



Classroom Management

February 2021

Frontline staff require classroom management skills and supervisor support to create a safe space and productive learning environment for adolescent pregnancy prevention (APP) program delivery. This tip sheet describes strategies for frontline staff to prevent and respond to challenging student behavior and tips for how supervisors can support staff efforts to manage the classroom and deliver high-quality programming. Frontline staff should work with supervisors to select strategies that are appropriate for the amount of time they spend in a given classroom. Although many of these strategies refer to classrooms and teachers, they are relevant for any staff facilitating activities with a group of young people, regardless of location.

PROACTIVE CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Proactive classroom management strategies mean more than simply controlling student behavior and include “the actions teachers take to create an environment that supports and facilitates both academic and social-emotional learning” (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006, p. 4). The use of reactive strategies is typically more punitive and harmful to a student’s sense of motivation and belonging in the classroom (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Findings suggest that the association between student-teacher relationships and behavioral engagement is stronger for students in secondary school settings than those in elementary (Roorda, Koomen, Split, & Oort, 2015), meaning that building a positive classroom culture and strong relationships with students is even more important at the middle and high school levels.

Everything a teacher or facilitator does has implications for their classroom or group (Evertson & Poole, 2008), so it is particularly important to consider how a proactive classroom management strategy will include the *actions* taken prior to students’ arrival to the classroom space, the *interactions* that will occur once students arrive, and the *reactions* teachers have when students misbehave. Even with a plan or strategy in place, flexibility and adaptability in the classroom are necessary for effective classroom management. Despite their importance, many who are new to the classroom struggle with these skills (Emmer & Stough, 2001). Frontline staff should feel comfortable asking questions to educators throughout the school building where they work if they come across any unexpected issues. Ultimately, being **positive**, **firm**, and **consistent** while running a classroom will lead to both students and teachers experiencing success.

It is important for frontline staff to learn about existing classroom management approaches in the classroom in which they will be implementing APP programming so that staff can incorporate or build on these strategies if appropriate. However, these approaches may need to be negotiated, particularly if incentives are required

from the APP grantee; grantees should discuss the use of APP grant funding for purchasing incentives with their project officer. Frontline staff and supervisors should communicate proactively with the classroom teacher to clarify expectations (e.g., that the teacher will always be present, whether the teacher will manage classroom behavior, that the teacher will neither disrupt nor lead APP activities). To avoid future problems or miscommunication, it may be helpful to have a memorandum of understanding between the grantee and the school or other organizational setting (e.g., detention center) that clarifies classroom management roles and expectations for both program delivery staff and teachers as well as their respective organizations.

Table 1. Proactive Classroom Management Strategies

Strategies	Examples
Establish, maintain, and restore trusting relationships with students.	Trust is a key component to an effective classroom (Evertson & Poole, 2008), and trust starts with relationships. It is incredibly important to take the time to get to know students as individuals. The Establish-Maintain-Restore (EMR) approach is a research-based way to build relationships and trust with students (Cook et al., 2018a; Duong et al., 2019). For middle school contexts, researchers found that the EMR approach resulted in significant improvements in academically engaged time and less disruptive behavior (Duong et al., 2019). Greeting students at the door upon their arrival to the classroom is an easy way to set the tone for trusting relationships and can increase engagement and reduce disruptive behaviors (Cook et al., 2018b). Learning to pronounce student names correctly is another key component to establishing a positive, trusting relationship with students.
Establish clear classroom expectations with the help of students.	The expectations that teachers set and hold students to have a causal impact on students' educational attainment (Papageorge & Gershenson, 2016). Create a group agreements poster or classroom contract with students and have everyone sign it. Keep the contract posted at all times and refer to it if/when challenges arise. When students misbehave, remind them that they helped create the classroom contract. Revisit the agreement often and make changes when necessary, as the classroom contract is a living document.
Maintain an orderly classroom environment.	Start each session in a timely manner and post the agenda for the day where all students can see it. Outlining and explicitly teaching steps for completing classroom procedures ensures that all students know what they need to do, how they should do it, and when they should do it (Mitchell, Hirn, & Lewis, 2017). Checking off agenda items as they are completed may build a sense of accomplishment for all. Setting timers for transitional periods or work time can also be beneficial to keep the class on track. Giving students reminders before transitions will prepare them for what will come next. Presenting clear, concise instructions in either written format or verbally in sequential order (e.g., step-by-step instructions, making sure students are on track throughout the process) can help keep students focused on the task at hand.
Increase behavior-specific praise.	Increasing behavior-specific praise means that verbal statements are delivered that explicitly identify and affirm a student behavior (Mitchell, Hirn, & Lewis, 2017). Negative attention with reprimands like "don't do x" or "stop doing y" may temporarily stop misbehaviors, but research found that students will eventually become more likely to engage in that disruptive behavior (Reinke, Herman, & Newcomer, 2016).

