Positive behaviour support: Classroom organisation

Overview and rationale

Positive relationships underpin all effective classroom management practices.

This resource is the second component in a suite of resources collectively called Positive Behaviour Support – Effective Classroom Practice, which is available through the Universal Resources Hub. It provides classroom teachers with support to:

- set up their classroom and organise classroom materials effectively
- develop and teach classroom procedures and routines
- manage transitions in the classroom.

Classroom organisation is one of the many effective classroom practices which research shows has the greatest positive impact on learning and behaviour. These proactive strategies assist teachers to increase the time available for instruction, and decrease the amount of time spent responding to inappropriate or unwanted behaviour.

Effective classroom management is critical to the provision of a safe and supportive learning environment, and helps build positive relationships. Research has consistently demonstrated the relationship between effective classroom management and both academic achievement, and teacher and student wellbeing.

Target audience and instructions for use

Teachers across all school settings can use this resource to support all students P-12.

When to use/ timeframes: Teachers can use this resource at any time in the year as a stand-alone resource to support them to organise their classroom or as part of the suite of Positive Behaviour Support: Effective Classroom Practice resources. The first resource, positive relationships, underpins all resources in the suite.

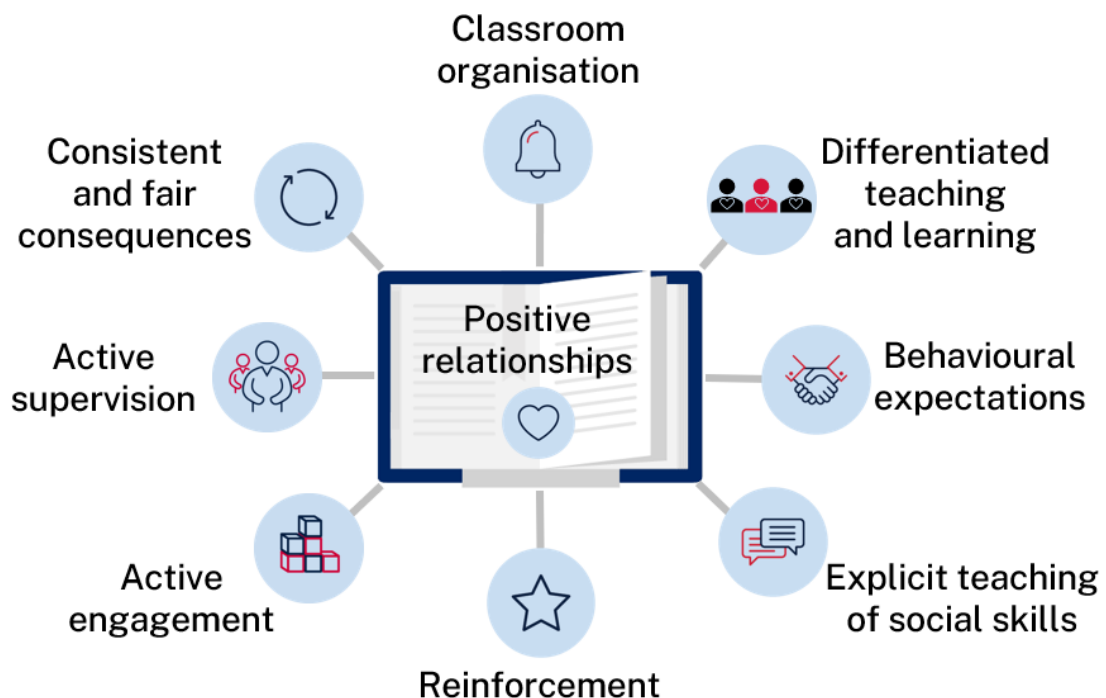This resource will work most effectively when:

- a whole-school framework for behaviour support and student learning and wellbeing is in place

- schoolwide systems are in place for teaching, acknowledging and responding to behaviours
- data-based decision-making is in place to guide implementation
- classroom systems are linked to the schoolwide system of positive behaviour support
- effective pedagogy, including differentiation, is in place in classrooms.

Key components of effective classroom management

The visual below depicts the components of effective classroom management demonstrated by research to reduce rates of inappropriate or unwanted behaviour and increase student engagement with learning. Each component can be broken down into a number of practices, which teachers can utilise to build a positive classroom environment and maximise instructional time.

This resource focuses on classroom organisation. Refer to the separate resources for more information about each of the other eight components.

