

Persistent disengaged and disruptive behaviour

Creating calm, focused classrooms

February 2026

Teachers play a key role in creating safe, supportive and inclusive learning environments, which includes preventing and responding to disengagement and disruption. Many factors influence students' engagement and participation, and some students may require targeted support from their teachers to help them engage, participate and stay focused on learning. This practice guide will assist you in supporting students to focus on learning when a range of factors impact their engagement and attention and lead to persistent disengagement and disruption across multiple lessons.

Supporting students to focus on learning, including when they experience persistent difficulties with engagement and attention across multiple lessons, requires ongoing consideration and adjustments to practice. You can use this guide to identify your strengths and prioritise the area for refinement you'll focus on first. Supporting your own wellbeing is essential as it helps you feel more confident and respond effectively.

This guide is part of the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO)'s suite of classroom management resources and guidance for supporting students' diverse needs, which support teachers and school leaders in establishing learning environments where all students can thrive and achieve. These resources can be used individually to reflect on and refine your own practice, or as shared resources to support mentoring and a whole-school approach to classroom management and supportively responding to student behaviour. They're designed to inform and complement rather than replace existing school and system policies, procedures and guidance.

Proactive and preventative approaches to creating calm and learning-focused classrooms

All students deserve to learn in safe and supportive learning environments where expectations are clearly defined and understood. In these environments, all students are supported to meet these expectations, with reasonable adjustments made as they develop their skills.



Effective classroom management and high-quality instruction are key to students' learning and engagement.

When considering how to prevent and respond to persistent disengagement and disruption, it's important to begin by reviewing how you use preventative and proactive approaches to set up a calm and learning-focused classroom. These approaches are foundational for students' engagement in learning: they help prevent disruption and disengagement and they support students.

Use [Appendix A: Proactive and preventative approaches to creating calm and learning-focused classrooms](#) to reflect on how you establish safe, supportive and inclusive learning environments for all students.



Responding to persistent disengagement and disruption

Some students will also need additional support to help them focus on learning and interact with others in respectful ways.

Disengagement and disruption negatively impact learning and teaching – for the student and, in the case of disruptive behaviours, other students who are trying to learn and the teacher who is trying to teach.

Even with effective classroom management and teaching practices in place, including responses to one-off, low-level disengaged and disruptive behaviours, some students may experience persistent difficulties focusing on learning across lessons. This can lead to persistent disengagement or disruption which requires more targeted consideration, planning and support.

To respond to persistent disengagement and disruption:

1. Understand why the persistent disengagement or disruption is occurring:
 - 1.1 Identify the persistent behaviours of concern
 - 1.2 Explore why the persistent behaviours might be occurring
2. Support the student to focus on learning:
 - 2.1 Select strategies based on the student's needs
 - 2.2 Collaboratively plan with the student and their parents or primary caregivers
3. Reflect on the impact of support strategies, celebrate progress and make adjustments.

When behaviours of concern are complex or continue after applying strategies to support students, engage your student support team to further explore what may be contributing to the behaviours and plan additional support strategies. You can use AERO's guidance on planning to support students' diverse needs and collaborating with students' support networks to inform this process.

When behaviours of concern are more serious, engage your school leadership team in addressing the behaviours.

1. Understand why the persistent disengagement or disruption is occurring

When disengagement and disruption continue across multiple lessons, thinking about what could be influencing the student's ability to focus on learning can help you identify how you can best support them to re-engage, be more attentive and focus on learning. It can also help you identify who else needs to be involved in supporting the student and you, including the student support team for more complex behaviours or the school leadership team for more serious behaviours.

1.1. Identify the persistent behaviours of concern

Identifying and clearly describing the persistent behaviours that are interfering most with learning and teaching in your classroom is imperative, as some behaviours may be irritating but not necessarily problematic. Developing stronger relationships with students will help you determine if the behaviours are of concern and need to be addressed or are simply an expression of their individuality that needs understanding, compassion, support and adjustments to reduce the impact on others.

If you decide specific persistent behaviours are concerning, one of the first steps is to clearly describe the behaviours to better identify the right support for the student.

To identify the persistent behaviours of concern

- Identify and reflect on exactly what the student is doing in observable and measurable terms, avoiding general terms like 'acting out' or 'attention-seeking'.

For example:

The student is calling out during teaching and when other students are responding, saying things like 'This is boring!', 'Why do we have to do this?' and 'That's what I said'.

The student is repeatedly initiating conversations with their desk neighbours about topics unrelated to the task. The conversations often become animated and loud.

- Consider the impact and why the behaviours are a concern: Do they prevent or disrupt learning for the student or others, affect others or pose a safety risk?

For example:

Off-topic conversations are preventing the student and their desk neighbours from learning and often distract other nearby students. Monitoring and managing the student is reducing my availability to support other students' learning.

- Consider where and when they happen. Identify patterns: Do the behaviours occur at certain times, in specific settings, with particular people or during certain tasks or activities?

For example:

Off-topic conversations are most often initiated during independent work, particularly when I'm circulating further away from the student, supporting other individual students.



1.2. Explore why the persistent behaviours might be occurring

Understanding the reasons for the persistent behaviours can help you determine the best way to support the student. You may want to do this with an experienced colleague, student support specialist or school leader, depending on your school procedures, level of concern and the seriousness of the behaviours.

