

# **Teaching with Purpose:** **Responsive Practice for All Learners**

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ENBI  
agency

## 4. Response:

# Managing Behaviour When Things Go Wrong



Young coworkers sitting at desk with documents Wayhomestudio on freepik

***"Every behaviour tells a story."***

– Fred Rogers

***When a student stops engaging,  
they are trying to tell you something is wrong.***



04.

## **Case Studies & Approaches**

# Case Study 1: Persistent low-level disruption

**Context:** Teen EFL class (ages 14-16). One student constantly makes humorous side comments in Greek, continuously disrupting the lesson.

## ***What the teacher notices:***

- Comments appear during low-structure moments.
- Student checks peer reactions before speaking
- Laughter reinforces the behaviour

## ***Risk:***

- Disruption becoming normalized
- Teacher authority slowly eroding.

# Case Study 1: Persistent low-level disruption

## **Frivolous** Approach:

### **Response A (Common):**

- Public reprimand
- Sarcastic tone (“Very funny. Can we focus?”)

### **Response A leads to:**

- Increased peer attention
- Behaviour escalation

# Case Study 1: Persistent low-level disruption

## Strategic Approach:

### Response B (Professional):

- Silent proximity
- Brief task redirection
- No public naming or commentary

### Response B leads to:

- Behaviour fades
- Lesson continuity

# Case Study 1: Persistent low-level disruption

## Reflective Question:

At what moment could the teacher have intervened *earlier* to prevent this becoming public?

## Possible professional answers:

- Prioritise de-escalation over correction
- Remove the audience or reward maintaining the behaviour
- Address the behaviour privately rather than publicly
- Focus on restoring learning conditions, not winning compliance



## Case Study 2: Refusal to participate

**Context:** Secondary classroom (ages 15-17). One student keeps their books closed, avoids eye contact, and remains silent.

### ***What the teacher notices:***

- Passive resistance, no verbal disruption
- Behaviour begins after giving instructions
- Student stiffens when addressed publicly

### ***Risk:***

- Public power struggle
- Student disengagement becoming identity-based



## Case Study 2: Refusal to participate

### Frivolous Approach:

#### Response A (Common):

- “You must do this now.”  
(public demand)

#### Response A leads to:

- Open defiance or shutdown

# Case Study 2: Refusal to participate

## Strategic Approach:

### Response B (Professional):

- Quiet, private choice-based instruction:  
“You can follow silently or join in next round.”

### Response B leads to:

- Compliance without loss of face

## Case Study 2: Refusal to participate

### Reflective Question:

How could we properly address the student so that they participate, or at least to avoid escalation?

### Possible professional answers:

- Identify the function of the attitude in this situation (attention, escape, peer approval)
- Choose a response that reduces escalation specific to this context
- Delay correction if immediate intervention would reward the attitude

## Case Study 3: Emotional reaction to correction

**Context:** Mixed-ability class. Teacher corrects a student's answer publicly. The student reacts with raised voice and defensive language.

### ***What the teacher notices:***

- Sudden emotional shift
- Class attention locks onto the exchange
- Student language becomes personal

### ***Risk:***

- Emotional contagion
- Teacher–student confrontation

# Case Study 3: Emotional reaction to correction

## Frivolous Approach:

### Response A (Common):

- Insisting on public correction
- Ignoring completely

### Response A leads to:

- Student is already on edge. Any of the above will lead to further aggravation.

# Case Study 3: Emotional reaction to correction

## Strategic Approach:

### Response B (Professional):

- Lower voice
- Minimal language
- Clear boundary
- Delayed conversation e.g. “We’ll talk after the task.”

### Response B leads to:

- Behaviour fades
- Lesson continuity

# Case Study 3: Emotional reaction to correction

## Reflective Question:

In this moment, is it my priority to correct behaviour immediately, or to prevent escalation?

## Possible professional answers:

- Preventing escalation is the priority if emotions are rising
- Immediate correction may worsen the situation by increasing stress or resistance
- A short pause or redirection can stabilise the class before addressing behaviour
- Decisions should be based on observable cues, not assumptions about intent



## Case Study 4: Perceived unfairness after reprimand

**Context:** Upper secondary class (ages 16–17). After being asked to stop talking during a listening task, a student reacts emotionally. They say, “You always scold me. Others talk too, but you only tell **me** off.” The comment is made loudly enough for classmates to hear.

### ***What the teacher notices:***

- Emotional tone (raised voice, frustration)
- Language of generalisation (“always”, “only me”)
- Peer attention shifts to the exchange
- **The issue moves from behaviour to perceived fairness**

## Case Study 4: Perceived unfairness after reprimand

### ***Risk:***

- Public debate about fairness
- Teacher authority reframed as personal bias
- Escalation through emotional validation-seeking

### ***Common reaction (that escalates):***

- Defending oneself publicly
- Listing past incidents or other students' behaviour
- Minimising the student's feelings

# Case Study 4: Perceived unfairness after reprimand

## Professional response:

- Acknowledge feelings without validating the claim
- Refocus attention to lesson
- Postpone discussion to a private moment



## Case Study 4: Perceived unfairness after reprimand

### Reflective Question:

How can I acknowledge this student's feelings without turning the moment into a public trial of my fairness?