Classroom organisation

Classroom organisation encompasses the way classrooms are physically set up, as well as the establishment of classroom routines which help to create order and maximise instructional time.
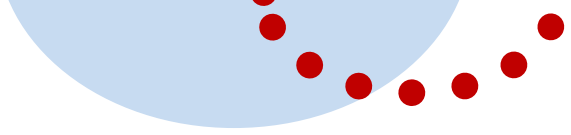
Classroom Setup

The way the classroom space is structured has an effect on student behaviour. The physical arrangement of the classroom obviously varies based on the age of the students and the content being taught. In addition, special events or activities may require the teacher to review the physical seating arrangements throughout the school year. The orderly arrangement of furniture, resources and equipment sets the scene for student engagement with learning.

There is a growing body of evidence that highlights a strong link between a positive classroom environment and student outcomes. A well set up classroom takes into consideration teacher and student movement patterns, access to materials and the ability for students to see presentations and important information. It also ensures that students can see the teacher and that the teacher can see all of the students. Classrooms that are well designed are attractive but are also set up to minimise distractions.

Classroom Management Fundamentals eLearning is available as professional learning and is divided into five modules: setting the scene, positive classroom environments, establishing your practice, active engagement and responding to student behaviour.

Considerations for classroom setup

- Think about the best placement of the teacher's desk – ideally this should be out of the way
- Ensure that there is enough room to walk between desks and to activity stations
- Separate sections of the room for particular activities by use of partitions, signs and strategic placement of furniture
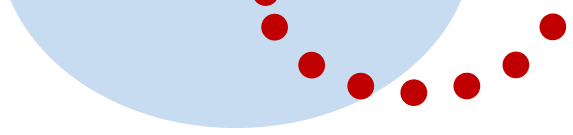- Label equipment and organise resources into boxes or trays

- Display and use a [visual schedule](#) to decrease transition times, decrease inappropriate behaviour, increase on task behaviour, and support adherence to classroom routines;

    o Picture or photograph schedules are the most common types of visual schedule used in schools. For older students the schedule may be a written checklist

    o When introducing a visual schedule for the first time, it is important to teach students what it is and how to use it

    o Individual visual schedules or visual prompts can also be developed for students requiring more intensive support.

- Use visual cues to help students transition between areas and activities (for example, signage about where to leave bags in high school classrooms, carpet squares for where to sit in lower primary classrooms)

- Keep posters and displays relevant and change according to current curriculum focus – avoid over-stimulation by use of too many visuals and displays.

Ways to organise classroom materials effectively

- Label equipment and communal resources

- Ensure student names are on personal items

- Teach students how to organise materials and provide regular time to practise tidying up (even at secondary level)

- Teach students classroom expectations for note keeping and book work

- Provide checklists of required materials for tasks.

Considerations for seating arrangements

- There are pros and cons for different [desk arrangements](#) – as a rule of thumb, change the arrangement to suit the activity.

- Classroom furniture should be arranged for easy traffic flow and supervision.

- Seating plans can be a good idea, but consideration should be given to combinations of students, positioning of individuals and allowing some freedom of choice as the year progresses
- Remember that movement breaks (and brain breaks) are essential for some students, and desirable for all – studies have shown that regular movement breaks and opportunities for physical activity increase academic engagement.

Classroom procedures and routines

Classroom procedures are patterns for accomplishing classroom tasks. Procedures form routines that help the students meet the expectations stated in the rules. Routines must be taught, practised and consistently reinforced to be effective in the classroom. Students who learn to follow routines will become more independent and socially competent, and have a greater sense of security. The ultimate aim of teaching routines is for students to become self- managing, with less and less need for adult prompting and assistance over time.
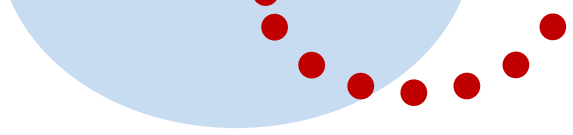
Developing classroom procedures

When developing procedures, keep "Why, what, when, where, who, and how" in mind:

- Why is this procedure needed?
- What is the procedure?
- What are the steps for successful completion of the procedure?
- When will the procedure be taught?
- When will the procedure be practised?
- Where is this procedure needed?
- Who needs to be taught this procedure?
- Who will teach this procedure?
- How will successful use of procedures be recognised?
- How will I support students who require more time to learn the procedure?

Examples of essential classroom routines include:

- getting attention

- entry and exit procedures
- handing in of homework or assignments
- transitioning between activities and/or locations
- going to the toilet
- asking for help
- managing and using equipment
- needing a break
- packing up.