Identify any personal circumstances that could be contributing to the persistent behaviours

Reflect on your observations of the student, what you already know about them and any other available information. This could be information provided by the student, their parents and primary caregivers, other teachers and professionals (e.g., special educator, school counsellor, psychologist, occupational therapist, physiotherapist, speech pathologist, paediatrician or psychiatrist) and plans made by the school. Consider whether recommendations have been put in place and individual plans followed. Reflect on the impact supports have had and whether they've been reviewed and refined. If possible, talk with the student's past teachers to gain their insights.

Keep in mind that students' experiences both within and outside of school impact their engagement and ability to pay attention and stay on task. For example, feeling hungry, having insufficient sleep, experiencing harm or stress from abuse (including neglect, emotional abuse, physical or sexual violence) and discomfort due to a physical or mental health issue or sensory sensitivity will likely negatively influence behaviour. Follow school procedures to involve relevant specialist support staff and school leaders when needed.

Consider the perspective of the student

Speak privately with the student soon after an example of the behaviour of concern about what they're experiencing and what they think might help, inviting them to bring a support person with them if that would make them more comfortable. You might also want to have a colleague present for support. Follow your school procedures for private conversations with students and be mindful of their comfort in any discussions you have with and about them. While meeting with the student may take time away from teaching and other duties, don't rush the conversation, as it can be well worth the effort to build positive relationships and support the student to focus on learning in the long run.

When discussing the persistent behaviours of concern, clearly describe the student's actions rather than making statements about the student as a person. The student may not realise they're persistently disengaged, non-attentive or disrupting the class. They may also not know why they're engaging in this behaviour.

Questions that explore how the student is feeling when they're inattentive or disruptive – while respecting the student's right not to share personal information – could include the following:

- Can you describe what you're thinking about when you're having trouble focusing?
- What's happening for you during this time?
- When do you find you stop being able to concentrate?
 - Is it as soon as I get the whole class's attention?
 - Is it after I say one or two sentences?
- When you get up from your desk to chat with someone during an activity when you've been asked to stay seated:
 - How do you find working on the task?
 - How are you feeling when you stop?
 - What are you thinking about when you get up?

It may be useful to provide the student with a copy of the questions and meet with them more than once to allow them time to consider their responses.

You might find it helpful to consult with the student's parents and primary caregivers and have them assist with this conversation, if it's safe and appropriate.

Keep in mind that every student and family has different needs, backgrounds, experiences and educational goals. AERO's practice guide on [building positive connections](#) includes practical advice for getting to know students, interacting positively with them and engaging with families. AERO also offers tailored guidance to support your work with [families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds](#), [families of children with disability](#) and [families of children in out-of-home care](#).

Consider what the persistent behaviours might indicate

Reflecting on your knowledge and observations of the student and your discussions with them, consider whether the behaviours may indicate:

- instruction that's not aligned with how students learn, including managing their cognitive load and helping them to retain, consolidate and apply their learning
- knowledge or skills the student is still developing or needs to be taught, including:
 - required subject knowledge
 - behavioural expectations, routines and rules
 - skills to manage their emotional and behavioural responses to triggers and communicate that they need help.
- unmet needs, including sensory, physical, emotional, social, communication, academic or physiological (for example, hunger or a lack of sleep) needs. These needs may stem from situations outside the classroom and impact the student in the classroom
- that they are seeking or avoiding something through the behaviour.

For example, students may experience challenges in engaging, paying attention, staying on task and waiting their turn due to their need:

- for attention, approval, interaction or connection from peers or teachers
- to avoid interactions, tasks or sensory inputs they find difficult, are unable to manage or find unstimulating or uncomfortable
- to access tasks, activities or sensory inputs that help them meet their needs
- to communicate their thoughts, emotions or physical or sensory needs
- for help to understand, start or continue a task.

You may want to involve additional staff to help you identify issues the student may be encountering.

Discuss and explore your thoughts with the student (and their parents and primary caregivers when safe and appropriate) to test your understanding.

2. Support the student to focus on learning

Using manageable strategies that meet students' needs and help them focus can reduce disruption and disengagement and promote engagement in learning. They should be collaboratively planned and monitored with the student and their parents or primary caregivers when appropriate. The evidence-based approaches outlined in this guide are mindful of teachers' workload.

When persistent behaviours are complex, engage your student support team, and when they're more serious, involve your school leadership team. Your student support team and school leadership team can help you further explore what may be contributing to the behaviours and plan support and responses, including appropriate consequences for more serious behaviour.

2.1. Select strategies based on the student's needs

Consider what the persistent behaviours of concern may indicate and identify how you can support the student both immediately and over time through refined teaching and classroom management practices, adjustments, explicit skill instruction and additional supports. You might involve specialist support staff to help identify strategies specific to the student's needs.

Build the student's sense of belonging and reinforce learning-focused behaviours

- Increase positive interactions that build trust and positive relationships, and reinforce desirable behaviours.
- Proactively check in with students who appear less engaged in learning or connected to others, as well as their parents or primary caregivers, to strengthen positive connections. This might be as students arrive at or leave class, during transition times, during independent tasks and at break times.
- Develop cultural safety and responsiveness by engaging in reflexive practice and building relationships of trust with students, their families and community.
- Provide strength-based feedback, including respectful, student-preferred ways of acknowledging and praising their efforts and positive behaviour, with specific descriptions of what's being praised to reinforce the behaviour.
- Build a collaborative classroom culture with peer support and acknowledgement. Provide scaffolds to help peers learn and practise these skills.
- Celebrate the student's progress and success.