### Possible professional answers:

- Acknowledge emotion (“I can see you’re upset”) without agreeing with the accusation
- Avoid comparisons with other students in public
- Restate the expectation neutrally and move on
- Offer a private conversation later to preserve dignity and lesson flow

## Case Study 5: Passive defiance and phone usage

**Context:** Upper secondary EFL class (ages 15–16). During a lesson, three students at the back disengage. One scrolls on their phone under the desk, the other two whisper, laugh quietly, and avoid eye contact with the teacher.

### ***What the teacher notices:***

- No materials open
- Minimal or no participation when prompted
- Smirking and whispered side comments
- Body language signalling withdrawal

# Case Study 5: Passive defiance and phone usage

## ***Risks:***

- Silent spread of disengagement
- Undermining lesson momentum
- Normalisation of dismissive behaviour

## ***Common reaction (that escalates):***

- Public reprimand ("Phones away now")
- Sarcastic comments
- Power struggle that rewards defiance

# Case Study 5: Passive defiance and phone usage

## Strategic Approach:

### Response (Professional):

- Non-verbal proximity
- Quiet, private instruction or choice:  
"Join the task or we'll change seats"
- Reset expectations without naming individuals publicly

### Response leads to:

- Behaviour fade
- Lesson continuity

# Case Study 5: Passive defiance and phone usage

## Reflective Question:

Is this behaviour seeking power, attention, or escape?  
How can I remove the reward without escalating?

## Possible professional answers:

- Identify the function of the behaviour in this situation (attention, escape, peer approval)
- Choose a response that reduces escalation specific to this context
- Delay correction if immediate intervention would reward the behaviour



## Case Study 6: Bullying in the classroom

**Context:** One student verbally intimidates another during lesson. Peers observe silently.

### ***What the teacher notices:***

- Targeted student withdraws: becomes visibly distressed.
- Others avoid eye contact or freeze.
- Power imbalance is evident

### ***Risk:***

- Normalisation of harm
- Loss of psychological safety
- Message that bullying is tolerated

### ***IMMEDIATE PRIORITY:***

- Stop the behaviour
- Protect the targeted student
- Restore safety

## Case Study 6: Bullying in the classroom

### Reflective Question:

What action must I immediately take to protect safety and dignity, even if it disrupts the lesson?

### Possible professional answers:

- Stopping the behaviour takes precedence over lesson flow
- Clear, public boundary-setting is necessary in this case
- Separation of students may be required to restore safety
- Follow-up and documentation are part of the professional response, not optional

Cases 7-12 (Workshop)	What's the Problem (Function)	Effective Response (In the Moment)	What to Avoid
<b>7. Silent Group</b>	Collective withdrawal due to high response risk / unclear entry point	Lower the barrier: "Type one word in the chat." → build up to speaking	Repeating the same question; "Anyone?"; random cold-calling without prep
<b>8. Challenger</b>	Public challenge (power, audience, control)	Contain + delay: "We'll come back to that. Stay with the task."	Arguing; justifying the lesson; ignoring completely
<b>9. Over-Participant</b>	Imbalance of participation; others withdrawing	Redistribute airtime: "Let's hear from someone new." + add roles/turn limits	Shutting student down; over-praising one voice; ignoring imbalance
<b>10. Emotional Exit</b>	Overwhelm / frustration → withdrawal	Reduce pressure: "Take a minute: join when ready."	Public confrontation; forcing participation; "What's wrong with you?"
<b>11. Peer Laughter</b>	Micro-bullying; loss of psychological safety	Set boundary + restore: "We keep this a safe space. Go on."	Ignoring; shaming publicly; long moral lecture
<b>12. Compliance Mask</b>	Passive engagement; low cognitive demand	Increase thinking: "Add a reason/example." / "Change your answer."	Accepting minimal answers; equating silence with success

# Why haven't we stopped teaching?

- We love our profession
- We care about our students
- We thrive with their success
- Our role as educators is a fundamental element of society



# References

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# RESOURCES

## PHOTOS

- Child suffering at school for getting bullied by @Freepik
- Young man using a book as an umbrella by @pressfoto
- Handsome nerd by @gpointstudio
- Fish-eye shot of distressed, annoyed and pissed-off man clenching hands angry staring with clenched teeth, frowning bothered, sit at office desk by @cookie\_studio
- Crazy and drunk businessman giving a punch by @luis\_Molinero
- Social Networks icon by @freepik
- Picture showing children violence at school by @gpointstudio
- Editor checking words on journal article before publish @rawpixel.com
- A tired student is studying using a laptop male student studying online by @pvproductions
- Portrait of boy child showing finger behind his head and teasing against white background by @freepik
- Teacher with elbow on stack on books by @freepik

# THANKS

**Do you have any questions?**

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