules?

Amanda: Darren! Now (speaking to the group) as I was saying, the game is a cross between Trivial Pursuit and Snakes and Ladders. When it is your turn to go you will roll the . . .

Darren: Miss, can't we just play Snakes and Ladders and forget about this science revision. Snakes and Ladders! (All the others start joining in and chanting 'Snakes and Ladders, Snakes and Ladders'.)

Amanda: Right, do we want to play or not? (Everyone, including Darren, is quiet.)

Well, eventually I explained the rules and we made a start. It was Anita's turn.

Amanda: Anita, the question is: What is photosynthesis?  
 Darren: A new type of digital camera? (The rest of the group laugh.)  
 Amanda: No, Darren. Anyway can you let Anita answer?  
 Anita: Well, I thought it was a camera, too?  
 Amanda: Anita!  
 Anita: Sorry, Miss. Photosynthesis is a way of plants getting energy from light.

The lesson went too quickly. But things didn't improve and Darren continually talked out of turn.

### **On reflection**

*Why do I think that Darren is behaving in such a way?*

Darren likes attention. I find Darren irritating, but the problem is that he can also be quite funny and if I am very honest I do like him.

*What strategies did I use?*

I tried reminding him. I tried refocusing the group and I eventually gave them a choice.

*What worked? What didn't work?*

Giving them a choice seemed effective, however the effect didn't last.

*How can I improve my practice?*

Maybe I need to be more firm. I don't mind a few comments, but if I am not careful these comments can take over and we just don't get things done. The others look up to Darren and admire him and they will follow along with what he does. In a sense his comments are deliberately meant to disrupt the group. I asked him one day why he was doing this and he replied that he was just mucking around and that he didn't mean any harm.

### **Self-assessment questions**

- What do you think are the possible explanations for Georgia's and Darren's behaviour?
- What specific strategies do you think the teaching assistants used?
- What would you do if you were the teaching assistant?

### **Making sense of behaviour**

Both these case studies describe students, though of varying ages, who continually talk out of turn. Although we only have limited information we can attempt to make educated guesses (based on what we have discussed about behaviour) regarding why they are doing what they are doing. Hopefully the various explanations will suggest strategies that will minimise their talking-out-of-turn behaviour. The rest of this chapter will look in turn at the three views (behaviour determined by consequences, behaviour determined by emotions or feelings, and behaviour determined by thoughts or thinking processes) in regard to both explanations and ways forward – that is, practical everyday strategies that a teaching assistant can use.

## Behaviour determined by consequences

### Explanations

Here we remember that behaviour is determined by the consequences of the behaviour. One of the first suggestions from this viewpoint is to carry out a structured observation focusing on antecedents, behaviour and consequences. From what we have read we could write the following analyses of Georgia's and Darren's behaviour.

<b>Georgia</b>		
<i>Antecedent</i>	<i>Behaviour</i>	<i>Consequence</i>
TA shows flashcard to Georgia.	Georgia looks at card.  Georgia gives correct answer.	TA states, 'I can see you are really concentrating, can you tell me the answer?'  TA remarks, 'Well done, Georgia.'
TA shows next flashcard to Rod and asks him for answer.	Georgia answers the question.  Georgia remarks, 'But I was right, wasn't I, Miss? I was right!'	TA remarks: 'Yes Georgia you are right, but it is Rod's turn, remember we are taking turns in answering the question.'  TA remarks, 'Yes, Georgia, you were right, but we are taking turns.'
TA continues, 'OK, Rod. What do you say for this card? Remember group, it is Rod's turn. Let's give him some time to think.'	Georgia again answers the question.	TA remarks, 'Yes, Georgia. But, Georgia, what did I say? We take turns. The rest of the group waited quietly while you were thinking. You need to show the others the same respect that they showed you.'
TA shows Rod another flashcard. Rod answers the question incorrectly.	Georgia replies, 'Doh, it's not 10, it's 12! This is boring.'	TA replies, 'Georgia!', then moves on to next activity.

This viewpoint argues that if behaviour is ongoing, as is the case of Georgia's talking-out-of-turn behaviour, then there must be some sort of reward or pay-off for the student. What then is Georgia's reward for her talking-out-of-turn behaviour? There are several possibilities.

### Attention and approval from teaching assistant

The teaching assistant, on reflecting about the incident, remarked that on one level Georgia was just eager to please. Looking at the structured observation, although the teaching assistant tells Georgia off for interrupting, she usually makes a point of telling Georgia that she is right first. Perhaps all that Georgia is hearing is that she is right and the need to please or the need to be right is reinforcing her talking-out-of-turn behaviour.

*Attention and approval from other students*

It does not seem from what is stated that the other students give Georgia any indication that they admire her for what she is doing. In fact the teaching assistant remarks that they find Georgia irritating.

<b>Darren</b>		
<i>Antecedent</i>	<i>Behaviour</i>	<i>Consequence</i>
TA introduces the task of a revision game.	Darren remarks, 'Great, Miss, I like games. Can we play monopoly, cluedo and what about strip poker? What about a drinking game?'	Other students laugh. TA remarks, 'No, Darren. Weren't you listening? We are going to play a game about science!'
TA talking to the group states, 'Now I want to explain the rules. As soon as we go over the rules, we can start. Now this game is a bit like . . .'	Darren: 'Rules? Why do we have to have rules?'	TA remarks, 'Darren!'
TA talking to the group, 'Now, as I was saying, the game is a cross between Trivial Pursuit and Snakes and Ladders. Now, when it is your turn to go you will roll the . . .'	Darren: 'Miss, can't we just play Snakes and Ladders and forget about this science revision. Snakes and Ladders!'  Everyone, including Darren, is quiet.	All the others start joining in and chanting 'Snakes and Ladders, Snakes and Ladders!'  TA remarks, 'Do we want to play or not?'
(some time later) TA asks Anita, 'What is photosynthesis?'	Darren blurts out, 'A new type of digital camera?'	Other students laugh. TA, 'No, Darren. Anyway can you let Anita answer?' Anita agrees with Darren.

Again, this viewpoint argues that if behaviour is ongoing, as in the case of Darren continually talking out of turn, then there must be some sort of reward or pay-off for the student. What is Darren's reward for this behaviour?

*Attention from other students*

Darren is getting lots of attention from the other students. The others were laughing at his remarks. The others are following his lead, for example chanting 'Snakes and Ladders' and one other student, Anita, is agreeing, at least initially, with his definition of photosynthesis.

*Attention from the teaching assistant*

The teaching assistant is telling Darren off, but very gently. The question is whether Darren regards the teaching assistant's comments as a telling off or not?

*Avoiding doing what he should be doing*

Certainly through his distraction the group does not seem to be working very hard at the revision task. Does Darren's behaviour of continually talking out of turn mask his inability to answer the revision questions correctly?

What these explanations show is that although these two case studies detail the same inappropriate behaviour, the same behaviour could have differing explanations. All of these observations and reflections need to be discussed with the teacher.

**Strategies***Try to discover what is triggering the inappropriate behaviour then remove the trigger*

It could be that both Darren's and Georgia's behaviour is triggered by a great need to be the centre of attention. The teaching assistant, having realised the student's need for attention, could arrange the activity in such a manner that would guarantee that Georgia and Darren received the attention that they craved but in a manner that could be rewarded. Georgia, for instance, could be given the task of picking up the flashcards and asking the others questions. Darren could be given responsibility for ensuring that the others in the group followed the rules correctly. If Darren and Georgia carried out their respective jobs suitably they could be rewarded for their appropriate behaviour. Giving Darren and Georgia responsibility would also have the effect of boosting their self-esteem.

*Play your role in making sure that the tasks set are achievable and sufficiently challenging*

One of the possible explanations for Darren's talking-out-of-turn behaviour was the possibility that he was avoiding a task that he could not do. As a teaching assistant it is important to get to know the students you support and to be aware of their capabilities.

*Intervene early*

With Georgia's group it is possible that you could arrange the activity in such a manner that the students had to write the answers to all the questions on an individual whiteboard. Then, when given the signal, the students could reveal their answers. This strategy would have several advantages. All the students would be involved in answering all the questions. This would eliminate the possibility that some students would get bored or frustrated by how long they would have to wait for their turn. This would hopefully prevent the temptation to call out the answer. However, would this prevent Georgia from talking out of turn?

*Point out role models*

Pointing out suitable role models is always an advantage. In the case study with Darren what has transpired is that Darren has become the role model for the others. However, his behaviour is not the sort of behaviour that you would want the others to imitate.



## **Behaviour determined by feelings or emotions**

### ***Explanations***

Negative feelings such as fear of failure are seen as threats to our self-esteem. Ways of dealing with threats to our self-esteem include becoming upset, angry or avoiding the situation. The characteristics of those with low self-esteem include:

- being hesitant in taking on new learning tasks as they fear failure;
- needing reassurance – often need to be the centre of attention;
- tending to blame other people and outside factors when things go wrong – it is never their fault;
- being very quick to put others down – putting others down makes them feel better;
- boasting and showing off – again this makes them feel better.

Georgia's talking-out-of-turn behaviour could be explained by low self-esteem. It certainly seemed that Georgia needed to be the centre of attention, she needed constant reassurance that she was right and she was very quick to point out others' mistakes, perhaps in an attempt to make herself feel better.

In dealing with talking-out-of-turn behaviour it is important to distinguish those students who are acting in such a way because they are just eager to please from those such as Georgia who have a real need to be the centre of attention and those students who are deliberately trying to disrupt the lesson.

Can Darren's behaviour be explained in terms of feelings and emotions? Certainly we could say that Darren enjoys being the centre of attention. But is he hesitant in taking on new learning tasks, as he fears failure? The short case study does not really give us enough information. However, if you were the teaching assistant involved you would be in a position to explore possible explanations.