Support the student's needs and foster the development of their skills

- Where required, seek help from appropriate staff to arrange additional support for the student's basic home, health or learning needs.
- Adjust the environment, considering the student's cultural, communication, sensory, social, emotional and physical preferences, strengths and needs. Remove or cover distracting items unless they support student engagement in learning.
- Reteach and support the student to practise expected, respectful, learning-focused behaviours and increase prompts and reminders about these, especially in situations where they might be more difficult. Support the student's understanding and focus through visuals such as graphics, visual schedules and self-monitoring tracking tools.
- Provide sensory support by lowering noise levels, dimming the lights, removing or reducing unpleasant or overwhelming textures or smells, providing space and allowing students to regularly move.
- Support the student's emotional regulation, including noticing signs of agitation, removing or reducing triggers, and using appropriate responses for the phase of escalation.
- Support the student's receptive and expressive communication and use of language for different purposes.
- Support the student in monitoring their behaviour with specific, achievable goals and, where appropriate, tools to track their progress, such as checklists, charts or journals.
- Provide opportunities to practise in the moment. If the student is agitated, they'll need opportunities to practise when they're regulated.

Ensure teaching and tasks are appropriate for the student's needs, ability and background

- Increase opportunities to respond and actively participate in learning using techniques such as having students:
 - say words, numbers or symbols together as a class
 - read aloud together or follow along while the teacher or another student is reading
 - discuss learning and responses in pairs or small groups
 - display answers on mini whiteboards
 - listen to and paraphrase the responses of randomly selected students.
- Build 'behaviour momentum' with students who sometimes find it difficult to start learning tasks by beginning with tasks you know they can complete before introducing more challenging ones. Scaffold learning and praise their efforts as they progress.
- Support the student to start or continue learning tasks by breaking them into smaller, manageable steps.

- For some students, and in some circumstances, consider offering some limited options for starting and completing learning tasks. When doing so, ensure expectations remain high, aligned with learning objectives and responsive to the student's strengths and needs. While still supporting students to achieve the learning objective, choices might include:
 - the order they complete tasks and questions
 - the materials used
 - how students present their learning
 - using assistive technology. For example, using speech-to-text software to dictate ideas or having one student take notes on discussion points.
- Ensure the student can complete learning tasks and experience success at least 80% of the time.
- Assess the student's need for academic intervention and support and refer them to the student support team when needed.
- Provide short, simple, structured breaks, particularly from difficult or non-preferred tasks, to help maintain focus. Breaks might include standing and stretching, a quick activity or walk, emotional regulation exercises or switching learning tasks from high to low cognitive load.
 - Establish the purpose, routine, expectations and timing for breaks, and monitor students during these. If students are taking a break in another location, ensure they're accompanied and supervised at all times.
- Have the student complete learning tasks at another time, provided there are no underlying reasons affecting their ability to complete the learning task. Use this strategy cautiously, as, if not done with careful consideration, it can create feelings of shame, isolation or anxiety. Ensure students still receive a sufficient break if they're completing tasks at break time.
 - This time can also provide an opportunity for discussions, learning assistance and relationship repair with the student without a class audience. It could also be used to support the student in developing and practising positive behavioural skills, such as asking for and accepting help, completing part of the task before taking a short break and using positive self-talk such as 'I'll do this for 5 minutes then have a short break'.
 - Try to identify why the student wasn't completing the task. Consider if it was because they didn't fully understand the task, weren't capable of completing it, were overwhelmed and needed support getting started and staying focused, or were hungry, tired or impacted by an unsettling incident.

Consider providing time away from the reinforcing environment when other strategies haven't been effective, ensuring appropriate supports are in place. Follow school procedures, including when responding to dangerous behaviour.

Time away from the classroom might be used for a short period if necessary as part of a students' individual plan or to restore safety or order in the classroom. It should be limited, purposeful and consistent with your system or sector procedures.

2.2. Collaboratively plan with the student and their parents or primary caregivers

Meet with the student to collaboratively discuss and confirm what needs to change and why, set clear goals and identify supports that could potentially help.

Pairing accountability with connection and support is key. Consider creating a shared plan that identifies:

- the desired behavioural changes and timelines, ensuring they're reasonable for the student
- how the student will be supported, ensuring this is reasonable for you
- contingencies when things don't go to plan
- how progress will be monitored and recognised.

Seek insight, support and feedback from parents or primary caregivers when safe and appropriate, and communicate updates and progress.

3. Reflect on the impact of support strategies, celebrate progress and make adjustments

After implementing the selected support strategies, reflect on their effectiveness, seek feedback from the student and, where appropriate, seek feedback from their parents or primary caregivers.

Debriefing after disengaged or disruptive behaviour

If the student engages in disengaged or disruptive behaviour, debrief with them to help them reflect, provide insight and guide adjustments to the strategies to support them in focusing on learning.

You might ask them:

1. 'What happened?'
2. 'What did you want to happen?'
3. 'What can we do together to make it better next time?'

Ensure that after the debrief, the student is given the opportunity to move forward. Make deliberate efforts to interact positively with them to help reinforce positive relationships.

Recognise and celebrate progress as early and often as possible, and continue to refine your approach and support for the student over time.

Supporting your wellbeing

It can be very challenging to manage persistent disengagement and disruption, as it can affect your teaching and other students' learning. Supporting your own wellbeing is essential.

Try to regulate your emotions and responses by seeing the behaviour as a sign that the student needs support to engage, participate and stay focused on learning and, in the case of disruptive behaviour, be respectful of others.

