



INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this book is to provide you with a resource for handling student misbehavior. It presents a complete step-by-step approach to changing inappropriate student behavior to appropriate behavior. It takes the guesswork out of your treatment of discipline problems by offering specific techniques for dealing with various misbehaviors. And it provides a guarantee for the professional handling of student behaviors.

Often, our handling of discipline problems is a reaction to the student's behavior, with little or no thought to whether our reaction is good for the student, other students, or the learning situation in the classroom. Our language concerning discipline problems is often jargon that is not really understood by all teachers, administrators, counselors, or parents. Likewise, we often attempt to handle problem behavior alone. In many cases, our handling of discipline problems may not be considered professionally responsible by colleagues, administrators, or parents.

There are three variables in every discipline situation: the teacher, the problem student, and the rest of the students in the class. The only variable a teacher can control is himself or herself. If the teacher is out of control, the situation is out of control. The discipline model contained in this book will help you understand how to handle discipline concerns effectively, keep yourself in control of the situation, and teach students self-discipline.

The discipline model offers a complete step-by-step guide to many options for handling 124 student behaviors. The model is designed to enable you, your colleagues, counselors, administrators, and the rest of the school team to work together for an effective solution to student problems. It will give you assurance that everyone is working from the same firm foundation toward the solution of discipline problems.

Using the Model

Before you can begin trying to change a student behavior, you simply must properly identify that behavior. The identification must be specific and accurate. For example, the student who talks excessively is different from the student who blurts out during class. Therefore, the first step in selecting the proper techniques is identifying the behavior and its characteristics.

Please note: The names of the behaviors are *not* labels for students. They are simply descriptions of the behaviors and are provided to facilitate identification, cross-reference, and an understanding of how to handle discipline concerns effectively, stay in control of the situation, and teach students self-discipline. The techniques apply to all levels of student behavior: first-time, occasional, and habitual. You must rely on your knowledge of the student to decide which techniques you want to use each time you counsel him or her. Remember, a student may not change the first time you talk with him or her. Therefore, plan your strategy for reinforcement and follow-up sessions.

I. BEHAVIOR: Specific attitudes and actions of this child at home and/or at school. Study the specific student characteristics listed in this section. Does the student exhibit the characteristics listed? It may be helpful to check the “behavior” section of related behavior types listed in the “see also” section at the end of each behavior type.

Pinpointing the student’s observed or expressed behavior is vital because it identifies the exact characteristics of the behavior. It helps you avoid generalizing and enables you to zero in on the behavior you want to change. It also helps in describing the specific problem behavior to the student, colleagues, and parents.

II. EFFECTS: How the behavior affects teachers, classmates, and parents in the school learning environment and the home family situation. Understanding the effects of the behavior is another vital part of your preparation to deal with that behavior. It is important to be able to point out how the behavior actually affects the teacher, classmates, and/or the learning environment in the classroom. Failure to correctly identify the effects of the specific misbehavior will rob you of the vision necessary to see the adjustments you will have to make to get the student to change the behavior.

In the school, there are three distinct areas that any misbehavior may affect in addition to the student: the teacher, other students, and the learning environment. It’s possible that the behavior affects all these areas. To suggest any solution without first identifying all the effects of the behavior is useless. If you first take time to closely observe the effects of the behavior in question, you’ll find it much easier to plan and pursue workable solutions to bring about positive and constructive change.

It should be noted that often a student’s behavior affects only the teacher. Clearly, if the student’s behavior prevents the teacher from teaching, then some changes in the behavior are necessary. However, recognizing that the behavior is affecting only the teacher prevents such negative teacher actions as making a student feel guilty by saying he or she is bothering the rest of the class.

III. ACTION: Identifying causes of misbehavior; pinpointing student needs being revealed; and employing specific methods, procedures, and techniques at school and at home for getting the child to modify or change his or her behavior. In this section, consideration is given to the primary cause of the misbehavior, primary and secondary needs being revealed, and specific suggestions for handling the misbehavior.

1. Primary Cause of Misbehavior. The good student is good for a reason. Likewise, the student demonstrating inappropriate behavior is misbehaving for a reason. The fact is that all behavior has purpose. This is the primary reason we can’t lump all discipline problems under one label and treat them the same. It won’t work. The bully does not have the same motivation for misbehavior as the class clown. The student who habitually arrives late is different from the student who talks back to a teacher.

In maintaining a professional approach to changing unacceptable behavior to acceptable behavior, we must never forget that the *first* step to a solution lies in discovering the purpose of the misbehavior. We cannot treat any misbehavior effectively until we know the reasons for it.