### ***Strategies***

#### ***Teaching assistants need to be aware of all aspects of communication***

They need to be aware of what they say, what they don't say and what their body language communicates. Likewise, they need to be aware of what the students say, what they don't say and what their body language communicates. The way we communicate to the student can be perceived as a 'put-down' or as a means of raising self-esteem.

The teaching assistant in the case study involving Georgia was effective in responding to Georgia's need to be told that she was correct but at the same time reminded Georgia that her behaviour was not what it should be.

From the case study involving Darren it is not evident how successful the teaching assistant was at raising Darren's self-esteem. However, it is fairly obvious that his self-esteem is being boosted by the response he is getting from his fellow students.

#### ***Corrective discipline should make a distinction between the behaviour and the person***

With Georgia, the teaching assistant tries to make a distinction between the behaviour and the person by saying at one point to Georgia, 'Yes, Georgia, you were right, but we are taking turns'. Does Darren's teaching assistant make a distinction between the behaviour and the person in telling Darren off? What Darren's teaching assistant said was:

'No, Darren, weren't you listening?'

'Darren, Now!'

'Right do we want to play or not?'

'No, Darren. Anyway can you let Anita answer?'

Could Darren's teaching assistant have corrected Darren in another manner?

***Teaching assistants can model emotional awareness by talking about their own emotions and how they deal with them***

This technique is often more effective on a one-to-one basis. The teaching assistant could talk about how the student's behaviour makes them feel or comment on how the student's behaviour might make other students feel. The teaching assistant could describe situations where they might have acted similarly and what emotions caused them to behave in such a manner. Let's look at some examples.

Teaching assistant: Darren, when you constantly interrupt me when I am trying to explain what we have to do, I feel upset.

or

Teaching assistant: I know the others laugh at your comments, but we aren't getting any work done. If we don't do the work then it will be harder for everyone to revise. How do you think the others will feel when it comes to revision?

or

Teaching assistant: I know that when I am in a situation that I can't handle or find difficult, I tend to ask all sorts of silly questions. I remember when I was about your age, I found maths very difficult and to get out of doing maths I would try and get the teacher talking about all sorts of other things. I would ask him how his mother was, whether he had any pets. The other students all found this very amusing but I did it just to avoid doing maths.

If we look at the example of Georgia, the teaching assistant could perhaps use the following tactics.

Teaching assistant: Georgia, how do you feel when you get a question right? Do you feel good?

Georgia: Yes.

Teaching assistant: Georgia, how do you feel when you get a question wrong? When you get a question wrong what do you want people to say to you?

Georgia: But, I don't.

Teaching assistant: If you did, what should I say? Should I be nice?

Georgia: Yes, you should be nice to me, but I am never wrong.

Teaching assistant: Do you think you were nice to Rod when he got the question wrong? How do you think Rod feels?

These examples show that it is important to try to develop an awareness of others' emotions, but that is not always easy.

## Behaviour determined by thoughts or thinking processes

### Explanations

This viewpoint states that what we do or don't do can be explained by our thinking processes. To what extent can thinking processes explain Georgia's and Darren's behaviour? Did Georgia think about what she was doing? Certainly the teaching assistant tried to encourage Georgia to think about her behaviour, by reminding her of the rules of taking turns and pointing out to Georgia that the group waited for her to answer and that she should show the same respect to others. However, the teaching assistant's attempts at reasoning did not seem to have any influence on Georgia's behaviour.

Likewise with Darren, the teaching assistant makes an attempt at reasoning by asking him to explain why he was behaving in such a way and by giving Darren and the group choices, i.e. 'Do we want to play or not?' The issue for both teaching assistants is whether they could have used reasoning more effectively.

## Behaviour determined by thoughts or thinking processes

### Strategies

#### Using double questions

At all ages reasoning helps to develop an individual's awareness of what is right and what is wrong, what is appropriate and what is inappropriate. Using double questions, 'What are you doing?', 'What should you be doing?', encourages the student to think about their actions.

For example, with Darren the teaching assistant could have said:

Teaching assistant: Now this game is a bit like . . .  
 Darren: Rules! Why do we have rules?  
 Teaching assistant: Do we have rules about asking questions? Do we have rules about not interrupting?  
 Darren: Yes.  
 Teaching assistant: What are you doing?  
 Darren: Talking out of turn again.  
 Teaching assistant: What should you be doing?  
 Darren: Listening.  
 Teaching assistant: Thank you.

For example, with Georgia the teaching assistant could have said this:

Georgia: The numerator is five. (This is the second time Georgia has talked out of turn.)  
 Teaching assistant: Yes, the answer is five, but what are you doing?  
 Georgia: Answering the question.  
 Teaching assistant: But what should you be doing?  
 Georgia: Letting Rod answer the question.  
 Teaching assistant: Thank you, Georgia.

#### Giving the student a choice and stating the consequences

In the case study regarding Darren it is possible that Darren is deliberately trying to disrupt the lesson. If this is the case then the teaching assistant needs to be very clear about choices and consequences with Darren. Again, this type of corrective feedback is better given on a one-to-one basis as shown in the following example.

Teaching assistant: *Darren, you have constantly interrupted our session. If you continue to talk out of turn I will have to report your behaviour to the teacher. Miss has already talked to you about this sort of behaviour last week and you know that the consequence for repeating this behaviour is to have a detention. The choice is yours. You either come back to the group and play the game sensibly or, if you continue to talk out of turn and disrupt the game, you will have a detention.*

## Summary

This chapter has discussed possible explanations and strategies for dealing with students who continually disrupt others. In doing this we have looked specifically at two case studies. What we have discovered through this discussion is that there are a number of possible explanations as well as a number of possible strategies that can be used to deal with the behaviour. Which strategy, or combination of strategies, you should use in the classroom very much depends on the individual student and the particular details of the situation.

### Remember

- ✓ Write down notes of what happened.
- ✓ Reflect on what has happened. Ask yourself:
  - Why do I think this student is behaving in such a way?
  - What strategies did I use?
  - What worked? What didn't work?
  - How can I improve my practice?
- ✓ Try to record your recollection of the events in the form of a structured observation noting antecedents, behaviour and consequences.
- ✓ Discuss your thoughts with others (teachers, SENCO, other teaching assistants).
- ✓ Look for possible explanations for behaviour. Consider the consequences, feelings and emotions, and thinking processes as being part of the explanation as well as suggesting ways forward.

## Chapter 6

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# The student who uses inappropriate language

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Inappropriate language from students is a very common problem facing teaching assistants. Each school will have specific policies regarding what is and what is not acceptable language and teaching assistants will work within these guidelines. Two case studies that explore these issues follow.

### Primary school

#### ***The event***

Maya was working as a teaching assistant supporting a Year 1 class.

Well, you know what children are like at that age. Let me tell you about yesterday. Our usual teacher was off sick and we had a supply teacher in. Well, how can I describe her? Mrs Jones, is a very well endowed woman. I was working with a group of boys, Sam, Leon, Malcolm and Ahmed. Well Sam, started it, he started whispering to the boys and they were all giggling. I asked him what it was all about and he then put two textbooks under his shirt and started wriggling them, saying: 'I'm Mrs Jones, I'm Mrs Jones'. The rest of the boys started to giggle. I put my hands on my hips and gave them a serious look. However, before I could say anything Leon remarked: 'I would like to get my hands on those'. The boys were besides themselves. I thought that was totally out of line and I reminded the boys that there was a way of behaving in class and what they had just said was inappropriate and disrespectful and that I would inform their teacher of their behaviour when she returned. Well, that certainly stopped them laughing.

#### ***On reflection***

I find this a really difficult issue to deal with. It is very clear in the behaviour policy that this sort of language is not acceptable and I know that the teacher takes a firm stance on disrespectful language. I was also worried that Mrs Jones had noticed the boys' behaviour.

#### ***Why did I think the boys behaved in such a manner?***

As far as Leon's comments go, well I just don't know where he heard that from. In some ways they are just at that age.

#### ***What strategies did I use?***

I certainly communicated to them my disapproval by giving them a serious look and putting my hands on my hips to tell them that I was angry. I told them that their behaviour was inappropriate.

*What worked? What didn't work?*

They were upset at being in trouble with the teacher, so it seemed that my telling them off had worked. But later I saw them at the other end of the playground, with textbooks up their shirts wriggling around. Perhaps I should have gone over, but I didn't. It was very obvious then that what I had said to them earlier had had no effect. I told them that they were being disrespectful, but I am not sure if they understood what I meant.

*How can I improve my practice?*

Perhaps next time if I see them behaving in this manner in the playground, I will go over to them.

**Secondary school*****The event***

Mary works in a mainstream secondary school. One of the students Mary supports is Richard. Richard is in Year 9. Mary reports a specific incident.

Well, it was Tuesday morning during double science. I was sitting next to Richard and going over with him the questions that the teacher had given the class to do, when Richard said: 'I don't like f\*\*\*\*\* science and I don't want your f\*\*\*\*\* help'. I told Richard that his language was not appropriate and that he knew that it was not appropriate. I told him that I would have to put him on report for his language. He then said: 'Go on, I don't f\*\*\*\*\* care!' I could have left it at that, but then I said to him: 'I never swear at you and I don't expect you to swear at me'. He then said: 'Oh yes you do, miss, you swear at me'. The other students who were listening in to this all agreed with what I had said and told Richard that they had never heard me swear. I then said to Richard: 'I am not saying that I don't swear, I swear as much as the next person, but I don't swear in school and I certainly never swear at the students'. I left him at that point and moved on to the next student.