To support your wellbeing:

- Focus on safety and wellbeing, while recognising that students are still developing essential skills, including emotional regulation, effective communication, positive social interactions, learning focus and persistence.
- Seek help from specialist support staff and school leaders when behaviours are more complex or serious.
- Recognise that students may disengage and disrupt for various reasons, some of which neither you nor they may be aware of or able to control. Reviewing student plans, debriefing and seeking others' assistance can help you support students and try to prevent disengagement and disruption in the future.
- Remember that refining your classroom management and teaching practice can take time. It can also take time for students to learn what's expected of them and develop their skills.
- Use this guide to plan, script and rehearse how to support learning by increasing student engagement and attention and effectively responding to persistent disengagement and disruption. This supports you with focusing on your own regulation as you deliver planned responses, rather than trying to regulate and consider how to respond at the same time. You might do this independently or with the support of colleagues.
 - You might focus on a student, a group of students or a class who experience persistent difficulties with disengagement or disruption.
 - Use this guide to identify your strengths and prioritise the area you'll focus on first. Work on one area at a time until you can confidently demonstrate it.
- Pause before responding to maintain your own emotional regulation and ensure you aren't reacting impulsively.
- Regularly reflect on your own and your students' strengths and successes, the effectiveness of approaches, areas for improvement and student needs requiring support.
 - Take time to reflect on your own or debrief with the support of colleagues after times of disengagement or disruption.
- Ask colleagues and students' support networks for strategies and suggestions on how to support students.
- Consider what resources, planning time and debriefing process you need after disengaged or disruptive behaviour. Discuss with the relevant school leader how these might be arranged.
- Use your employer's employee assistance program to access additional support for your wellbeing.
- Participate in professional development to strengthen your own wellbeing strategies.

It's also helpful to keep in mind that building a positive classroom culture and developing student–teacher relationships take time. Your efforts may not be realised immediately, but there will be incremental improvements and, over time, you and your students will benefit from your persistence.

Examples of practice

The following examples demonstrate how teachers support students when they're disengaged or disrupting learning.

Supporting a student persistently disengaging during lessons



Identifying the persistent behaviours of concern

Mr Hall notices that Jade often appears disengaged. He thinks about what she's doing at these times – playing with items in her pencil case, not responding in discussions and putting her head on the desk. She often needs prompting to begin tasks and frequently leaves them unfinished.

These behaviours concern Mr Hall because they indicate that Jade is not fully participating in learning and there may be something going on for Jade that requires support. He can't identify specifically when these behaviours happen, so he decides to take note of the times, tasks and topics when they occur.



Exploring why the persistent behaviours might be occurring

Mr Hall reviews Jade's digital profile, particularly prior assessment, communication with Jade and her parents and any existing plans. He also discusses with the school's learning support coordinator additional supports that may be useful for Jade given her handwriting difficulties and slower-than-average processing speed.

Mr Hall privately speaks with Jade to arrange a time to meet and asks which caregiver or support person she might want at the meeting, ensuring it's held at a time they can attend. Jade chooses to bring a friend with her. Mr Hall also invites the learning support coordinator and lets Jade know that they'll be attending.

He tells Jade how much he appreciates having her in the class and identifies some of her strengths. He then tells her, 'I've noticed that sometimes you don't seem to be interested in some tasks and have trouble answering questions in discussions.

I've also noticed that sometimes you seem to have difficulty starting or finishing tasks. I'd like us to work together so that you can get the most out of your learning. Jade, can you tell me about what's going on for you in class?'

Mr Hall pauses to give Jade time to think. After a moment, she says, 'It's boring. I don't like it.' Mr Hall asks her what she finds boring or doesn't like. When Jade responds with 'Everything', Mr Hall asks her to think about what she found boring over the last couple of days, and she describes some specific activities. When he asks her what she enjoys, she initially says 'Nothing' and then, when prompted, identifies a number of activities.

It seems that Jade prefers hands-on activities and reading and dislikes writing. She finds it difficult to focus on class discussions about topics with little relevance to her life. Jade also says she doesn't know why Mr Hall is talking to her about her behaviour when other students often start talking to one another instead of completing their work. Mr Hall acknowledges that other students might need to work on their learning focus as well, and agrees that he will address that. He says that it's helpful to know Jade's preferences and the activities she doesn't like, which he agrees are sometimes not as fun as hands-on activities, but are really important for helping Jade develop important skills. Mr Hall asks Jade's friend and the learning support coordinator for their perspectives and they reinforce what Jade and Mr Hall have just shared.

He asks Jade what might help her to focus, but she doesn't know. Mr Hall confirms that he will consider what he can do to help Jade and the other students that she's mentioned. He also asks Jade's friend and the learning support coordinator for their ideas and they make a few suggestions which Jade and Mr Hall agree might be helpful. He asks Jade if she'll think about what might help and let him or her parents know. He also gives Jade a short survey to complete at home, asking what parts of class she enjoys, what parts she finds difficult and what she finds helps her focus or might help her focus. Mr Hall reassures Jade that he's here to help, and that he will check in again once he's thought about how he might help. He asks her if she'd like him to speak with her parents about what's happening to see if they might have some helpful ideas, and suggests that she might like to speak with them too. She says she doesn't mind. Mr Hall says he'll give them a call.

He gives Jade's father a call and follows up with an email to both her parents identifying Jade's strengths, sharing his concerns and asking for their suggestions and insight. He also mentions to her parents that Jade could be showing signs of tiredness and that she said she doesn't like going to bed early. They both thank him and say they'll have a chat with Jade, keep an eye on how much sleep she's getting and be in touch if anything comes up.

