

DIFFICULT BEHAVIORS IN THE CLASSROOM

1. BEHAVIOR:

Rambling -- wandering around and off the subject. Using far-fetched examples or analogies.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- Refocus attention by relating relevant point.
- Direct questions to group that is back on the subject.
- Ask how topic relates to current topic being discussed.
- Use visual aids, begin to write on board, turn on overhead projector.
- Say: "Would you summarize your main point please?" or "Are you asking...?"

2. BEHAVIOR:

Shyness or Silence -- lack of participation.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- Change teaching strategies from group discussion to individual written exercises or a videotape.
- Give strong positive reinforcement for any contribution.
- Involve directly asking him/her a question
- Make eye contact.
- Appoint to be small group leader.

3. BEHAVIOR:

Talkativeness -- knowing everything, manipulation, chronic whining.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- Acknowledge comments made.
- Give limited time to express viewpoint or feelings, and then move on.
- Make eye contact with another participant and move toward that person.
- Give the person individual attention during breaks.
- Say: "That's an interesting point. Now let's see what other people think."

4. BEHAVIOR:

Sharpshooting -- trying to shoot you down or trip you up.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- Admit that you do not know the answer and redirect the question to the group or the individual who asked it.

- Acknowledge that this is a joint learning experience.
- Ignore the behavior.

5. BEHAVIOR:

Heckling/Arguing -- disagreeing with everything you say; making personal attacks.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- Redirect questions to group or supportive individuals.
- Recognize participant's feelings and move on.
- Acknowledge positive points.
- Say: "I appreciate your comments, but I'd like to hear from others," or "It looks like we disagree."

6. BEHAVIOR:

Grandstanding -- getting caught up in one's own agenda or thoughts to the detriment of other learners.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- Say: "You are entitled to your opinion, belief or feelings, but now it's time we moved on to the next subject," or "Can you restate that as a question?" or "We'd like to hear more about that if there is time after the presentation."

7. BEHAVIOR:

Overt Hostility/Resistance -- angry, belligerent, combative behavior.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- Hostility can be a mask for fear. Reframe hostility as fear to depersonalize it.
- Respond to fear, not hostility.
- Remain calm and polite. Keep your temper in check.
- Don't disagree, but build on or around what has been said.
- Move closer to the hostile person, maintain eye contact.
- Always allow him or her way to gracefully retreat from the confrontation.
- Say: "You seem really angry. Does anyone else feel this way? Solicit peer pressure.
- Do not accept the premise or underlying assumption, if it is false or prejudicial, e.g., "If by "queer" you mean homosexual..."
- Allow individual to solve the problem being addressed. He or she may not be able to offer solutions and will sometimes undermine his or her own position.
- Ignore behavior.
- Talk to him or her privately during a break.
- As a last resort, privately ask the individual to leave class for the good of the group.

8. BEHAVIOR:

Griping -- may be legitimate complaining.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- Point out that we can't change policy here.
- Validate his/her point.
- Indicate you'll discuss the problem with the participant privately.
- Indicate time pressure.

9. BEHAVIOR:

Side Conversations -- may be related to subject or personal. Distracts group members and you.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- Don't embarrass talkers.
- Ask their opinion on topic being discussed.
- Ask talkers if they would like to share their ideas.
- Casually move toward those talking.
- Make eye contact with them.
- Comment on the group (but don't look at them "one-at-a-time").
- Standing near the talkers, ask a nearby participant a question so that the new discussion is near the talkers.
- As a last resort, stop and wait.

KEYS FOR MANAGING CHALLENGING STUDENT BEHAVIORS

- Instead of holding your students with an iron grip, allow them to be themselves until (and unless) their behavior distracts you or others in the class.
- When you notice unproductive behavior, nip it in the bud. Otherwise, you send a clear message to the students that it's OK for them to talk while you are talking, etc.
- Use classroom management techniques before you become irritated, impatient or upset. We are much more powerful when we are centered, when we like our students, and when we view our students with fondness rather than impatience.
- Allow students to save face. When we put students down in front of others, the entire class will turn against us.
- Do all you can to feel good about yourself and others on a daily basis? Your attitude will come across to your students, so it is important to be in good mental and physical shape.
- If, by chance, you feel that you have spoken sharply in an attempt to manage your students, own up to it. "Wow, that sounded harsh. Forgive me!"
- Remind yourself: "If teaching were easy, everyone would be doing it." Teaching in front of a classroom full of students can be challenging, but on the other hand, very rewarding!"