***On reflection****Why do I think Richard was behaving in such a way?*

Looking back on the episode I suspect that perhaps Richard just wanted a reaction.

*What strategies did I use?*

I reminded him that his language was not appropriate and I told him I would put him on report for his language. I tried to set myself up as a role model in saying that I never swear at him.

*What worked? What didn't work?*

Perhaps I should have ignored his language. Perhaps I made the situation worse by getting into an argument with him. However, at the time I couldn't stop thinking about what Richard had said. I never swear at any of the students and I couldn't understand why he thought I did. Then I thought that perhaps it was his way of justifying how he was treating me. If Richard thinks that I swear at him, then that makes it alright for him to swear at me. I decided that at the next opportunity I would talk to Richard about this.

*How can I improve my practice?*

I need to talk to Richard about what happened.

### **Follow up**

The next day I saw Richard in a withdrawal lesson. I took this opportunity to have a heart-to-heart chat. I started to talk about things he was good at, one of them being photography. He had a really keen interest in this and some of the pictures he had taken had won prizes. I told him I really respected and admired him for his ability at photography. I told him that I couldn't take decent photographs to save my life and that I always got my thumb in the picture. I said to him if I could respect the fact that he was better than me at photography, could he respect the fact that I was better than him at science and that I was there to help him. I also again said to him that I never swear at him and that I did not expect him to swear at me. Richard just nodded.

### **On reflection**

*What strategies did I use?*

I tried to raise his self-esteem by talking about how everyone had their strengths and weaknesses.

*What worked? What didn't work?*

Well, since that heart-to-heart things have been much better in class. I told the science teacher that I had had a talk with Richard. The Science teacher has noticed how things have improved and asked me what I had said to Richard to make him change his attitude.

### **Self-assessment questions**

- What do you think are the possible explanations for the inappropriate language?
- What specific strategies do you think the teaching assistants used?
- What would you do if you were the teaching assistant?

### **Making sense of behaviour**

Both these case studies describe students who are displaying the same inappropriate behaviour. Although we only have limited information we can attempt to make educated guesses (based on what we have discussed about behaviour) regarding why they are doing what they are doing. Hopefully the various explanations will suggest strategies that will help to deal with these examples of inappropriate language. The rest of this chapter will look in turn at the three views (behaviour determined by consequences, behaviour determined by feelings or emotions, and behaviour determined by thoughts or thinking processes) in regard to explanations and ways forward – that is, practical everyday strategies that a teaching assistant can use.

### **Behaviour determined by consequences**

#### **Explanations**

Here we remember that behaviour is determined by the consequences of the behaviour. One of the first suggestions from this viewpoint is to carry out a structured observation focusing

on antecedents, behaviour and consequences. From what we have read we could write the following analyses of the students' behaviour.

<b>Sam, Leon, Malcolm and Ahmed</b>		
<i>Antecedent</i>	<i>Behaviour</i>	<i>Consequence</i>
Supply teacher, the well-endowed Mrs Jones, taking the class.	Sam whispering to other boys.	Other boys giggling. TA asks them what is going on.
	Sam puts two textbooks under his shirt and starts to wriggle them, saying, 'I am Mrs Jones, I am Mrs Jones'.	The boys start to giggle. TA puts hands on hips and gives them a stern look.
	Leon remarks, 'I would really like to get my hands on those'.  The boys stop laughing.	The boys are beside themselves with laughter. TA tells them that their behaviour is inappropriate and disrespectful and that TA will inform the teacher when she returned.

The behavioural viewpoint argues that if behaviour is ongoing then there must be some sort of reward or pay-off for the student. The reward for the boys' behaviour is really quite obvious; their mutual enjoyment in making such comments seems to outweigh the effects of being told off. Although the boys were told off for their behaviour in the classroom this did not stop them behaving in the same way in the playground where they presumed they were out of sight of the teachers and teaching assistants.

From a social learning theory point of view there are many role models for this 'laddish' behaviour. The reality is that in today's society many such remarks about women are common. Of course, the issue for the school concerns how to deal with this behaviour within the classroom and school grounds.

<b>Richard</b>		
<i>Antecedent</i>	<i>Behaviour</i>	<i>Consequence</i>
TA sitting next to Richard and going over with him the questions the teacher had given the class to do.	Richard responds, 'I don't like f***** science and I don't want your f***** help.'	TA tells Richard that his language is not appropriate and that he knows that it isn't appropriate and that TA will put him on report for his language.
Others listening.	Richard replies, 'Go on, I don't f***** care!'	TA replies, 'I never swear at you and I don't expect you to swear at me'.

*continued*



Others listening.	Richard replies, 'Oh yes you do, miss, you swear at me'.	The other students who are listening in to this all agree with what TA has said and tell Richard that they never hear me swear. TA then says, 'I am not saying that I don't swear, I swear as much as the next person, but I don't swear in school and I certainly never swear at the students'. TA leaves him at that point.
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This viewpoint argues that if behaviour is ongoing then there must be a reward or pay-off for the student.

#### *Is Richard swearing for attention?*

Does swearing give Richard a certain 'street cred' in front of his peers? Did the teaching assistant by confronting his swearing in the presence of his classmates put Richard in a position where he felt he couldn't back down and consequently led him to swear even more? From the social learning viewpoint, such language is common within today's society, but again the issue is whether the school regards this language as appropriate behaviour. What amount or degree of swearing is acceptable in secondary school? Are there any circumstances when swearing is acceptable?

But perhaps there is another more likely explanation for Richard's swearing?

### **Strategies**

#### *Try to discover what is triggering the inappropriate behaviour then remove the trigger*

With Richard, a clear reason for his inappropriate language could be his difficulty in doing the task at hand. This clearly relates to the next point regarding playing your role in making sure that the tasks set are achievable and sufficiently challenging. With the boys and Mrs Jones it is clear what the trigger is, but removing the trigger is not going to solve the issue of their inappropriate language.

#### *Intervene early*

If the reason behind Richard's swearing is his inability to do the task, then discussing with the teacher appropriate tasks would go some way towards eliminating his behaviour. However, in the long term Richard needs to find appropriate and constructive ways of dealing with tasks which he finds difficult.

Would it be possible to intervene early with the boys and Mrs Jones? In future, if Mrs Jones were to return to the school as a supply teacher, the teaching assistant could remind the boys that she expects appropriate language and behaviour. Of course, this would need to be expressed in a language they understand.

#### *Tactically ignore misbehaviour*

In the case study regarding Richard, could the teaching assistant have acted in any other way? Could she have ignored the swearing? Could the teaching assistant while reminding him that

his language was not appropriate, i.e. 'Language, please', have given Richard time to cool down. Perhaps the teaching assistant could have said: 'If you don't want help you don't have to swear, but I will be over here if you want me'. Did the teaching assistant make the situation worse by being drawn into a discussion about whether she swears or not?

## Behaviour determined by feelings or emotions

### Explanations

Negative feelings such as fear of failure are seen as threats to our self-esteem. Ways of dealing with threats to our self-esteem include becoming upset, angry or avoiding the situation. This could be what Richard is doing by swearing? Perhaps Richard is swearing as he finds the work too difficult and is taking out his frustrations on the teaching assistant. Perhaps Richard is swearing because he feels embarrassed that someone has to help him with science? Is Richard the only one of his classmates that needs help? Here we are making a distinction between inappropriate language that is due to frustration and inappropriate language that is used as a form of personal abuse. Does Richard always swear? If this behaviour is unusual for him then perhaps the teaching assistant needs to ask Richard the reasons for his behaviour. With the boys, perhaps their language regarding Mrs Jones can be explained by emotions and feelings that they themselves do not understand.

### Strategies

*Assistance can be seen by the student as valued support or as a source of stigma or shame*

This issue could certainly relate to the case study regarding Richard. If Richard does need support, maybe attention needs to be paid to the manner in which he receives support. Perhaps Richard would be better in a group situation where every member of the group received the same level of support.

*Teaching assistant should try to use active listening skills*

In giving corrective discipline the teaching assistant should make a distinction between the behaviour and the person. Teaching assistants can model emotional awareness by talking about their emotions and how they deal with them. To some extent the teaching assistant in the case study regarding Richard used some of these strategies, but there are a number of other ways in which she could have tackled the issue of swearing. A possible approach is detailed below.

- Teaching assistant: I take it from your colourful language about this task, that this is something you just don't want to do. (Here the teaching assistant is communicating to the student that they are listening to what the student is saying.)
- Richard: Yeah. (Looking down.)
- Teaching assistant: I know when I find something difficult, I swear like a trooper. It might make me feel better but it doesn't help me do the task. Last night I was trying to do my homework for college and I couldn't get the printer to work and my 5-year-old daughter asked if she could look at what I was doing and I just lost it and yelled at her. I know I upset her, I didn't mean to, I said sorry later, it was just that I was so frustrated that I couldn't get the printer to work. (Here the teaching assistant is trying to raise Richard's

*awareness of his emotions by talking about how she deals with emotions.)*

*Richard, I know you try very hard in science class, and I know you don't find it easy, but saying what you did to me was not right. (Here the teaching assistant is trying to make a distinction between the behaviour and the person.)*

The teaching assistant could have used the above approach with Richard. Instead, she tried to develop emotional awareness of ways of dealing with difficult tasks and the difficulty of accepting help by focusing on strengths and weaknesses, reminding Richard that everyone has things that they are good at and things that they struggle with. In this case study this approach seemed to work.

However, would this strategy work with every student? Suppose the student didn't have any area in which they naturally excelled? It would then be up to the teaching assistant to find something that the student was good at or in which they were knowledgeable. Of course, to be able to do that the teaching assistant needs to know the student well. On the other hand, is it right to boost a student's self-esteem by undermining your own – 'You can do this, but I can't'?