After a reminder, Jade returns the survey. It confirms that she enjoys art and hands-on activities and doesn't like writing and maths or when the class is talking too much. Outside of school, she likes being active, spending time with her guinea pigs and reading. She doesn't like chores or going to bed early.

To explore why the persistent behaviours of concern might be occurring, Mr Hall is:

- collaborating with Jade, her parents and specialist support staff
- identifying her preferences, strengths and needs.

This helps Mr Hall consider a range of perspectives, including Jade's, to identify what could be contributing to the persistent behaviours.



Considering what the persistent behaviours might indicate and selecting strategies that meet the student's needs and help them focus on learning

Mr Hall considers what Jade's behaviours might indicate and what he might do to refine his practice to support her. From his discussion with Jade, it seems that she's avoiding tasks she finds difficult or doesn't like and is still developing skills to help her have a go and persist or seek help when experiencing challenges.

He decides to ensure Jade and other students are focused when he's giving instructions and that they start tasks straight away. He commits to pausing after an instruction, scanning the room and moving to Jade's vicinity whenever possible to praise her when she makes a quick start and help and encourage her when she doesn't.

This reflection helps Mr Hall realise he hasn't always been effectively gaining all students' attention and has sometimes started giving instructions without making sure all students are focused on him. He makes a note to consistently use his cue for attention and to pause, scan and acknowledge and praise students giving their attention between and after his countdown steps. At the end, he'll ensure that all students are listening before he continues, practising in the moment if needed.

After discussing strategies for Jade's writing difficulties and processing speed with the learning support coordinator and considering all of the information he's gathered, Mr Hall plans to:

- Adjust and scaffold tasks
 - slow down, break tasks into smaller, manageable steps, check for understanding in between each step, and provide written instructions for Jade and other students who may benefit
 - try to reduce the number of tasks Jade needs to complete when there are already sufficient opportunities to practice
 - provide the option for Jade to type task responses rather than write when appropriate
- Enable additional processing time
 - try to give Jade tasks in advance to read through and think about
 - allow Jade extra processing time by calling on her later in discussions and letting her know he'll call on her next

- Support Jade's mastery of foundational learning
 - provide additional review and retrieval practice opportunities to help Jade practice foundational skills, including practising both handwriting and typing
 - ensure Jade's using the structured handwriting program and learn-to-type software effectively during daily practice
- Increase active participation and movement opportunities
 - when possible and appropriate to the learning objective, use hands-on activities and opportunities for students to stand and move, including having students move to peers not sitting beside them for structured learning discussions and to complete tasks
 - incorporate structured collaboration and partner discussions when tasks aren't hands-on
- Monitor and support Jade's focus and emotional regulation
 - give Jade specific praise when she contributes even minimally
 - use non-verbal and verbal cues when Jade loses focus, including a light tap on her desk
 - quietly check in when Jade looks agitated or puts her head on her desk, asking, 'Jade, are you okay?' and providing help and encouragement when needed.

He shares this plan with Jade to ensure she feels comfortable with it or see if she would prefer different ways to check in on her and provide support. He also thanks her for returning the survey, which was really helpful, acknowledging what she likes to do and saying he noticed she doesn't like going to bed early. He tells her he doesn't either, but he knows if he doesn't get enough sleep, he'll feel tired the next day. He says it's something he always has to keep an eye on and encourages her to do so too.

Considering what Jade's persistent disengagement might indicate and collaborating with the learning support coordinator helps Mr Hall identify practices to refine and strategies to help Jade focus on learning. This includes:

- refining his classroom management practice of gaining all students' attention, pausing, scanning, circulating, acknowledging and praising, encouraging, practising in the moment, using non-verbal and verbal cues and responding to signs of agitation
- refining his teaching practice of checking for understanding, providing help, adjusting and scaffolding tasks, revisiting and reviewing foundational learning and incorporating discussion opportunities and hands-on activities
- adjusting tasks for Jade's needs, ability and background, including adjusting the number of tasks she's required to complete, using assistive technology, providing tasks in advance, providing additional processing time and planning movement opportunities.

Mr Hall improves the likely effectiveness of the plan by inviting Jade's perspective. This also helps to strengthen their relationship and build Jade's ownership and motivation.



Using strategies to meet the student's needs and help them focus on learning

As he puts his plan into practice, Mr Hall finds that sometimes Jade gives him her attention quickly and start tasks straight away, which he acknowledges her for. Other times, she responds well to prompts, which he also acknowledges. He ignores some minor grumbling at times, knowing that it's her way of communicating that she doesn't like a task, but is working on giving tasks a go and demonstrating persistence.

Mr Hall makes sure that he's regularly pausing, scanning and circulating to check on Jade and the rest of the class. He praises her effort even when minor. He more frequently offers and provides help and prompts her to continue tasks. He notices that he may be able to further adjust task demands to help her be successful over 80% of the time.

He notices that the overall class noise level is regularly high, making it difficult for Jade and others to focus. He addresses this by being clear about the expectations for students' volume at the beginning of tasks and monitoring students as they commence. He promptly gains all their attention when the noise level starts to rise, reminds them of the appropriate volume and makes it clear how long they have to finish to help them focus, setting a timer so they can keep track. He monitors and reminds them as they continue with their tasks.

Mr Hall finds that most of the time Jade is focused on learning. She sometimes still loses focus and starts playing with items on her desk. When she does this again after prompting her to put them away, he gives her the choice to focus on the task or put the items on his desk, following through when necessary.

