



Paul Dix's Behaviour Course

Audio: The best two-minute intervention: Transcript

There are so many quick conversations about behaviour happening all over schools every day. These are the critical conversations, the ones that are the difference between escalation or getting back to work. Never is the behaviour of the adult more decisive than when the child is not following instructions or their behaviour is wobbling.

Nobody has ever improved a child's outcomes by taking them out of the classroom and pointing out their faults. The chat you have with a pupil to try and reset expectations is often unplanned. However, shaping this conversation effectively means you have the best chance of getting back to teaching with a clear head, and the pupil has the best chance of getting back to class ready to learn. Done well, two minutes will seem too long. The focus of the conversation must be returning to learning. If you start unpicking what has just happened the moment you walk out of the door, it will be a longer and less productive chat. This will be difficult at first, because the pupil will expect that to be the topic of conversation. "Me? You ask me to step out? Carmel was live streaming whitening our teeth on Twitch under the desk and you asked me to step out?" However, tempting it is to get into this. You don't have the time and the pupil hasn't earned the right to be in charge of the topic. This moment is a true test of your ability to shift your behaviour to get the best outcome. The high energy, intense, and even frenetic atmosphere of the classroom will be in

sharp contrast to the quiet calm behind the closed door. Sometimes it helps just to drop your shoulders, breathe, and take a moment to acclimatize yourself to the new atmosphere. This may not be the moment for your best 'teacher voice', even though cliché demands that it is. Rather it is a great moment for humility, curiosity, and a strong resolve. Social distancing is your friend here. A distance of 2 metres will give everyone the space they need. Nobody benefits from being close-up, particularly when talking about their own behaviour - virus or no virus. If you are going to be made to look into the mirror, you need to see only yourself, not someone else who could be blamed.

When you get to a space to talk, resist the urge to suddenly find a uniform infringement that must be corrected. There might be a time and a place for that discussion, but don't let it muddy the waters now. Similarly, try not to pick up on physical reactions unless they stop the conversation from happening. Ignore the smirk, the slouch, or any of the myriad secondary behaviours that are irrelevant to the present behaviour. Avoid the temptation to recognise repetition. "This is the third time this week you have chosen to infringe the rules" or to label or pass judgement. "It was you; you did it deliberately." There are six suggestions for resetting and returning to routine...

One, start with curiosity and a space for the child to speak. "Are you ok? I thought it would be better to talk away from everything. I was wondering what was up."

Two, accept where we are. "I asked to speak to you because I noticed you were struggling to keep to our rules."

Three, signal where we're going. "This is just a pause. I want to get you back in and working."

Four, reset expectations. "We've agreed that Safe is one of our rules. I need you to..."

Five, offer help. "What do you need most right now to help you get back to learning?"
Or just "How can I help you now?"

Six, plan to go back in. “Okay, breathe. We need to go again.” Or, “When we go back in, I'm going to make it easy for you to walk back in, get to your desk, save face.” Of course, the way you ask the pupil to leave the class or walk away from their group for a chat sets the tone for the rest of the conversation. I've often misjudged this and sent out the child rather than asking them to step out. If the child's irritation or anger is directed at me from the moment we start talking and I have not acknowledged it, then the pep talk is going to be a real struggle.

The principle of keeping your own emotions out of these interventions is worth remembering too. The resetting and returning routine will help, but there is also a moment when the door closes and you look each other in the eye. So much is unspoken yet absolutely clear. The child is reading you as you are trying to read the child. Before you open your mouth, check what you are already saying physically. Drop your shoulders, relax your thumbs, and put your hands by your side. If you are prone to lots of gesturing, this might be a good moment to resist.

Some children will need a bit longer to breathe, shake it off, and walk back in. Sometimes you will need to return separately to allow the child to save face. These small concessions are important. At first, the child will check your emotional state as you resume teaching. After a while, they will realise that you are giving away nothing. After a while, they will realise that you are giving nothing away. How the child returns may affect their ability to stay. You don't want them walking back in and taking a round of applause, and neither do you want the collective “Ooooooh” as they perform the walk of shame. Having a calm, planned, and low-volume chat attracts far less attention than the traditional hair-dryer chastisement that stops everyone working as they tune in to listen. Setting a new rhythm to these short interventions makes them more predictable, safe, and effective. Reducing the number of pupils removed from class, while making sure that everyone stays within the boundaries, is the road to closing the removal room and creating a model of inclusive practice. A little piece of Nirvana.