Certain procedures will always be needed to enable the classroom to operate effectively; and such procedures should be taught at the start of the year and revisited as needed. Other procedures will be decided based on scheduling, teacher observation and identification of difficult times or activities.

How to establish classroom procedures

1. Make a list of procedures that would help create structure and predictability in your classroom.
2. Determine the desired outcome.
3. Write the steps students need to do to complete the task.
4. Write the procedure so that it is observable, measurable, positively stated, understandable, and always applicable.
5. Create posters that are in student friendly language to provide staff and students with a visual reminder.
6. Teach directly, practise regularly throughout the year, and recognise students when they follow the procedures.

Teaching classroom procedures

In order for procedures to become routines, they need to be explicitly taught. This should be done by telling, showing and practice, again even at the secondary level.

For example, to teach the lining up before class procedure the teacher would explain why lining up is needed, the steps involved to the students and how you as the teacher want it done for your classes. The teacher would ask a student to demonstrate correct lining up and the teacher
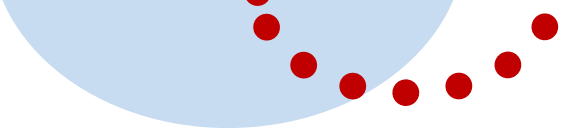
would demonstrate common mistakes: for example, talking; standing too close; or being out of line. Before dismissing the class for lunch, the teacher would remind the students of the expectations for lining up. When the students returned from lunch or for the next lesson, the teacher would monitor lining up and provide acknowledgement for doing a good job. Students not demonstrating correct lining up would receive some additional teaching and practice.

Lining up for class procedure	
Tell Lining up is important so we can get into class quickly, safely and get our work done. We have to line up out of school when we want to buy a ticket or access public transport.	**Practice** • Examples (students) and non-examples (teacher) • Provide pre-correction *'Remember when the bell rings, start to line up straight away behind the yellow line and keep still and quiet until I ask you to enter.'*
Tell & Show Steps 1. First person stands behind the yellow line. 2. Others line up directly behind the person in front. 3. Keep one footstep behind the person in front. 4. Face forward. 5. Keep mouths closed and hands and feet still. 6. Walk into the classroom when the teacher says.	**Monitor & Reinforce** • Acknowledge students for lining up correctly: *'Everyone did a great job of lining up – you were all in a straight line and ready to come in.'* (group) *'Good lining up, Jo – you were really still and quiet. That was very responsible, thanks.'* (individual) • Provide extra teaching and practice if needed *'Jo, I saw some pushing in the line-up today. Remember we need to keep a footstep behind and keep our hands still. Go back and show me good lining up.'*

Attention signal

Gaining student attention at the beginning of a lesson or activity is an essential component of effective classroom classroom management. It is possible to use a visual or auditory cue to indicate to students that they need to stop, look and listen.

The best signals are simple and easy to do without the need for any special equipment. For example, a clapping sequence, a raised hand or standing

in a particular location in the room can all serve as attention signals. Whatever the signal, teachers will need to demonstrate the signal and explain what it signifies. Students will then need to be taught what to do when they see or hear the signal.

Opportunities to practise paying attention on the signal need to be provided; this can be turned into a game with younger students. Teachers need to wait and scan to see who is paying attention and follow up with a low-key reinforcer or reminder.

It is important to know if your students have any sensory responses to loud clapping or noise and adjust as necessary to avoid unnecessary responses.

Transitions

Teaching a procedure for transitions is one of the best ways to maximise learning time; much time can be lost in the course of a school day if transitions are not well organised. Transitions can be managed effectively by:

- being at class before the students arrive
- explicitly teaching, modelling and practising all the required procedures which need to take place during transitions
- clearly communicating when activities will begin and end
- referring to the posted visual schedule, and signalling any changes in advance
- giving specific instructions about how students are to change from one activity to another
- using signals and countdowns
- providing pre-corrections prior to transitions to encourage appropriate behaviour and reduce unwanted behaviour and should be used after expectations have been explicitly taught and practised, followed by acknowledgement for students who demonstrate the appropriate behaviour:
- prompting students during transitions
- reinforcing students for smooth transitions, by use of verbal acknowledgment and class rewards.

Additional information

While this resource provides an explanation and examples of classroom organisation, it is important to remember that becoming an effective classroom teacher involves a thorough understanding of the principles of positive behaviour support. The aim of classroom management is for students to become self-managing, and to create a respectful learning environment where positive relationships are fostered, and individual learning is encouraged.