At other times, Jade looks agitated, frowning and putting her head down. When he offers help, she sometimes responds well, but other times, she continues to look frustrated, so he offers her a quick drink break. Sometimes Jade takes the break, but at other times, she refuses to respond, so Mr Hall gives her some space.

Mr Hall:

- refines his practice and uses the strategies he's identified, making adjustments as he observes how Jade (and the rest of the class) responds.
- notices that he can help all students to focus by refining his practice of setting behaviour expectations for completing learning tasks, monitoring these throughout tasks and providing reminders and additional support, such as clear time expectations.
- reinforces and supports Jade's focus by acknowledging and praising her effort and conduct, and responding to disengaged behaviour by prompting her, giving choices and offering help and breaks when needed.



Reflecting on the impact of support strategies, celebrating progress and making adjustments

Mr Hall monitors Jade's participation and task completion and how she responds to the strategies. Jade shows more sustained periods of engagement and contributes to discussions more often. She seems happier and is starting to seek Mr Hall's help more readily. He reinforces her behaviour and effort using acknowledgement and private praise, especially when she shows sustained engagement, with a comment like, 'Jade, great job staying on task for those 20 minutes.' She seems to look happier when praised. Jade still has moments of disengagement, but they occur less frequently. He continues to offer support and breaks when Jade shows signs of frustration.

Mr Hall observes that Jade's more likely to participate in discussions when called on after other students have contributed. He finds she's more likely to write if the task is broken into smaller parts and she seems to enjoy typing.

After a few weeks, Mr Hall discusses how the strategies are going with the learning support coordinator and checks in with Jade, saying, 'You're participating well in class most of the time, Jade. Are the changes I've made helping?' Jade says they are. Mr Hall continues, 'I noticed that sometimes you still seem to lose focus, stare out the window or start playing with things on your desk, or look frustrated when we're writing. Can you tell me what's happening at those times?'

Jade responds by saying, 'It's hard. And I feel embarrassed when everyone else finishes and I'm still going. I feel like I'm behind everyone.'

Mr Hall responds, 'Thank you for telling me. We all work at different paces. It doesn't matter how slow or fast you are, as long as you're learning. You're not alone. I've noticed that quite a few other students need more time. We can also look at what we can do if you don't finish the task. Have you found reading the tasks I give you before class helps in class?'

Jade responds, saying, 'Yes, but I don't always do it, and sometimes it's not helpful because I don't know some of it.'

Mr Hall responds, 'Yes, sometimes it's the first time you've come across something. It's to give you an extra chance to think about what you already know, and it's okay if that's not much because we'll learn about it in class. Let's check again in a few weeks whether it's helpful for you.'

Mr Hall acknowledges that the support and adjustments are helping Jade engage more, and reminds her that her own persistence is contributing as well.

With Jade's agreement, he communicates with both of Jade's parents to ask for feedback and share updates, including filling them in on progress to celebrate.

Mr Hall is monitoring the impact of the support strategies he planned and is now implementing through his own observations and reflections and by asking the learning support coordinator, Jade and her parents for their perspectives. He's acknowledging progress and considering what else may be helpful.



Ongoing monitoring and support

Mr Hall continues to use strategies to support Jade's engagement, monitoring their effectiveness and her progress. He also continues having conversations with Jade and her family to celebrate her progress and collaboratively plan to support her, engaging specialist support staff when needed.



Supporting a student when they persistently call out answers during lessons



Identifying the persistent behaviours of concern

Liam repeatedly calls out answers during class without allowing the teacher, Ms Rowe, to finish asking the question and call on him. Ms Rowe has explicitly taught, practised, revised and reinforced with students the routine for gaining teacher attention. She's tried many strategies to manage the calling out, including acknowledging students who wait until she's finished, using non-verbal prompts and verbal reminders, ignoring Liam when he calls out without being called on and calling on him when he raises his hand. This has reduced the calling out, but it will start again a while later or in the next lesson. Sometimes Liam will call out to peers and make distracting comments to them, too, such as asking them what they did on the weekend and what they want to do at break.

Ms Rowe reflects on what Liam is doing, why it's a concern and when it happens. She identifies that it happens more often when she's explicitly teaching the class and when students are working independently, and less when students are working together.

Ms Rowe has used proactive, preventative and responsive classroom management approaches, including:

- explicitly teaching the expected behaviour and routines
- reinforcing the expected behaviour through acknowledgement and attention
- using non-verbal prompts and verbal reminders.



Exploring why the persistent behaviours might be occurring

Ms Rowe speaks with Liam to share her concerns and find out how she can help. Liam says he doesn't know why he calls out – he just has things to say. Ms Rowe asks him if it's okay to speak with his mother to see if she has any suggestions. He agrees. Liam's mother says he's 'always been a chatterbox'. Ms Rowe thanks her, says she'll think about how she can support Liam in the classroom, and asks her to be in touch if she thinks of anything else.

Ms Rowe is considering Liam's perspective and collaborating with his parent to explore why the behaviours might be occurring.



Selecting strategies based on the student's needs

Ms Rowe discusses with a colleague her observations and what Liam and his mother shared. The colleague suggests the calling out might be because Liam enjoys talking and interacting with others and is still learning to manage his impulse to call out his thoughts. Ms Rowe wonders if increasing his opportunities to actively participate might reduce the calling out.