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Actively supervise students.	Be active while students are at work on completing tasks or assignments—move around the room, check in with students on their progress, and ask questions throughout the lesson to keep students engaged. Both verbal and nonverbal interaction with students is key. Nonverbal cues—like smiling or simply making eye contact—can “reduce physical and/or psychological difference” with students, which can boost students’ positive feelings toward the teacher and course material while also improving their behavior (Andersen, 1979).
Consider the physical layout of the classroom and make it conducive to the given activity.	The arrangement of a classroom facilitates instructional activities and should be orderly to enable the save movement of students and teachers (Mitchell, Hirn, & Lewis, 2017). There are many effective seating configurations that can match a variety of activities: small groupings of desks to allow for group work, side-by-side desks for partner work, or flexible seating arrangements where students can sit where they want in the room for work time. It may be beneficial for the first couple classes to assign seats, but as relationships and trust form, give students autonomy to choose their seats. Be sure to work with the teacher to determine optimal seating arrangements and return seating to its original place when class is over if desks get moved.
Engage students by incorporating student interest and choice in preferred activities and allowing students to respond throughout instruction.	The absence of student engagement can lead to negative teacher attention and further student disengagement (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). To engage students, consider giving them options for how to complete assignments (e.g., drawing a comic strip scenario instead of writing a paragraph about it). Increasing the frequency of opportunities for students to respond actively to instruction (e.g., reading aloud, going to the board to respond to a problem, turning and talking after an activity) can also keep students engaged. Curriculum fidelity can be maintained during this strategy with appropriate preplanning.

TEACHING SENSITIVE CONTENT

Pregnancy prevention can be a sensitive topic for many students, especially depending on student maturity level and lived experience. The first step in teaching sensitive content is to create an inclusive environment for students. Welcoming and getting to know students, addressing bias in the classroom, and understanding the relationship between “intent” and “impact” are important factors to creating an inclusive classroom (University of California-Berkeley, n.d.).

Using social-emotional learning (SEL) strategies can be helpful while teaching sensitive topics. SEL is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, n.d.). Using the SEL framework developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning can be a beneficial lens through which to view the curriculum and help identify components of the curriculum to make applicable connections with students.

STRATEGIES FOR RESPONDING TO CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR

Challenging behavior in a classroom is inevitable. Given the increased prevalence of Adverse Childhood Experiences, it is imperative to consider that many students acting out in classroom settings are doing so as a response to trauma. Adverse Childhood Experiences include all types of neglect, abuse, or other potentially

traumatic experiences that occur to people under the age of 18 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). Triggering traumatic memories may result in students re-experiencing the intense, distressing feelings from the event, which can lead to withdrawal, behavioral outbursts, aggression, and other types of responses. Instead of intervening immediately to bring the student back into class activities or insisting that the student immediately share how they feel, staff may have a plan in place to escort the student to a quiet place and help them feel safe and calm while staff seek guidance from a school counselor, psychologist, or social worker (Cole et al., 2005).

Responding to misbehaviors requires patience and compassion. A first step to take when challenging behavior occurs is to consider what need a particular behavior is expressing (Souers, 2017). Is the student distracted during class because he is hungry? Did she get enough sleep last night? Thinking about the root of the problem behavior can help identify the best strategies to use to address the behavior. Discussing any problematic or questionable behavior with a classroom teacher or a school counselor can also be an insightful tool to better understand a student's motivations.

Ultimately, having clear classroom expectations and a "warning system" (e.g., giving students a warning that their behavior is inappropriate before directly moving to disciplinary action) can prove to be effective when managing a classroom. It is crucial to consistently apply rules to students, meaning that the focus should be on the behavior, *not* the student. One-on-one conversations about student behavior that occur outside of the classroom or away from other students can allow students to feel more comfortable in sharing their frustrations.

SUPERVISOR SUPPORT FOR PROGRAM DELIVERY STAFF

Supervisors should assure program delivery staff that their expected role in classroom management will be clearly outlined. Additionally, supervisors should make known that they will facilitate open and frequent communication between the project team and the school or delivery site and will also observe a few sessions to assess program delivery staff needs.

Supervisors can support program delivery staff by holding a joint meeting with the frontline program delivery staff and the teacher or relevant administrative personnel to discuss topics like the expected classroom management strategies, the teacher or administrator's role, and logistical considerations. Supervisors can also help by

- inviting school administrators to observe lessons;
- communicating about program delivery when there is school staff turnover;
- asking teachers and school administrators to sign memorandums of understanding or letters of commitment;
- making personal visits to the school to discuss the goals of the project, the progress of implementation and classroom management, and administrator involvement in the project's success; and
- setting boundaries and expectations for teachers and other school staff by discussing what their role(s) will be.

Supervisors should also discuss with program delivery staff the following topics:

- understanding that definitions of appropriate classroom behavior are culturally defined, developing knowledge of adolescents' cultural backgrounds, and identifying culturally appropriate classroom management strategies (Weinstein et al., 2003, 2004);
- recognizing staff ethnocentrism (i.e., the attitude that one's own group is superior);

- maximizing the classroom management strategies listed above, particularly considering the EMR approach (Cook et al., 2018a; Duong et al., 2019) and the use of cocreated classroom expectations for students;
- discovering opportunities for observation and dialogue with experienced staff, self-reflection on their classroom management practices within a supportive environment (Dobler et al., 2009), and participating in group discussions to enhance staff confidence in their classroom management skills (Prince, 2009); and
- using supervisor observations and positive reinforcement and direction for any necessary changes.

Supervisors should provide a classroom management checklist that program delivery staff can use to self-assess over time. Supervisors should provide consultation to frontline staff about what is observed and documented on the checklist, incorporating performance feedback and action planning to develop or enhance classroom management strategies that are not being used or that need improvement and to enhance or maintain strategies that are being used (MacSuga & Simonsen, 2011).

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This tip sheet was developed by RTI International and Healthy Teen Network (#HHSP233200951WC Task 25) and updated by RTI International (#HHSP233201500039I Task 4) with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Family and Youth Services Bureau.

Suggested Citation: Redden, A. (2021, February). *Classroom management*. Washington, DC: Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Family and Youth Services Bureau.