What could the teaching assistant have said to the boys about their language regarding Mrs Jones? The teaching assistant could have approached the situation in the following terms.

- Teaching assistant: *You boys are usually very kind. What you have said are not kind words. (Here the teaching assistant is using corrective discipline and is trying to make the distinction between the behaviour and the person. She is also telling the students that the behaviour is inappropriate but in words that they can understand.)*
- Boys: *Miss? (Puzzled.)*
- Teaching assistant: *If you had said those things about me I would be very upset. (Here the teaching assistant is trying to raise awareness of others' feeling with the boys.)*
- Sam: *But we didn't! Mrs Jones didn't see us.*
- Teaching assistant: *But what if she had? Would she be upset?*
- Boys: *(Mumble 'Yes'.)*

### ***Say important things in private***

In the case study regarding Richard, the teaching assistant had the most success when she had a heart-to-heart chat in private.

## **Behaviour determined by thoughts or thinking processes**

### ***Explanations***

This viewpoint states that what we do or don't do can be explained by our thinking processes. Did Sam and the boys really think about the remarks that they made about Mrs Jones? Did the boys understand why they should not say those remarks? Did they understand what the teaching assistant meant by the words 'inappropriate' and 'disrespectful'?

Did Richard think about why he was swearing? Did Richard really think that the teaching assistant swore at him?

## Strategies

### Using double questions

At all ages reasoning helps to develop an individual's awareness of what is right and what is wrong. Using double questions, 'What are you doing?', 'What should you be doing?', encourages the student to think about their actions. Would it have helped if the teaching assistant had taken this approach when Sam was imitating Mrs Jones ?

Teaching assistant: (Hands on hips.) *What are you doing?*

Boys: Miss.

Teaching assistant: *What should you be doing?*

Boys: Work.

This strategy might get them back on task, but does it encourage them sufficiently to think about their actions? Would you need to say more and try to raise emotional awareness as in the previous section? Would this approach work with Richard?

Teaching assistant: *Richard what are you doing?*

Richard: Isn't it obvious?

Teaching assistant: *What should you be doing?*

Perhaps this strategy would be useful, but perhaps it would not. What this shows is that these strategies are just guides and that any given strategy that is helpful in one situation might not be very useful in another.

### Using the language of choice

This helps the student to look at the possible consequences of their actions and to think before acting. In the situation with Richard, could the teaching assistant have used the following approach?

Teaching assistant: Richard, you know that is inappropriate language and you know that such language is not acceptable within the class. I personally find that language upsetting. If you don't stop that language I will have no other choice but to put you on report. The choice is yours. (Teaching assistant moves away to help someone else so as to give Richard time to calm down.)

In this case the teaching assistant has reminded Richard of the rules of the classroom and of the reasons for those rules. The teaching assistant has given Richard time to reflect on those rules and the consequences of breaking them. Will this work?

In the situation with the boys and Mrs Jones, the teaching assistant could have taken the following line.

Teaching assistant: Boys, we have rules about sensible behaviour in the classroom and the kind of things we *can* say and things that we should *not* say. Talking about Mrs Jones in that way is not very nice. Mrs Jones or any woman would feel hurt if they heard what you said. I want no more silly behaviour. If you don't stop this, I will have to tell the teacher.

Would this work? Would you be able to give the boys such a choice, or according to the guidelines in your school's behaviour policy must *all* such incidents be reported to the teacher or a member of the senior management team?

**Self-assessment questions**

- After reading the suggestions in this chapter how would you have dealt with the inappropriate language?
- Think of a situation where you have had to deal with a student who used inappropriate language? Use the techniques in this chapter to think of both explanations for the behaviour and strategies that could turn the behaviour around?

**Summary**

This chapter has discussed possible explanations and strategies for dealing with students who use inappropriate language. In doing this we have looked specifically at two case studies. What we have discovered through this discussion is that there are a number of possible explanations as well as a number of possible strategies that can be used to cope with this behaviour. Which strategy you should use in the classroom when you encounter a student who is using inappropriate language very much depends on the school's rules regarding this behaviour, the individual student and the particular details of the situation.

**Remember**

- ✓ Write down notes of what happened.
- ✓ Reflect on what has happened. Ask yourself:
  - Why do I think this student is behaving in such a way?
  - What strategies did I use?
  - What worked? What didn't work?
  - How can I improve my practice?
- ✓ Try to record your recollection of the events in the form of a structured observation noting antecedents, behaviour and consequences.
- ✓ Discuss your thoughts with others (teachers, SENCO, other teaching assistants).
- ✓ Look for possible explanations for behaviour. Consider the consequences, feelings and emotions, and thinking processes as being part of the explanation as well as suggesting ways forward.

## Chapter 7

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# The student who refuses to do what is asked

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Most students will have days when they don't wish to cooperate. Some students will have more of these days than others. What is certain is that working with students who refuse to do what is asked is a challenge. This challenge needs to be addressed by all those involved in the school. The following two case studies will explore relevant issues.

### Primary school

#### *The event*

Brenda works in a Year 3 class. She reported that she found one student particularly difficult to work with, as he never does what he is told.

For example, yesterday we were doing a science experiment, the class divided into groups and we had to discover what various objects weighed. After we had visited all the workstations, the students had to fill in a worksheet. There was quite a bit of excitement in the class during this activity and the activity took much longer than expected. The teacher was very firm with the class in stating that all the students had to finish their worksheets before they went out to break. I sat down with Jason and said in a cheerful, no nonsense manner that we were going to get this worksheet completed. However, Jason just looked at me and said that he wasn't going to do it. I reminded Jason that the teacher had said that everyone was to fill in the worksheets. Reluctantly Jason picked up his pencil. However, at that point the bell for afternoon break went and all the other students lined up to go outside. As they handed in their worksheets to the teacher, they were allowed to go out. Unfortunately, Jason had not even started his worksheet. I got up to have a word with the teacher about Jason. That is when Jason made a mad break for it and charged out of the door into the playground. Well, the teacher, Mr Collins, quickly brought him back, sat him down and said that he must write three sentences before he went out and that as soon as he had finished I could let him go. I said 'Come on, Jason, let's do this quickly'. Well, Jason just gave me that look and said very firmly 'No'. I reminded him that he had a choice that he could do the work quickly and go out with his friends or sit in at break-time. He just looked at me and said 'No'. I then tried to encourage him and said that I would help him. I said that I would write part of the sentence and he could fill in the blanks.

I know Jason has trouble with writing and I thought that this was a good compromise. Well, Jason picked up his pencil, and started to write, then all of a sudden he picked up the paper and it looked as if he was going to rip it up. Jason sometimes does this when he gets upset. I quickly grabbed the paper from him and tried to calm him down. I again compromised and said 'All right, Jason, just one word. What is the first answer? What did we first weigh?' Jason said, 'Rocks', which was the correct answer. I said, 'Well done, Jason. Now just write it down'. I gave him back the paper and he wrote the first letter, threw the paper on the ground and then he made another mad break for the door.

Well, I told the teacher what had happened and showed him what Jason had managed to do and Mr Collins just shrugged and said 'Well, at least he did something'. Jason stayed out in the playground. There was now only five minutes left and Mr Collins and I went for a cup of coffee in the staff room. Unfortunately, this was quite an average day for Jason.

### **On reflection**

*Why did I think Jason was behaving in such a way?*

Jason likes to be active, he likes doing practical things, but he does not like writing.

*What strategies did I use?*

I tried coaxing him. I tried compromising. I tried to jolly him up. I gave him choices.

*What worked? What didn't work?*

Well, at least Jason did do something and I know that he does have difficulty writing. However, I sometimes feel that I spend too much time compromising with Jason and that Jason is constantly pushing boundaries to see how far he can go.

### **How can I improve my practice?**

Perhaps I need to set more realistic targets for Jason.

## **Secondary school**

### **The event**

John, who works in a secondary school, told Brenda that he had a student just like Jason who constantly refused to do what she was asked. The student, Charlotte, was in the Year 7 English class that he supported.

Let me tell you about Charlotte and what happened yesterday. The class were all asked to complete some exercises from the textbook. I was circulating around the class to see if the students I was supporting knew what they were supposed to be doing. Charlotte was just sitting at her desk staring out of the window. I asked Charlotte whether she knew what she was supposed to be doing? Charlotte said 'Yes'. I asked her if she had her book. She replied, 'Yes'. I then asked her to make a start and told her that I would be back to check in a few moments.

Well, when I came back Charlotte was still staring out of the window. I got down to Charlotte's level and asked quietly if there was any problem. She replied that there wasn't. I asked Charlotte if she could please have a go at the questions and if she wanted to we could do the first question together. Charlotte replied that it wouldn't be necessary. I told Charlotte that I would be back later to check.

But again when I came back Charlotte still had not started. I asked Charlotte again if there was a problem. Charlotte said very loudly that she wasn't going to do it and that I couldn't make her. I kept calm and said that she had a choice – she either started her work now or finished it after school. Again Charlotte said, 'You can't make me do it'.

At this point I made the teacher aware of what was going on. The teacher said very calmly, 'Well, Charlotte, if you don't do the work, then you will have to stay in after school and

complete it'. Again Charlotte said, 'You can't make me do it'. The teacher said to Charlotte: 'Right, I will see you later'. He then ignored Charlotte and told me to help the others.

On the way out of the classroom Charlotte turned to me and said: 'Well you got me in trouble again, didn't you!' I replied that: 'You don't need any help from me to get into trouble'. Charlotte did turn up for detention, which I suppose, is something, but she did not do her work. I just don't know how to get through to Charlotte.