To say that there are only four reasons for misbehavior would be untrue. However, the vast majority of misbehavior arises from four causes: lack of attention, lack of power, desire for revenge, and lack of self-

confidence. If we could learn to handle misbehavior resulting from these four causes, the vast majority of our classroom discipline problems would be resolved. For this reason, they receive special attention in the discipline model. Briefly explained, they are these:

- **Attention:** Most students gain attention in school through normal channels. However, for some students, misbehavior is the only source of attention. Most commonly, these students are the ones who speak out without permission, arrive late for class, or make strange noises that divert class and teacher attention. Some students will even tell us all the bad things they have done. They are all misbehaving in an attempt to gain attention.

- **Power:** The need for power is expressed by open dissent and refusal to follow rules. Remember, some students often *feel defeated* if they do as they are told. Most commonly, we know these students as those who defy authority, break rules, or bully others. They truly feel that *lack of power* lies behind all their woes, and that more power would be the answer to all their problems. If they had more power, they believe, they would be telling teachers what to do rather than vice versa.

- **Revenge:** Some students find their place by being hated. *Failure has made them give up trying for attention and power.* Unfortunately, they find personal satisfaction in being mean, vicious, and violent. They will seek revenge against teachers and classmates in any way they can. They are the students who write on desks, beat up classmates, threaten younger students, break windows, and write on restroom walls. The reason for their misbehavior is the desire for revenge.

- **Self-Confidence:** Students who lack self-confidence honestly *expect* failure. They do not feel they have the ability to function in the classroom—but may feel completely adequate outside school. They frustrate us as teachers because they are often capable of handling their studies successfully. We are angered because we feel their behavior is a cop-out. It is—except they really *believe* they can't win in school. These students use inability—real or assumed—to escape participation. When they are supposed to be studying, they play and talk to others. Then they make excuses such as “I couldn't do it” or “I'm dumb.” Their misbehavior results from a lack of self-confidence.



THE AGITATOR

I. BEHAVIOR: Specific attitudes and actions of this child at home and/or at school.

1. Tries to cause trouble—and appears delighted with it.
2. Gets others to do or say what he/she would not do or say.
3. Uproots old controversies, cries “unjust,” incites hostilities, and causes as much trouble as possible.
4. Tries to appear as an innocent bystander in any trouble he/she causes.
5. May act upset, stir others to rebelliousness, and then walk away when the disturbance is about to take place.
6. Usually gets other students into trouble more often than he/she gets into trouble. Typically does not get *openly* and *publicly* involved, but operates from the sidelines.
7. At home, hits, pushes, and trips siblings when out of parents’ sight—then says the brother or sister “started it” if problems result.
8. Starts rumors to create turmoil.
9. Plays other people against one another, including teacher against teacher, parent against parent, students against classmates.
10. Often provokes physical confrontations between other people.
11. Consistently acts immature and irresponsible.
12. Tattles on others.
13. Seeks attention from others.
14. Appears to operate without loyalties, even to those regarded as friends.

II. EFFECTS: How behavior affects teachers, classmates, and parents in the school learning environment and the home family situation.

1. Others are influenced to do or say what the agitator would not do or say himself/herself.
2. Learning experience in the classroom is seriously disrupted because this student’s activities distract classmates and teacher alike from the work or discussion at hand.
3. Social experience of students in the halls, cafeteria, etc., becomes negative.
4. At times, others are led to admire this student’s sly and manipulative behavior. Therefore, he/she is a hero to some.
5. Teacher can easily start to feel threatened and may fear losing control of the class.
6. Classmates can begin to feel as if they might be able to get away with similar behavior.
7. Class may be in a continual or almost continual uproar regarding some issue.
8. Teacher influence and credibility may be reduced.
9. Teacher may lose self-control.
10. Teacher may feel inadequate. As a result, he/she can become tense and transmit this tension to the agitating student and other students.

III. ACTION: • Identify causes of misbehavior. • Pinpoint student needs being revealed.

• Employ specific methods, procedures, and techniques at school and at home for getting the child to modify or change his/her behavior.

