

Positive Parenting of Primary Schoolers

Behaviour at School

Behaviour problems at school can interfere with children's learning and development. Sometimes parents are not aware of a behaviour problem until something serious happens. This can make it hard for parents to know what to do. However, parents can help resolve a school behaviour problem by working closely with their child and their child's teacher. This tip sheet gives some suggestions to help you work with your child's teacher to teach your child to behave well at school and follow school rules.

What Are Common School Behaviour Problems?

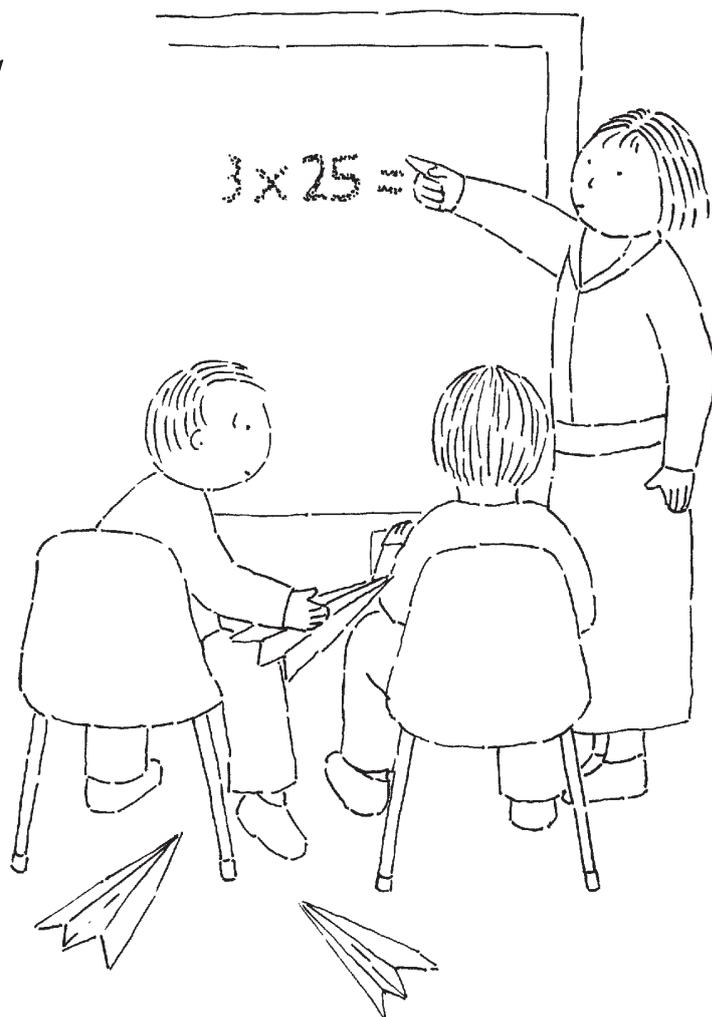
Problems that may concern teachers and parents include:

- Not following the teacher's instructions.
- Distracting other children who are working.
- Swinging on chairs.
- Calling out.
- Wandering in the classroom.
- Not finishing set work.
- Not paying attention.
- Getting into fights.

Why Do Children Misbehave at School?

All schools and classrooms have set rules and expectations for children's behaviour. However, misbehaviour may result from a child not knowing or understanding what the classroom rules are. The rules may not be clear or may be too difficult for the child to follow. Problem behaviour can also occur if there are no consequences for breaking the rules, or if the consequences for misbehaviour are different from day to day.

Sometimes children are accidentally rewarded for misbehaviour. If a child gets lots of laughter and attention from other students, or they can avoid doing their work, the misbehaviour is likely to continue. In busy classrooms, teachers can fall into the trap of ignoring good behaviour and only paying attention to a child when they misbehave. If this happens, misbehaviour increases and good behaviour decreases. Misbehaviour can also be learned from watching others. If children see others misbehaving and getting attention, they are more likely to do the same thing.



Misbehaviour at school can be a sign that a child is having difficulties coping with their school work. Disruptive behaviour in the classroom can arise when a child who lacks the ability or the confidence to do the work tries to avoid tasks set by the teacher. Children who find the work too easy can also become bored and disruptive. If you suspect your child is having learning difficulties, or is bored with work that is too easy for them, seek professional advice and an educational assessment.

How To Manage School Behaviour Problems

Talk to Your Child About the Problem

Ask your child about any problems at school. Try to get your child's view of the problem before talking to the teacher. Do not lecture or nag your child about their behaviour. Instead, ask your child for their ideas on how to solve the problem.

Ask the Teacher About the Problem

Make an appointment to speak to your child's teacher. Ask the teacher to describe exactly what your child is doing that is causing concern. Try to understand the problem from the teacher's point of view.