Becoming an effective classroom teacher also takes self-reflection and deliberate practice. Self-assessment and coaching have been shown to improve implementation of effective classroom practices. Teachers are therefore encouraged to work with colleagues and school leaders to develop and refine classroom management understanding and skills.

Visual schedules

The use of visual schedules has been shown to decrease transition times, decrease unwanted or inappropriate behaviour, increase on task behaviour, and help development of independence. Visual schedules help all students to understand what is going on and the order of events. This can reduce anxiety and support adherence to classroom routines.

Picture or photograph schedules are the most common types of visual schedule used in schools. These typically consist of movable cards depicting daily activities which are mounted on a backing sheet with Velcro or blu-tac. Students can be involved in changing the cards, for example, by removing the card once the activity has finished.
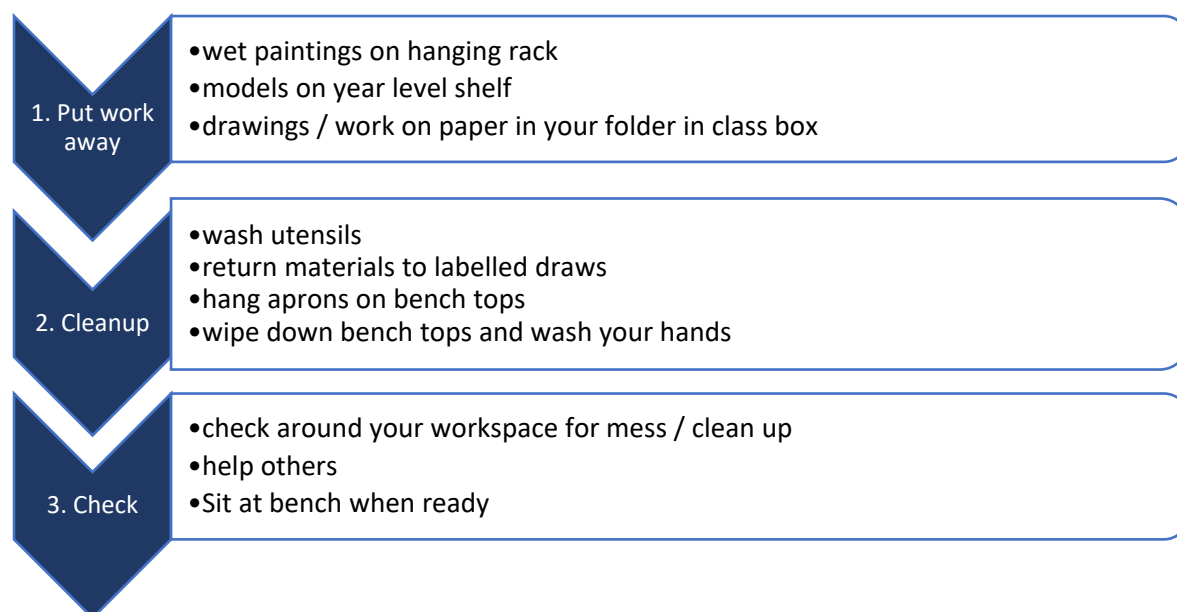
The use of visual schedules can be particularly useful for supporting students with Autism Spectrum Disorder, but are beneficial for all students. Visual schedules can be used in all school settings, for all year levels. Visual schedules for older students may take the form of a written checklist. When introducing a visual schedule for the first time, it is important to teach students what it is and how to use it.

[back]

Example of primary school morning routine schedule

first	next	then
circle time	table work	Play-Doh

Example high school art class packing up schedule

1. Put work away
- wet paintings on hanging rack
- models on year level shelf
- drawings / work on paper in your folder in class box

2. Cleanup
- wash utensils
- return materials to labelled draws
- hang aprons on bench tops
- wipe down bench tops and wash your hands

3. Check
- check around your workspace for mess / clean up
- help others
- Sit at bench when ready

Individual visual schedules or visual prompts can also be developed for students requiring more intensive support.

Desk arrangements

Classroom furniture should be arranged for easy traffic flow and supervision. Different desk arrangements will suit different activities:

Arrangement	Suited to
Rows	• individual work • whole class questioning • focus to the front
Clusters	• group work • cooperative learning • learning stations
U shape	• group discussion • round robin activities • shared reading
Circle	• group discussion • demonstrations

Pre-corrections

A pre-correction is a verbal prompt which is provided prior to known problem times or activities in order to encourage appropriate behaviour and reduce problem behaviour. Pre-corrects should be used after expectations have been explicitly taught and practised.