After discussing with her colleague what she might do to support Liam, she plans to:

- increase her positive interactions with Liam:
 - as soon as possible in the lesson, greeting him when he's entering the room and checking how his day has been
 - frequently join Liam when he's talking with his partner to give him attention and acknowledge his positive interactions
- increase students' active participation
 - increase her use of whole-class responses, turn-and-talk discussions and random selection of students to share with the whole class
 - revise and have the class practise these routines, including practising in the moment when needed
- reinforce the expected behaviours
 - make sure she pauses, scans and acknowledges and praises students for respectfully participating, providing specific praise to Liam when he allows others to speak and waits before responding, saying, 'Great job pausing and giving others time to think before responding. That shows great awareness and respect for everyone's learning. Thank you for using that strategy – it helps the whole class participate together.'

Collaborating with a colleague helps Ms Rowe to select strategies to support Liam's needs, including:

- increasing her positive interactions with him
- increasing students' active participation and revising and practising active participation routines
- reinforcing the expected behaviours by pausing, scanning and acknowledging and praising Liam when he makes an effort to demonstrate these.



Reflecting on the impact of support strategies, celebrating progress and making adjustments

While using the strategies, Ms Rowe reflects on the impact they're having on Liam. His calling out, while still occurring, has reduced and he's definitely getting more positive attention from her and having more opportunities to talk with others.

She privately checks in with him, saying, 'Your calling out has reduced Liam and you're responding really well in whole-class responses and discussions. Do you like having more opportunities to share?' Liam says he supposes so. She asks if there's anything she can help him work on. He says, 'I'm still calling out a bit.' She asks what might help, but he's not sure. Ms Rowe empathises, saying, 'I know it's hard being patient when we've got something to say. Even I struggle with that. It's important, though, because we need to allow everyone to contribute. Do you want to try counting to 10 or writing down what you want to say when you feel like calling out? That might help the wait time pass and give you another way to respond. 'I know you're making a good effort to share at the right time and listen when I'm teaching. Let's keep working together on this.'

Ms Rowe calls Liam's mother to let her know how he's doing and check if she has anything to share. His mother says that he's coming home speaking more positively about his day and has mentioned some discussions he's had with his peers. Ms Rowe encourages Liam's mother to be in touch if she has any other feedback or information to share and she'll do the same. She acknowledges the progress Liam has made and thanks his mother for following up with Liam at home.

By involving Liam and his mother in reflecting on the impact of support strategies, Ms Rowe is:

- continuing to build her positive relationship with them
- recognising and reinforcing Liam's progress
- inviting them to share their perspectives.

This collaboration helps Ms Rowe identify what's working well for Liam and adjust the support strategies.



Ongoing monitoring and support

Ms Rowe continues to provide opportunities for the class to respond and actively participate as much as possible, knowing that this supports their learning and also supports Liam, who wants to interact with her and others and share his responses. She knows that she'll still need to support Liam and maintain a positive connection with him while he develops his ability to wait before sharing his thoughts and interacting with others.

Further reading

Australian Education Research Organisation. (2023). *Classroom management resources: User guide*. <https://www.edresearch.edu.au/guides-resources/practice-resources/classroom-management-resources-user-guide>

Australian Education Research Organisation. (2023). *Teaching for how students learn: A model of learning and teaching*. <https://www.edresearch.edu.au/guides-resources/practice-resources/teaching-how-students-learn-model-learning-and-teaching>

Australian Education Research Organisation. (2025). *Collaborating with support networks: Supporting students' diverse needs*. <https://www.edresearch.edu.au/guides-resources/practice-guides/collaborating-support-networks-supporting-diverse-needs>

Australian Education Research Organisation. (2025). *Planning: Supporting students' diverse needs*. <https://www.edresearch.edu.au/guides-resources/practice-guides/planning-supporting-diverse-needs>

Australian Curriculum. (2024). *Personal and social capability*. <https://v9.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/general-capabilities/personal-and-social-capability?element=0&sub-element=PSCSEAA>

Bennett, T. (2020). *Running the room: The teacher's guide to behaviour*. John Catt Educational.

Berman, J., & Graham, L. (2018). *Learning intervention: Educational casework and responsive teaching for sustainable learning*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203711675>

Borgmeier, C., Loman, S., & Strickland-Cohen, K. (2016). *Basic FBA to BIP*. Portland State University. Retrieved September 18, 2025, from <https://basicfba.com/>

Causton, J., & MacLeod, K. (2020). *From behaving to belonging: The inclusive art of supporting students who challenge us*. ASCD.

Center on PBIS. (2020). *Tier 3 brief functional behavior assessment (FBA) guide*. University of Oregon. <https://www.pbis.org/resource/tier-3-brief-functional-behavior-assessment-fba-guide>

Department of Education, Victoria (n.d.). *Positive classroom management strategies: Opportunities to respond (OTR)*. https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/PCMS/SWPBS_PCMS_Placemats_Strategy_6.pdf

Desautels, L. (2024). *Connections over compliance: Rewiring our perceptions of discipline*. Wyatt-MacKenzie Publishing.

Dunlap, G., Iovannone, R., Kincaid, D., Wilson, K., Christiansen, K., & Strain, P. S. (2019). *Prevent-teach-reinforce: The school-based model of individualized positive behavior support* (2nd ed.). Brookes Publishing.

Fuller, A. (2025). *Neuroadvantage: The strengths-based approach to neurodivergence*. Amba Press.

Gunning, C., & Lofthouse, R. (2022). A manifesto for attuned teaching. In W. McGovern, A. Gillespie, & H. Woodhouse (Eds.), *Understanding safeguarding for children and their educational experiences: A guide for students, ECTs and school support staff*. Emerald Publishing.