Share Information with the Teacher

Tell the teacher about any similar problems you may have with your child. Let the teacher know how you manage the problem at home. This can help the teacher to understand your child.

Ask for the Teacher's Opinion

Ask the teacher to share their ideas on how to solve the problem. Some teachers will make specific suggestions about things you can do to help. Common suggestions include supervising homework and making sure your child brings to school everything needed for the day's activities.

Act on Useful Suggestions

Incorporate the teacher's suggestions with your child's and your own ideas to develop a plan of action. Put the plan into practice. Discuss your child's progress with the teacher at the end of a week.

How To Set Up a Home-School Program

Plan a Program with the Teacher

If your concerns continue, you could suggest a home-school program that allows you and the teacher to work together to manage your child's behaviour. With the teacher, set up a school behaviour diary (see below).

Example School Behaviour Diary

Date: March 15

Classroom goals	Possible Points	9.00 a.m. - 10.30 a.m.	10.45 a.m. - 12.30 p.m.	1.15 p.m. - 3.00 p.m.
Begin set work straight away	2	2	1	1
Put hand up to speak	2	2	2	2
Work quietly	4	2	3	3
Do as teacher asks	4	3	4	3

Goal for Reward: 25

Comments: Jacqui did an excellent job remembering to raise her hand when she wanted to speak. For tomorrow she needs to practise working quietly when she is given a task to do.

Teacher's signature: _____

Parent's signature: _____

Ask the teacher to explain what rules your child is expected to follow in class. For example, a Grade 4 student might be expected to begin set work straight away, put up their hand if they want to speak, work quietly and write down their homework for that day.

Break the school day into several time periods, such as before recess, before lunch and to the end of school. Playground time can also be included if problems occur outside of class. Write down the rules your child needs to follow. The teacher can give points for each rule your child follows during each period of the day. The teacher can also use the diary to write positive comments about your child's efforts or behaviour during that day. Your child is to take the diary home each day for you to sign and return it to the teacher the next day. To avoid discouraging your child, you or the teacher should not make negative or critical comments in the diary or take away points that your child has earned.

Explain the Program to Your Child

Let your child know how the school behaviour diary will work. Make sure your child knows they need to take the diary to school and bring it home each day.

Talk About Rewards

Set a goal for the number of points to be earned each day. Decide on a daily reward for when your child reaches their goal. You may like to have another reward at the end of the week. Daily rewards could include having a favourite dessert, staying up an extra thirty minutes or playing a special game with Mum or Dad. Weekly rewards could include having a friend sleep over or choosing a video to hire.

Talk About Consequences

Explain what will happen if your child does not reach their goal, or does not have their diary with them for you to check. Decide on consequences which involve a loss of privileges, such as no television that night.

Start the Program

Each day, praise your child for following the rules at school, check the points earned, sign the diary and make sure it is taken to school the next day. Give the rewards and consequences as agreed.

Review Progress with the Teacher

After one week, meet with the teacher to check your child's progress. Make any necessary changes. Thank the teacher for their efforts—*I'm glad we were able to work together on this problem*. Talk about phasing out the program.

How To Phase Out the Program

When your child has reached their goal for five days, make the rewards harder to achieve. Start by only giving rewards when your child has reached their goal for two days in a row. When this goal is achieved, increase to three days, then a whole week before your child can get the reward. Remember to continue to praise your child each day for behaving well at school.

Once your child's behaviour has improved, you can phase out the school behaviour diary by sending the diary to school every second day, then once a week, and then not at all. Telephone the teacher at least twice to make sure that your child's behaviour continues to be satisfactory.

If your child's behaviour worsens, simply go back one step and try again. For example, use the diary every day or give the rewards more often until your child has success. Then start to phase out the program again.

Points To Remember

Develop a partnership with your child's teacher. State your concerns about your child's behaviour clearly and calmly to the teacher. Since many factors influence your child's behaviour, it is not helpful to blame the school, teacher, yourself or your child for the problem. Focus on what you can do to resolve the problem rather than what caused it.

Key Steps

- Talk to your child about the problem.
- Ask the teacher about your child's difficult behaviour at school.
- Tell the teacher how you manage your child's behaviour at home.
- Ask for the teacher's opinion.
- Try out useful suggestions.
- Plan a home-school program with the teacher.
- Explain the program to your child.
- Review progress with the teacher after one week.
- Gradually phase out the program.

See the booklet 'Positive Parenting' for more information. If you have any questions or have tried these strategies and are concerned about your child's progress, contact the centre where you were given this tip sheet.



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Published by the Victorian Parenting Centre 2005.
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Code: PPT4002