A pre-correct tells the students what to do and how to do it, by using the previously taught classroom rules. Pre- corrects should be followed by acknowledgement for students who demonstrate the appropriate behaviour.

Examples of pre-corrects

Identified issue	Pre-correction
Students playing too roughly in playground	"You are going out to play. Remember to be safe by playing by the rules and keeping bodies calm."
Too noisy when going to reading groups	"In a moment we are going to reading groups. We are going to walk quietly, keeping our mouths closed."
Students packing up too early	"There is still 5 minutes to go. Remember to keep working until I tell you to pack up."
Students calling out during class discussion	"Remember our class discussion rules. Hand up to speak, show respect by listening to others and wait to be called on."

[back]

NSW
GOVERNMENT

Alignment and identified need

System priorities and/or needs

This resource aligns with:

- the Student Behaviour Strategy
- the Inclusive, Engaging and Respectful Schools policies
- the New South Wales Department of Education's strategic outcomes of improving academic achievement and wellbeing.

School Excellence Framework

- Learning – Learning culture, wellbeing, curriculum, assessment
- Teaching – effective classroom practice

Relevant frameworks

- Disability Standards for Education 2005
- Australian Professional Standards for Teachers
    - Standard 1: 1.2 and 1.6
    - Standard 3: 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5
    - Standard 4: 1, 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4
    - Standard 6: 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4
- NSW Wellbeing Framework for schools – behaviour, discipline and character education.

Existing resources

- Behaviour Support Toolkit
- Behaviour Professional eLearning:
    - Classroom management fundamentals
    - Understanding Behaviour
    - Understanding behaviour support planning
    - Introduction to Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL)
    - PBL Tier 1 School-wide support
    - PBL Tier 1 Classroom support.
- Inclusive Practice hub

- CESE:
  - [Classroom Management: Creating and maintaining positive learning environments](#)
  - [Classroom Management: Maintaining positive learning environments](#)
  - [What works best 2020](#)

Consultation

Materials adapted with permission from the Guide to Effective Classroom Management (Queensland Department of Education).
Reviewed by: Behaviour Services, Behaviour and Student Participation, Delivery Support, Student Support and Specialist Programs

Last updated: October 2022

Review date: February 2023

Feedback: studentbehaviour@det.nsw.edu.au

Evidence base
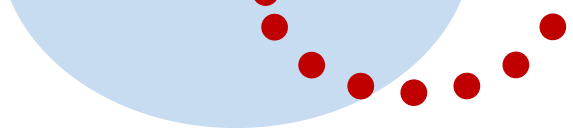
Research has consistently demonstrated:

- the importance of effective classroom management as a component of effective teaching
- the relationship between effective classroom management and teacher self-efficacy and wellbeing
- and the positive outcomes associated with a small number of specific classroom management practices.

Allen, G., Common, E., Germer, C., Lane, K., Buckman, M., Oakes, W., & Menzies, H. (2020). A systematic review of the evidence base for active supervision in Pre-K-12 settings. *Behavioral Disorders*, 45(3), 167-183.

Ashman, A. (2019). Education for Inclusion and Diversity (6th Ed.). Pearson.

Barker, K., Poed, S., and Whitefield, P. (Eds.). (2022). School-wide positive behaviour support: The Australian handbook. Taylor and Francis, New York.

Ennis, R., Lane, K., Menzies, H., & Owens, P. (2018). Precorrection: An effective, efficient , low-intensity strategy to support student success. *Beyond Behavior*, 27(3), 146-152.

Galkiene, A., & Monkeviciene, O. (Eds.). (2021). Improving Inclusive Education through Universal Design for Learning. Springer Nature.

Haydon, T., Hunter, W., & Scott, T. (2019). Active supervision: Preventing behavioral problems before they occur. *Beyond Behavior*, 28(1), 29-35.

Howell, M., Dounavi, K., & Storey, C. (2019). To choose or not to choose?: A systematic literature review considering the effects of antecedent and consequence choice upon on-task and problem behaviour. Review Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, (6), 63-84.

Hulac, D., & Briesch, A. (2017). Evidence-based strategies for effective classroom management. Guilford Publications.

Marzano, R., Marzano, J., & Pickering, D. (2003). Classroom management that works: Research-based strategies for every teacher. Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development: Alexandria, VA.

Strnadová, I., Dowse, L., Danker, J., & Tso, M. (2020). A review and synthesis of educational supports for students with disability: Evidence based practices in Australia. Summary review. UNSW Sydney.