### **On reflection**

*Why do I think Charlotte is behaving in such a way?*

Charlotte could have been bored or she could have been avoiding the task, but sometimes I think she just can't be bothered.

*What strategies did I use?*

I checked to make sure that she knew what to do and that she had the right equipment. I gave her time to make a start. I asked her confidentially if there was a problem. I offered to help her. I gave her choices.

*What worked? What didn't work?*

I feel I gave Charlotte many opportunities to do her work. However, whatever I said, nothing was effective. I felt upset that she thought that I was just getting her into trouble. I hoped by allowing her the time to get on with the work by herself I was communicating to her that I trusted her. Obviously this strategy did not seem to work.

*How can I improve my practice?*

Perhaps I need to be more patient with Charlotte.

### **Self-assessment questions**

- What do you think are the possible explanations for Jason's and Charlotte's behaviour?
- What strategies do you think the teaching assistants used?
- What would you do if you were the teaching assistant?

### **Making sense of behaviour**

Both these case studies describe students, though of varying ages, who refuse to do what is asked. Although we only have limited information we can attempt to make some educated guesses (based on what we have discussed about behaviour) regarding why they are doing what they are doing or why they are not doing what they should be doing. Hopefully the various explanations will suggest strategies to minimise their refusal to participate and encourage cooperation. The rest of this chapter will look in turn at the three views (behaviour determined by consequences, behaviour determined by feelings or emotions, and behaviour determined by thoughts or thinking processes) in regard to both explanations and ways forward – that is, practical everyday strategies that a teaching assistant can use.



## Behaviour determined by consequences

### Explanations

Here we remember that behaviour is determined by the consequences of the behaviour. One of the first suggestions from this viewpoint is to carry out a structured observation focusing on antecedents, behaviour and consequences. From what we have read we could write the following analyses of Jason's and Charlotte's behaviour.

Jason		
Antecedent	Behaviour	Consequence
<p>The class is participating in a science experiment after which they have to fill in a worksheet recording their answers.</p> <p>It is close to afternoon break and the teacher has firmly told the class that they must finish their worksheet before they could go out.</p> <p>TA sits down with Jason and says that we need to complete the worksheet.</p>	<p>Jason says that he was not going to do it.</p> <p>Jason picks up his pencil.</p>	<p>TA reminds Jason that the teacher has said that everyone is to fill in the worksheet.</p>
<p>The bell for afternoon break goes. The other students line up to go outside. As they hand in their worksheets they are allowed to go out to play.</p>	<p>Jason (who has not started his worksheet) makes a mad break for it and charges out into the playground.</p>	<p>Mr Collins (class teacher) goes out after Jason, brings him back, sits him down and tells him that he must write three sentences before he goes out to play.</p>
<p>TA says, 'Come on, Jason, let's do this quickly'.</p>	<p>Jason gives TA a look and says very firmly 'No'.</p>	<p>TA reminds him that he has a choice that he can either do the work quickly and go out with his friends or sit in with me (the TA).</p>
<p>Other children outside playing.</p>	<p>Jason says 'No'.</p>	<p>TA says that she will help him. Tells Jason that she will write the three sentences and that he can fill in the blanks.</p>
<p>Other children outside playing.</p>	<p>Jason picks up his pencil and starts to write and then suddenly picks up his paper and it looks as if he is going to rip it up (as he sometimes does).</p> <p>Jason answers 'Rocks' correctly.</p>	<p>I quickly grabbed the paper off of Jason and say: 'all right Jason, just one word. What is the first answer?'</p> <p>TA says, 'Well done, Jason. Now just write it down.' TA gives him back the paper.</p>

continued

<i>Antecedent</i>	<i>Behaviour</i>	<i>Consequence</i>
	He writes the first letter, throws the paper to the ground and makes a mad break for the door and escapes into the playground.	TA shows Mr Collins what Jason has done. Mr Collins shrugs and says, 'Well, at least he has done something'. Jason is now in the playground.

This viewpoint argues that if behaviour is ongoing, as it seems Jason's refusal to cooperate is, then there must be some sort of reward or pay-off for the student. What then is Jason's reward for his refusal to do what he is asked?

#### *Avoidance of an undesired task and the achievement of a desired goal*

From what we have read and recorded it is clear that Jason has difficulty writing and that he would much prefer to be out playing rather than writing. From this analysis it seems that every time Jason refused to do what was asked, either by making a mad break for it, refusing to write, or starting to rip up his work he was rewarded by being asked to do less and less writing. The rest of the class had to finish their worksheet before going out to play. But after trying to escape Jason was asked to write only three sentences. After several refusals and an attempt to rip up the paper (a strategy that was extremely effective), Jason only wrote one letter, before throwing the worksheet on the floor and running out to play. Jason was not brought back in and therefore from Jason's point of view this strategy of refusing to do what is asked has certainly worked.

The teaching assistant and teacher are clearly exhausted by Jason's antics. From their perspective, although Jason has only written one letter, he has certainly written something, so perhaps they think they are getting through to him. However, if Jason thinks that this strategy of refusing to cooperate will get him out of completing tasks that he doesn't like, then the likelihood is that he will continue with this strategy.

#### *Attention and approval from others*

By refusing to cooperate Jason is getting lots of attention. The teacher runs out after him and the teaching assistant sits by him, helps him with his work and tries to encourage him to work. Perhaps their attention makes Jason feel that he is important. Perhaps their attention makes him feel powerful. It is not clear from what has been written what the other students in his class make of his behaviour. It is certainly possible that if the others see that this refusal to cooperate can result in not having to do what everyone else is doing, then there may be others in the class who will start to imitate Jason's behaviour.

<b>Charlotte</b>		
<i>Antecedent</i>	<i>Behaviour</i>	<i>Consequence</i>
Class asked to complete some exercises from the textbook. TA is circulating around the room and notices that Charlotte is staring out of the window. TA asks Charlotte whether she knows what she should be doing.	Charlotte says 'Yes'.	TA asks her if she has her book.
	Charlotte says 'yes'.	TA asks her to make a start and says that she will be back in a few moments.
TA comes back to Charlotte's side of the class and notices Charlotte still staring out of the window.	Charlotte still staring out window.	TA goes down to Charlotte's level and asks her quietly if there are any problems.
	Charlotte replies 'No'.	TA asks Charlotte politely if she could please have a go at the question and offers to do the first one together.
	Charlotte replies that it won't be necessary.	TA tells Charlotte that he will be back later to check.
TA again comes back to Charlotte's side of the class.	Charlotte still hasn't started.	TA asks Charlotte again if there is a problem.
	Charlotte loudly says that she isn't going to do it and that the TA can't make her.	TA calmly tells her that she has a choice, she either starts her work or finishes after school.
Class listening.	Charlotte again says 'You can't make me do it'.	TA informs teacher of what has happened.  Teacher tells Charlotte that if she doesn't do the work she will have to stay in after school.
Class listening.	Charlotte again says 'You can't make me do it'.	Teacher says, 'Right, I will see you later' and leaves Charlotte alone.
Students are making their way out of the classroom.	Charlotte comes up to TA and says, 'Well, you got me into trouble again, didn't you?'	TA says, 'You don't need any help from me to get into trouble'.

Again this viewpoint argues that if behaviour is ongoing, as is the case of Charlotte continually refusing to do what she is told, then there must be some reward or pay-off. What is Charlotte's reward for this behaviour?

*Avoiding doing what she should be doing*

This is a possibility. Although Charlotte eventually went to the detention she did not do her work. The teaching assistant did ask sensitively, at least in his opinion, if there was a problem and did she need help. Charlotte was very firm in stating that she did not have a problem and did not need help, although perhaps this was not the case. If a student is refusing to do a task because they are unable or they find it too boring, then the task can be altered. However, if the student is refusing to do the task because they just don't want to, then that is a harder issue to address.

*Attention from other students*

It is not clear from what is written whether Charlotte was getting approval from other students for her refusal to do what was asked. Does Charlotte feel that she has a reputation to maintain?

*Attention from the teaching assistant and teacher*

The teaching assistant was giving Charlotte lots of attention, again in a manner which he thought was suitable and sensitive. Did Charlotte appreciate this attention? Did Charlotte perceive the attention as suitable and sensitive?

What these observations show is that although these two case studies talk about the same inappropriate behaviour, the same behaviour could have different root causes. All of these observations and reflections need to be discussed with the teacher.

**Strategies***Try to discover what is triggering the inappropriate behaviour then remove the trigger*

For both Jason and Charlotte the trigger for their refusal to cooperate could be being given a task that they can't do. In the case study regarding Jason it was stated that Jason had difficulty writing. Asking Jason to quickly write the answers on his worksheet before he was allowed out to play was perhaps unrealistic. If there is writing to be done, it would perhaps be better if Jason were given as much time as possible. Perhaps he could have started to fill in the worksheet while he was doing the activity.

*Play your role in making sure that tasks set are achievable and sufficiently challenging*

As a teaching assistant working with a student on an ongoing basis, you are in an ideal position to comment on what you think the student can realistically achieve. It is part of your role to feed these comments back to the teacher. Students who are given tasks that are achievable and sufficiently challenging are less likely to refuse to do the task. The teaching assistant working with Jason was constantly negotiating the task. Sometimes this strategy can be effective. The teaching assistant could have acted as a scribe and written down the answers that Jason gave. Perhaps she could have written the answers very lightly in pencil and asked Jason to write over what she had written after break. Sometimes giving the student something that they find very easy to do is a good way of getting into the task. Once the student has done what you have asked, then you can praise them and ask them to do a bit more.