1. Primary cause of misbehavior:
 - ◆ Power: The need for power is expressed by creating situations that demonstrate this student's ability to be in control.
2. Primary needs being revealed:
 - ◆ Hunger, Thirst, Rest: Lack of food and rest may be a form of abuse and should be investigated.
 - ◆ Sex/Sexuality: Because of past experiences, this person may find it very difficult to establish any positive relationships.
 - ◆ Escape from Pain: This student protects himself/herself by the use of power to cover his/her pain.
3. Secondary needs being revealed:
 - ◆ Aggression: This student has a need to control and should be helped to find ways to assert himself/herself positively.
 - ◆ Inquisitiveness: This student may have a strong need to know what's going on. He/she wants to know the *why* behind what we're doing and what's going on.
 - ◆ Power, Status: This student may be trying to achieve through agitation.
4. Remember that the agitator's biggest fear is exposure; basically he/she is a pretender as well as a coward. The agitator cannot accept the full and open responsibility of a leadership position, but needs others to fulfill his/her needs.
5. Identify the agitator through these two behaviors: First, he/she is always present when there is trouble—but appears to be an innocent bystander. Second, he/she is never personally involved in any dispute, if it can be avoided. Whenever you observe an ever-present innocent bystander, look for his/her position of leadership in group situations.
6. Indicate tactfully and professionally, in a private conference, that the disguise has been revealed. This will curtail his/her activities almost immediately.
7. Be careful not to make an open accusation—for he/she can easily deny involvement.
8. Seriously, but gently, tell the student that you suspect what he/she is doing. You may add that you have a professional obligation to discuss this deceitful behavior with parents, his/her other teachers, and administrators.
9. Regardless of the student's response, fear will be his/her emotion. Treat this fear kindly.
10. Listen carefully, then show concern. When you operate in a professional manner in this regard, the agitator will make every effort to improve and to make sure you know he/she is trying. Therefore, confront in a caring way.
11. When you confront, use the "What Is More Important Than Why" technique. Don't ask why the student did something. The student may not even know he/she is agitating. Regardless, "why" is not the immediate issue. You can talk about "why" later. Ask what the student did, and what he/she is going to do about it. You may even skip asking what the student did—and tell him/her. However, you must ask what he/she is going to do about it.
12. Recognize and acknowledge any efforts to improve. Otherwise, the agitating may begin again.
13. Be specific about what kind of behavior you expect. Don't generalize.
14. Be sure the agitator knows that you are not going to forget his/her past actions. Tell the student that you want to support positive behavior, and that anytime you see the slightest indication that he/she is beginning to agitate again you will confront him/her about it and stop it immediately.

15. Assign special duties to this student—such as passing out papers, erasing boards, etc. This helps meet the need for attention and power.
16. Use group and peer pressure in sincere and straightforward ways to help motivate this student to change his/her behavior. This is easily done by appointing the agitator to a leadership position. Remember, this student wants influence, but not responsibility. Yet, responsibility is what will change the behavior.
17. Set up a contract with the student. Make explicit agreements about what should be done, when and where it should be done, and how it should be done.
18. Try to remain objective and emotionally neutral.
19. Remember, the student who resists authority knows where the power is, yet has chosen a course which he/she knows risks severe consequences. It's analogous to the suicide attempt meant as a cry for help. Such resistance says everything from "I don't understand" to "I don't know what to do but fight."
20. Rather than fearing this student's agitating behavior or regarding it as appalling, look upon it as an opportunity to help a student work through a problem that can only cause trouble for a lifetime. Begin by showing your willingness to listen and talk privately.
21. Fully understand that behind every student rejection of a teacher's efforts is an overwhelming feeling of failure or frustration. That's why teaching rather than forcing is the best course to take. Any other road leads toward a destructive kind of confrontation and puts the teacher on the same level as the distressed student. This should not be a road we would choose just to prove our power.

IV. MISTAKES: Common misjudgments and errors in managing the child which may perpetuate or intensify the problem.

1. Openly and publicly accusing certain students of being agitators.
2. Failing to see the real fear of being discovered that underlies this student's behavior.
3. Believing this student's actions are directed toward us personally, and therefore reacting personally to the student and his/her behavior.
4. Getting into an argument, thereby causing division among the class.
5. Issuing punishments to the group, thus triggering strong student reactions.
6. Assuming that the agitator is responsible for a particular situation, based on past history.
7. Overreacting to all incidents of criticism and calling them agitation.
8. Making threats to stop the behavior and backing ourselves into a corner.
9. Feeling that "I must have the last word if I am to be the winner."
10. Becoming involved in a power play.
11. Openly confronting the student in class. This action can only cause serious difficulty for all. And our concern about losing respect may readily become a reality.
12. Accusing a student too harshly and/or in the presence of class members.
13. Playing detective and acting unfairly when we aren't able to pinpoint the culprit.
14. Attacking the followers rather than confronting the agitator.

SEE ALSO: • The Angry • The Bully • The Defier • The Influencer
• The Jealous • The Malcontent • The Overly Aggressive