Hepburn, L., & Telfer, S. (2022). Tier 1 in the classroom: Interventions to support all learners. In K. Barker, S. Poed, & P. Whitefield (Eds.), *School-wide positive behaviour support: The Australian handbook*. Routledge.

Lee, B. (Host). (2025, March 9). The ABCs of effective behaviour management: A practical guide for teachers with Dr. Brandi Simonsen (S03E05) [Audio podcast episode]. In *Knowledge for Teachers Podcast*. <https://knowledgeforteachers.podbean.com/e/s03e05-the-abcs-of-effective-behaviour-management-a-practical-guide-for-teachers-with-dr-brandi-simonsen/>

Little, C. (2020). Principles of behaviour support. In I. Spandagou, C. Little, D. Evans, & M. L. Bonati (Eds.), *Inclusive education in schools and early childhood settings* (pp. 93–101). Springer.

NSW Department of Education. (n.d.). *Support for teachers: Behaviour support toolkit*. Behaviour and Engagement, Schooling. <https://education.nsw.gov.au/schooling/school-community/attendance-behaviour-and-engagement/behaviour-support-toolkit/support-for-teachers>

NSW Department of Education. (2025, July 16). *How can I prepare for difficult conversations?* <https://education.nsw.gov.au/schooling/school-community/attendance-behaviour-and-engagement/behaviour-support-toolkit/support-for-teachers/working-with-parents-and-the-community/how-can-i-prepare-for-difficult-conversations>

Peddie, B., Kelly, M., Greengard, T., Whiting, C., & Richardson, S. (2024). *Foundational classroom management resources handbook*. Australian Education Research Organisation. <https://www.edresearch.edu.au/guides-resources/practice-resources/classroom-management-handbook>

Poed, S. (2024). Behaviour support. In A. Ashman & S. Poed (Eds.), *Education for inclusion and diversity* (7th ed.). Pearson.

Raising Children Network. (2024, March 8). *Effective communication with parents and carers: For professionals working with parents*. <https://raisingchildren.net.au/for-professionals/working-with-parents/about-working-with-parents/communication-with-parents>

Sarra, C., Spillman, D., Jackson, C., Davis, J., & Bray, J. (2020). High-expectations relationships: A foundation for enacting high expectations in all Australian schools. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 49(1). <https://doi.org/10.1017/jie.2018.10>

Swain, N. (Host). (2023, May 24). Practical ways to collect and use student behavioural data with Dr. Russ Fox [Recorded webinar]. On *Think Forward Educators*. <https://thinkforwardeducators.org/meetings-for-members/fox-behaviour-may2023>

Thomas, J., Egeberg, H., Parada, R., Tracey, D., & Martin, K. (2025). *Student engagement: Promoting positive classroom behaviour*. Cambridge University Press.

Thompson, R. (2022). Challenging behaviour in the classroom. In M. Hyde, S. Dole, & K. Tait (Eds.), *Diversity, inclusion and engagement*. Oxford University Press.

Acknowledgements

This practice guide was made possible by the Australian Government Department of Education through the Engaged Classrooms Through Effective Classroom Management Program. AERO would like to acknowledge the contributions of Dr Russ Fox and Associate Professor Erin Leif from Monash University, Dr Lorna Hepburn, Professor Karen Martin from The University of Western Australia and Peter Fittler in developing and reviewing content for this guide. We would also like to thank Dr Tim McDonald, as well as the experts, allied health professionals, education systems, teachers, school leaders and parents and primary caregivers who reviewed and provided feedback on this guide.

Appendix A: Proactive and preventative approaches to creating calm and learning-focused classrooms

Proactive and preventative approaches start with planning and positive early interactions with students. They require time and consistency to develop and involve:

- building teacher–student relationships through respectful interactions and engaging with families to support student learning
- developing and maintaining high expectations for all students, making adjustments as needed and supporting students to achieve them
- being intentional about developing a positive classroom culture by modelling, discussing, explicitly teaching, practising, revising and reinforcing expected behaviours, routines and rules (For relief teachers, familiarise yourself with the class expectations and maintain consistency by reinforcing the established rules and routines.)
- establishing culturally safe, inclusive and predictable learning environments
- actively engaging all students in learning by providing high-quality instruction aligned with how students learn, as outlined in AERO's model of learning and teaching
- using the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education and Personal and Social capability to explicitly teach and support students in practising and using emotional regulation and social skills
- supporting students' diverse needs by understanding and following individual plans, collaborating with students' support networks, and planning and taking action, including supporting their emotional regulation, communication needs, social interactions, sensory differences and physical needs
- teaching and encouraging all students to understand and support each other's strengths and differences
- effectively responding to low-level disengagement and disruption and seeking assistance when behaviours persist or are more serious
- implementing a whole-school approach to strengthen and support individual practice in classrooms, playgrounds and other school spaces and provide practical support for all staff members.

To determine the effectiveness of these proactive and preventative approaches in your teaching and classroom management and identify ways to enhance your practice, consider how students are responding, including those with individual plans and goals. You may want to:

- use behavioural, academic, attendance and wellbeing data, including observations, to identify patterns and critically reflect on practices
- draw on your relationships with students, families and colleagues to gather honest feedback from them by creating opportunities where people feel comfortable sharing their feedback. This might include offering options for anonymous feedback.
- undertake professional learning or reading
- seek support and feedback on practice from colleagues.

These actions can help you engage in reflexive practice to critically examine your own biases, assumptions, values and attitudes and the impact of these on your teaching, relationships with students, staff and families, and classroom management. In turn, this reflexivity can help you apply responsive practices to support all students in achieving learning success.