## **Behaviour determined by feelings or emotions**

### ***Explanations***

Negative feelings such as fear of failure are seen as threats to our self-esteem. Ways of dealing with threats to our self-esteem include becoming upset, angry or avoiding the situation. Fear of failure could apply to the students in both of these case studies.

Perhaps for Jason the reason he has to refuse is that he can't do the task as quickly or as well as his peers. Doing nothing perhaps is better than doing something that his peers would laugh at. The teacher and teaching assistant seem to be aware of his difficulties and differentiate the task, in that he doesn't have to do as much and that he is offered support. The teaching assistant praised him when he answered the question correctly and when he made an attempt at writing. But is this praise enough to boost his self-esteem?

With Charlotte the teaching assistant was aware of the importance of being sensitive. He gets down to her level, he asks her quietly if there is a problem, he gives her time to comply with his requests. In the case study regarding Charlotte, the teaching assistant used many well-known strategies correctly. However, the strategies did not work and in fact seemed to just aggravate the situation. Here we realise it is not just what you do that is important. You need to be aware of the student's perceptions of what you do. The question is whether Charlotte sees the teaching assistant's support as a boost to her self-esteem or is his mere presence proof that she can't do the task. Unfortunately, Charlotte's view of the teaching assistant was confirmed when he said 'You don't need any help from me to get into trouble'.

### ***Strategies***

*Assistance can be seen by the student as a valued support or as a source of stigma or shame*

With Charlotte it certainly seems that the teaching assistant's support was not valued, even though the teaching assistant really tried to be sensitive and understanding. Possibly – and this is just a guess based on the limited information we have from the case studies – Charlotte felt that having the teaching assistant around singled her out as different, stupid or a failure. Perhaps the teaching assistant would have had more success with Charlotte if Charlotte had been working within a small group. Then, while keeping an eye on her, he could focus his attention on the others in the group and perhaps over time Charlotte would feel more comfortable with receiving support. Was this an issue for Jason? It is difficult to say from the limited information presented.

*Teaching assistants need to be aware of all aspects of communication*

They need to be aware of what they say, what they don't say and what their body language communicates. Likewise, they need to be aware of what the students say, what they don't say and what their body language communicates. The way we communicate to the student can be perceived as a put-down or as a means of raising self-esteem. With Charlotte, the teaching assistant was very aware of the need to be sensitive. However, Charlotte was not going to make it easy for the teaching assistant. Sometimes students have great difficulties accepting help. Sometimes when a student has very low self-esteem they can not handle praise or accept kindness from others. In such cases perhaps all that the teaching assistant can do is to be patient.

With the case study involving Jason, what is apparent is that no one asked him why he did not want to do the work or why he felt unable to do the work. Students might have a history of refusing to cooperate but it is always important to ask if there is a reason. Perhaps his grandmother had died, or his parents had had an argument before he left for school.

*Corrective discipline should make a distinction between the behaviour and the person*

In the case of Charlotte how do you boost her self-esteem, encourage her to take on difficult tasks but at the same time convince her that refusing to do what is asked is inappropriate? What do you, as the teaching assistant, say? How do you respond to the question, 'Well you got me into trouble again didn't you?' You could say, 'Refusing to cooperate is never helpful, I am sure if you tried you could do the work. I am here to help all students in this class.' Likewise, in the case of Jason you could say, 'Saying no, you're not going to do it, won't make the work go away. If you put your mind to it I am sure you could do it. I am here to help.'

*Teaching assistants can model emotional awareness by talking about their emotions and how they deal with them*

Again, this strategy often works well on a one-to-one basis. For example, if the teaching assistant working with Charlotte happened to have a quiet time together perhaps the conversation could flow as follows.

- Teaching assistant: Charlotte. I know that you were angry with me yesterday. You thought that I got you into trouble. The last thing I wanted was to get you into trouble.
- Charlotte: You said that I didn't need anyone else to get me into trouble.
- Teaching assistant: I apologise for saying what I did. I felt angry that you blamed me. I was upset as I really tried to help you.
- Charlotte: I don't need your help. I don't need anybody's help.
- Teaching assistant: We all need help sometimes. All the other students in the class need help sometimes. I need help sometimes. It is never easy asking for help. When I am driving somewhere and I can't find the place, I would rather drive for an hour looking than ask for directions. My wife just can't understand why I don't ask for help. I suppose it is pride.

## **Behaviour determined by thoughts or thinking processes**

### **Explanations**

This viewpoint states that what we do or don't do can be explained by our thinking processes. What was Jason thinking? Was Jason thinking, 'I know, I just have to refuse long enough and then I won't have to do this worksheet?' The teaching assistant with Jason tried to encourage thinking by using the strategy of giving choices and stating consequences. The teaching assistant said to Jason that he had a choice: he could do either the work quickly and go out with his friends or sit in at break-time. The issue is whether Jason actually completed the work as first set out by the teacher and whether he actually faced the consequences of not doing the work.

With Charlotte the teaching assistant again tried reasoning. He asked Charlotte whether she knew what she was supposed to be doing, if there was a problem and stated that she had a choice of doing her homework then or later in detention.

### **Strategies**

#### *Using double questions*

At all ages reasoning helps develop an individual's awareness of what is right and what is wrong, what is appropriate, what is inappropriate. Using double questions, 'What are you doing?', 'What should you be doing?', encourages the student to think about their actions.

The teaching assistant with Charlotte tried to engage in reasoning by asking Charlotte whether she knew what she should be doing. Could the teaching assistant have made greater use of this reasoning technique? He could have tried the following line of reasoning.

Teaching assistant: Charlotte, what are you doing?  
Charlotte: Staring out the window.  
Teaching assistant: What should you be doing?  
Charlotte: Working.  
Teaching assistant: Fine.

Perhaps the teaching assistant with Charlotte needed to give Charlotte more time to get to work. Possibly, rather than going over to her every few minutes, he could just have caught her eye and motioned for her to get to work. With Jason would this strategy, of reminding him of the task, work?

Teaching assistant: What are you doing?  
Jason: Nothing.  
Teaching assistant: What should you be doing?  
Jason: Doing the worksheet.  
Teaching assistant: Right, well have a go.

Sometimes reasoning with a student involves stressing the relevance and importance of the work. Sometimes it helps to point out to the student how the work they are given in school can relate to their everyday life.

#### *Giving the student a choice and stating the consequences*

In both case studies the teaching assistants used the strategy of giving a choice and stating the consequences. If this strategy is used it is important to be very clear with the student regarding what the choices are and what the consequences are. If the wrong choice is made it is important that the consequences are carried through. If the consequences are not carried through, then this strategy *will not work*.

In the case study regarding Jason, Jason was given a choice of doing his work quickly and then going out to play *or* spending all of playtime doing work. However, in this case the goal posts were constantly shifting, in that what Jason had to do in terms of work, became less and less. It is important, when you ask a student to do a task, that it is a task they *can* do. It is also important to enforce the consequences. With Jason he only managed to write one letter and then throw the worksheet on the floor before he ran out to play and the consequences, of missing a playtime because he did not do his work, were never enforced.

However, in the case study regarding Charlotte the consequence of making the wrong choice was carried through, in that Charlotte was given a detention, which she served.

#### *Making the students aware of the impact of their behaviour on others helps them become more aware of the reasons for rules*

If, after trying to reason with Jason and Charlotte, by asking them what they are doing and what they should be doing, they still refuse to cooperate, then emphasising the impact of their behaviour on others might be useful.

Teaching assistant: Charlotte, you are saying you are not going to do your work.  
Charlotte: I am not going to do it.  
Teaching assistant: Do we have a rule about doing work?  
Charlotte: Yeah.

Teaching assistant: The rule states that we must all try to do our work to our best ability.  
 Charlotte: I am not going to do it.  
 Teaching assistant: If you don't follow the rule, then should the other students follow the rule?  
 Charlotte: I don't care. I am not going to do it.  
 Teaching assistant: Well if no one follows the rule, then nobody would do any work. Then no one would learn. Rules are for everyone.

Would this work?

### Self-assessment questions

- After reading the suggestions in this chapter how would you have dealt with Charlotte's and Jason's behaviour?
- Think of a situation where you have had to deal with a student who refused to do what they were asked. Use the techniques in this chapter to think of both explanations for the behaviour and strategies that could turn the behaviour around?

### Summary

This chapter has discussed possible explanations and strategies for dealing with students who refuse to do what they are asked. In doing this we have looked specifically at two case studies. What we have discovered through this discussion is that there are a number of possible explanations as well as a number of possible strategies that can be used to cope with this behaviour. Which strategy or combination of strategies you should use in the classroom very much depends on the school's rules regarding this behaviour, the individual student and the particular details of the situation.

### Remember

- ✓ Write down notes of what happened.
- ✓ Reflect or think about what happened? Ask yourself:
  - Why do I think this student is behaving in such a way?
  - What strategies did I use?
  - What worked? What didn't work?
  - How can I improve my practice?
- ✓ Try to record your recollection of the events in the form of a structured observation noting antecedents, behaviour and consequences.
- ✓ Discuss your thoughts with others (teachers, SENCO, other teaching assistants).
- ✓ Look for possible explanations for behaviour. Consider the consequences, feelings and emotions, and thinking processes as being part of the explanation as well as suggesting ways forward.



## Chapter 8

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# The student who has difficulty in controlling anger

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A student who has difficulty controlling their anger will be challenging to work with. Discussion and dialogue between all those involved is essential in these cases. The following two case studies will explore relevant issues.

### Primary school

#### ***The event***

Sophie works as a teaching assistant in a reception class. Sophie reported that she never thought that you could have serious behaviour problems in a reception class, but that was before Rebecca started.

Well, Rebecca was a beautiful looking little girl, with wavy hair that fell to her waist. She looked like butter wouldn't have melted in her mouth, but she had a temper that was unbelievable. The last major incident started in the dressing-up corner. Well, the most popular outfit for the girls was the wedding outfit. All the girls loved dressing up in that dress. Now, that morning Amy had been first over and was wearing the dress. Rebecca marched right over to her and demanded that Amy take the dress off and give it to her as it belonged to her because she was the most beautiful girl in the class.

I stepped in at that moment and told Rebecca that in class we had a rule about sharing and that right now it was Amy's turn and as for being the most beautiful girl in the class, well everyone was beautiful in their own way. Rebecca would not listen to what I had to say and started to stomp her feet. I got down to her level and said in a very calm and gentle voice that she needed to settle down. But Rebecca would have none of it. She made a grab for the dress. Amy struggled and screamed. Rebecca then pushed Amy, which made Amy scream even more and in the course of things the dress was ripped. As I was right there I spoke quite firmly to Rebecca and said that pushing and grabbing was not acceptable. Rebecca was still in a mood and turned round and called me a 'fat old cow' and kicked me in the shins. The teacher arrived by my side, grabbed Rebecca's hand and marched her to the head's office.

#### ***On reflection***

*Why do I think Rebecca is behaving in such a way?*

My first thoughts are that she is just used to having her own way. She is definitely suffering from the 'little princess syndrome'.

*What strategies did I use?*

I did try to remind Rebecca of the rules.

*What worked? What didn't work?*

Reminding her of the rules wasn't very effective.

*How can I improve my practice?*

I felt I tried to deal firmly and fairly with Rebecca, but perhaps I should have taken her out of the situation earlier. But, who is to say, perhaps if I had tried that, then Rebecca might just have kicked me earlier.

## Secondary school

*The event*

Angela works with Steve. Steve has a problem with his anger and attends the behavioural unit within the school part-time. When Steve was in mainstream classes a teaching assistant always supported him. However, as Angela noted when you were supporting Steve you always felt that you were tip-toeing on egg-shells and she imagined that was how the other students felt.

Like last Monday in History, the class had been set some work and everyone was getting on with it. I was sitting beside Steve. Then Brad at the back yelled at Steve, 'I heard that those lads from 11b are out to smash your face in'.

The teacher immediately intervened and told Brad that those remarks were not acceptable in class. There was absolute silence. But those remarks had already had their effect on Steve. I noticed his shoulders tense and his face turn very pale. I tried to keep him focused on the questions at hand and to ignore Brad's remark. I asked him questions about the task and commented on the work he had done so far. I thought that by trying to keep on the task at hand he might hopefully forget about Brad's remark. Steve answered my questions and was writing the answers that we discussed. For a while this strategy seemed to be working. Then there was a slight commotion at the back and we could hear Brad's distinctive laugh. Well that was it. Steve jumped up and in a split second was at the back of the class pinning Brad to the wall. The teacher stepped in immediately and said that he was having none of this and to put Brad down. Steve did what he was told. Then the teacher asked me to take Steve back to the unit.

I said to Steve that it was time to go and he followed me, but not before he gave Brad a menacing look and kicked over a chair. Steve was quiet all the way down to the unit and once he was back in the unit I left him alone.

*On reflection**Why do I think Steve was behaving in such a way?*

In this incident Steve was provoked by Brad's comments. Steve was frightened.

*What strategies did I use?*

I was very aware of Steve's body language. I noticed how tense he was getting and I tried very hard to get him to ignore Brad and to focus on the task at hand.

*What worked? What didn't work?*

As Steve has a statement and is attached to the behaviour unit, there are set procedures to follow if Steve acts up. If Steve displays any aggressive behaviour in a mainstream class he is required to leave immediately and go back to the unit. In this case the procedures were followed. However, I feel that maybe I should have done more to prevent the incident.

*How can I improve my practice?*

Perhaps I should have intervened earlier and suggested to the teacher that I take Steve out as soon as Brad made that remark.

**Self-assessment questions**

- What do you think are the possible explanations for Steve's and Rebecca's behaviour?
- What strategies do you think the teaching assistants used?
- What would you do if you were the teaching assistant?

**Making sense of behaviour**

Both these case studies describe students of varying ages who have difficulties in controlling their anger. Although we only have limited information we can attempt to make some educated guesses regarding why they are doing what they are doing. Hopefully these various explanations will suggest strategies that will help these students in controlling their anger. The rest of this chapter will look in turn at the three views (behaviour determined by consequences, behaviour determined by feelings or emotions, and behaviour determined by thoughts or thinking processes) in regard to both explanations and ways forward – that is, practical everyday strategies that a teaching assistant can use.

**Behaviour determined by consequences****Explanations**

Here we remember that behaviour is determined by the consequences of the behaviour. One of the first suggestions from this viewpoint is to carry out a structured observation focusing on antecedents, behaviour and consequences. From what we have read we could write the following analyses of Rebecca's and Steve's behaviour.

<b>Rebecca</b>		
<i>Antecedent</i>	<i>Behaviour</i>	<i>Consequence</i>
Amy wearing bride's outfit.	Rebecca marches over to Amy and demands that Amy takes the dress off and gives it to her as it belongs to her because she is the most beautiful girl in the class.	TA steps in and tells Rebecca that we have a rule about sharing and that it is Amy's turn, and as for being beautiful, everyone is beautiful in their own way.
Amy still wearing bride's outfit.	Rebecca starts to stomp her feet.	TA gets down to Rebecca's level and says in a very calm and gentle voice that she needs to settle down.

*continued*

<i>Antecedent</i>	<i>Behaviour</i>	<i>Consequence</i>
Amy still wearing bride's outfit.	Rebecca makes a grab for the dress.  Rebecca pushes Amy.     Rebecca calls TA a 'fat old cow' and kicks TA in the shins.	Amy struggles and screams.  Amy screams even more and the dress rips. TA speaks firmly to Rebecca saying that pushing and grabbing is not acceptable.  The teacher arrives, grabs Rebecca's hand and marches her to the head's office.

This viewpoint argues that if behaviour is ongoing, as it seems to be in the case of Rebecca, then there must be some sort of reward or pay-off for the student. What then is Rebecca's reward for her outburst of anger?

#### *Achievement of desired goal*

In this example it is very clear that Rebecca has her mind set on having this dress. However, despite her outburst she does not get to wear the dress. Nevertheless, she has perhaps made her point to the others in the class, that it is her dress, that she is willing to fight for what she thinks is hers and that she does not take 'no' for an answer. Perhaps in the past Rebecca has learned that when she makes a huge fuss and gets angry she often does get her own way. Perhaps when she next demands that a fellow student give her something the student might give her what she asks for out of fear.

#### *Attention and approval from others*

Rebecca is getting lots of attention by becoming angry. Is Rebecca gaining approval from others? Is Rebecca gaining respect from others?

<b>Steve</b>		
<i>Antecedent</i>	<i>Behaviour</i>	<i>Consequence</i>
Class has been set individual work.  Brad yells at Steve, 'I heard that those lads from 11b are out to smash your face in'.  TA asks him questions about the task and comments on the work he has done so far.	Steve's shoulders tense and his face turns very pale.    Brad answers TA's questions and is writing the answers that were discussed.	Teacher intervenes and states that those remarks are not acceptable in class.

*continued*

<i>Antecedent</i>	<i>Behaviour</i>	<i>Consequence</i>
Slight commotion at the back of the class. Brad's distinctive laugh is heard.	Steve jumps up and in a split second is at back of the class, pinning Brad to the wall.  Steve does what he is told.	Teacher steps in immediately and says that he is having none of this and to put Brad down.
Teacher asks TA to take Steve back to the unit. TA says to Steve that it is time to go.	Steve gives Brad a menacing look, kicks over a chair and follows TA out of room and back to unit.	Back in unit Steve is left alone.

This viewpoint argues that if behaviour is ongoing as it seems to be in the case of Steve's difficulty in controlling his temper, then there must be some sort of reward or pay-off for the student. What then is Steve's reward for his outbursts of anger?

#### *Avoidance of an undesired task or situation*

Was leaving the classroom situation and heading back to the unit a reward? Was returning to the unit the desired goal? In other case studies we have seen that students misbehave to avoid doing a task that they find difficult. However, from what has been written it certainly seems that Steve is capable of doing the work? Perhaps in this case study it was the situation that Steve wanted to avoid. Perhaps Steve felt safer in the unit.

#### *Attention and approval from others*

Was Steve's angry outburst rewarded by the attention of others? Did Steve feel that he needed to deal firmly with Brad's comments in order to maintain a certain amount of respect or 'street cred'?

#### *Social learning theory*

Perhaps both Rebecca and Steve are imitating ways of behaving that they have seen or perhaps they have been on the receiving end of such behaviour. Perhaps they believe that this behaviour is an appropriate way of responding.

What these explanations show is that although these two case studies illustrate the same inappropriate behaviour there could be various explanations. Again, all of these observations and reflections need to be discussed with the teacher.

### **Strategies**

#### *Try to discover what is triggering the inappropriate behaviour then remove the trigger*

It would seem that Rebecca's anger is triggered by not getting what she wants, while Steve's outbursts could be triggered by remarks or comments that he feels are not respectful. However, if these events were triggering the outbursts of anger then it would be unrealistic in these cases to try to remove the trigger. We all have to realise that we cannot have what we want all the time. We all have to deal constructively with negative comments from others.

*Praising appropriate behaviour*

It is very easy with students who have difficulty controlling their anger to pay them lots of attention when they are misbehaving but to ignore them when they are being good. Certainly, in the early years reward charts are used, whereby a student gains points, stars or merits for episodes when they are behaving well. When the student earns a certain number of stars or merits this then qualifies them for a special reward. As stated, this works really well in the early years, but even older students are still pleased by stickers, tokens and vouchers.

*Intervene early*

In both these case studies the teaching assistants felt that maybe they could have intervened earlier. If you know a student well and you know what their reactions are likely to be, then intervening before the situation gets out of hand can be a very effective strategy. With Rebecca, perhaps the teaching assistant could have intervened at the moment Rebecca was having a discussion with Amy about whose dress it was. The teaching assistant could have taken her gently by the hand and guided her over to another area. The teaching assistant could have tried to get Rebecca interested in another task. 'Come over here, I want to show you this book' or 'I have just the job for you'. With Steve's history of aggression, perhaps the teaching assistant could have taken Steve back to the unit after Brad made his initial comments about the lads from 11b.

**Behaviour determined by feelings or emotions*****Explanations***

Negative feelings such as a fear of being beaten up, a sense that others are not being respectful, that you are not valued or not seen as beautiful, can be perceived as threats to our self-esteem. Ways of dealing with threats to our self-esteem include becoming upset, angry or avoiding the situation. Possibly, a sense that others are not being respectful could apply to both case studies.

From Rebecca's point of view she might genuinely feel that everyone should do as she says and that she should get what she wants all the time. When people don't go along with her, she sees this as a lack of respect or that they don't seem to understand just how important she is. On the other hand, although Rebecca says that she is the most beautiful girl in the class, does she really believe this?

With Steve there could be an issue of needing respect. What triggered his outburst was hearing a commotion and Brad's distinctive laugh. Brad could have been talking and laughing about him, but he had no definite way of knowing that he was.

***Strategies****Teaching assistants need to be aware of all aspects of communication*

They need to be aware of what they say what they don't say, and what their body language communicates. Likewise, they need to be aware of what the students say, what they don't say and what their body language communicates. The way we communicate to the student can be perceived as a put-down or as a means of raising self-esteem.

The teaching assistant working with Rebecca used specific skills in an attempt to calm Rebecca. As the teaching assistant described, 'I got down to her level and said in a very calm and gentle voice that she needed to settle down'. However, this did not seem to work with Rebecca. In reading the case study on Rebecca do you feel that the teaching assistant

communicated to Rebecca that she was valued, did the teaching assistant boost her self-esteem? More importantly, did Rebecca feel that anyone was boosting her self-esteem?

The teaching assistant who worked with Steve was again very aware of body language and was certainly aware that Steve was tense. The teaching assistant cleverly tried to refocus Steve on a task that he could succeed at and praised Steve for answering the questions. Perhaps the teaching assistant also needed to praise Steve for ignoring Brad's initial comments.

***Corrective discipline should make a distinction between the behaviour and the person***

This carries on from the point made in the last section regarding whether it is possible to boost a student's self-esteem when they are acting inappropriately. Let's examine the following dialogue that the teaching assistant had with Rebecca.

Rebecca: Give me that. The dress is mine 'cause I'm the most beautiful girl in the class.  
Teaching assistant: Rebecca, we have a rule in this class about sharing and right now it is Amy's turn. As for being the most beautiful girl, well everyone is beautiful in their own way.

What would Rebecca make of the teaching assistant's remarks? Would she see the remarks as a boost to her self-confidence? Let's suppose the conversation went like this:

Rebecca: Give me that. The dress is mine 'cause I'm the most beautiful girl in the class.  
Teaching assistant: Yes, you are beautiful, Rebecca, but so is everyone else in their own way. Now, as for who gets to wear the dress, we have a rule in this class about sharing and right now it is Amy's turn.

In this example the teaching assistant is boosting Rebecca's self-esteem but is also making a distinction between the person and the behaviour. Rebecca is beautiful but she still has to share.

***Teaching assistants can help students to deal constructively with their emotions***

Ways of dealing effectively with emotions can be learned through social skills groups. In social skills groups, interpersonal skills such as listening, praising others, sharing and talking about how to deal with anger are discussed. Often teaching assistants are involved in running such programmes.

In dealing with Steve's difficulty in controlling his anger, one of the goals would be to teach Steve skills that enable him to deal with his anger effectively. Some programmes encourage students to recognise within themselves when they are getting angry and set up a system whereby they can tell the teacher or teaching assistant that they need time out. Some of these programmes involve the student giving the teacher or teaching assistant a red card to indicate that they need to leave the room.

**Behaviour determined by thoughts or thinking processes**

***Explanations***

This viewpoint states that what we do or don't do can be explained by our thinking processes. To what extent can the thinking processes or lack of thinking processes explain

both Rebecca's and Steve's behaviour? What was Rebecca thinking of? The teaching assistant did remind Rebecca that they had a rule about sharing in the classroom. Did Rebecca understand the concept of sharing? Did Rebecca understand why following rules is important?

Likewise, did Steve understand that there were rules or codes of behaviour that needed to be followed? Did Steve think that rules were not meant for him? Was Steve thinking or was he just reacting?

## Strategies

### *Using double questions*

At all ages reasoning helps to develop an individual's awareness of what is right and what is wrong. Using double questions, 'What are you doing?', 'What should you be doing?', encourages the student to think about their actions. When dealing with students who have difficulty in controlling anger, it is probably wise to use this strategy of reasoning at the earliest indication that they are becoming tense or after they have had a chance to calm down.

Let's look at the example of Rebecca. When should the teaching assistant have tried to reason with Rebecca? Possibly when Rebecca demanded the bride's outfit from Amy. The teaching assistant could have tried the following approach.

Teaching assistant: Rebecca, what are you doing?  
 Rebecca: Amy has the dress.  
 Teaching assistant: What should you be doing?  
 Rebecca: Waiting my turn?

Possibly Rebecca needs reminders regarding what she should be doing. Perhaps Rebecca could wear a brightly coloured badge with 'sharing' on it. Then, when such a situation arose, the teaching assistant could perhaps point to the badge to remind Rebecca of what she should be doing.

### *Giving the student a choice and stating the consequences*

This strategy might be successfully employed with Rebecca.

Teaching assistant: Rebecca, we have a rule in this class about sharing and right now it is Amy's turn. As for being the most beautiful girl, well everyone is beautiful in their own way.  
 Rebecca: (Stomps her feet.)  
 Teaching assistant: Rebecca, you have a choice. If you stop this and wait then you can have a turn next. If you don't stop, you won't wear the dress and I will take you immediately to the teacher.

With Steve, the teaching assistant commented that when Brad made his initial remarks (regarding a group of lads who were after Steve) Steve's shoulders became tense and his face went white. At this point the teaching assistant decided to try to refocus Steve on the work at hand. But the teaching assistant could have tried a different approach. She could have given Steve choices. She could have taken him outside the classroom and tried the following line of reasoning.

Teaching assistant: Steve, I noticed that Brad's remarks upset you and I wanted to say that you did the right thing by ignoring him.



Steve: If he says one more thing, I will have him.  
 Teaching assistant: As I said, Steve, in the lesson when he made those comments you made the right choice. If you had hit him the consequence would be that you would be the person in trouble. As it stands now Brad is the one in trouble, not you. Let's keep it that way. Remember you have a choice.

In this example the teaching assistant is making Steve aware that he has a choice about how to respond. However, the teaching assistant could give Steve a choice about whether he wants to stay in the lesson. This would give Steve a feeling of control over the situation.

Teaching assistant: Steve, I noticed that Brad's remarks upset you and I wanted to say that you did the right thing by ignoring him. Steve, do you feel comfortable about staying in the lesson? If you don't I will ask the teacher if we can go back to the unit. You have a choice, Steve. What do you want to do?

### **Encourage appropriate behaviour by encouraging reasoning**

Let's take the example of Steve. When Steve has calmed down the following discussion could take place.

Teaching assistant: What was all that about with Brad?  
 Steve: He was having a go at me.  
 Teaching assistant: How do you know he was having a go at you?  
 Steve: I just knew. I could tell by the way he was looking and the way he laughed. He was laughing at me.  
 Teaching assistant: He could have been laughing about something else. (Here the teaching assistant is trying to get Steve to look at the situation from different perspectives.)  
 Steve: No, miss. I know.  
 Teaching assistant: How do you know? Suppose he wasn't? Even if he was, did you have to have a go at him?  
 Steve: Yeah.  
 Teaching assistant: Steve, what else could you have done?

A strategy involving reasoning is never easy or quick.

### **Self-assessment questions**

- After reading the suggestions in this chapter how would you have dealt with Steve's and Rebecca's behaviour?
- Think of a situation where you have had to deal with a student who has had difficulty in controlling their anger. Use the techniques in this chapter to think of explanations for the behaviour and strategies that could turn the behaviour around.

### **Summary**

This chapter has discussed possible explanations and strategies for dealing with students who have difficulty in controlling anger. In doing this we have looked specifically at two case studies. What we have discovered through this discussion is that there are a number of possible explanations as well as a number of possible strategies that can be used to cope with this behaviour. Which strategy or combination of strategies you should use in the classroom depends on the school's rules regarding this behaviour, the individual student and the particular details of the situation.

**Remember**

- ✓ Write down notes of what happened.
- ✓ Reflect on what has happened. Ask yourself:
  - Why do I think this student is behaving in such a way?
  - What strategies did I use?
  - What worked? What didn't work?
  - How can I improve my practice?
- ✓ Try to record your recollection of the events in the form of a structured observation noting antecedents, behaviour and consequences.
- ✓ Discuss your thoughts with others (teachers, SENCO, other teaching assistants).
- ✓ Look for possible explanations for behaviour. Consider the consequences, feelings and emotions, and thinking processes as being part of the explanation as well as suggesting ways forward.

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