



UNDERSTANDING AND PROMOTING POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR IN THE FE SECTOR

Contents

Introduction	2
Understanding Behaviour	3
Creating a Welcoming Culture	6
The Importance of Good Transitions	7
Calm, Consistent, Adult Behaviour	8
Paying Attention Leads to Best Conduct	10
Reinforcing Routines	12
Scripted Interventions	13
Top Ten Behaviour Intervention and De-escalation Strategies	15
A Restorative Approach	18
Top Tips on Creating a Positive Culture and Managing Behaviour	21
A Learner-Led Curriculum	23

Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to help you as a further education (FE) professional, to understand and positively influence behaviour. It is a guide to cultivating an environment of positive behaviour for both staff and learners and creating a culture that is supportive to all behaviours.





Understanding Behaviour

Behaviour is defined by the way in which a person behaves in response to a particular situation or stimulus¹. To be able to successfully manage or influence behaviour, it is useful to understand how our own behaviour can be a powerful influencer when considering the impact upon our learners.

The human brain is hard wired to identify threat signals from within the limbic system². If a situation is assessed as a threat the amygdala is triggered.

The amygdala response

When the amygdala is triggered it releases hormones into the rational brain (pre-frontal cortex) to stop rational thinking.

The rational part of a person's brain isn't fully developed until around the age of 25 years.

The amygdala is an emotional sentinel that stands ready to protect.

Emotional memories in the amygdala that are created up to the age of 8 form truths that are hard to change³.

¹Frontline: Interview Deborah Yurgelun-Todd [webpage on the Internet] Arlington: Public Broadcasting Service; 2002 Available from: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/teenbrain/interviews/todd.html> Accessed February 14, 2013 [Google Scholar]

² Description of Limbic System and Amygdala - <https://qbi.uq.edu.au/brain/brain-anatomy/limbic-system>

³ Paul Dix – The Pivotal Curriculum 2019

Trauma, adversity, toxic stress and signs of distress⁴

Young people who have experienced trauma and/or adversity may be unable to exercise the skills and strategies they need to succeed.

The impact of trauma and adversity often results in behaviour that can present challenges for the learners themselves, peers, and other learners around them, as well as the staff working with them.

Toxic stress is considered to occur when there is a frequent or prolonged experience of adversity such as abuse, neglect, exposure to violence, or financial hardship. Without suitable support, the effects of experiences such as these can significantly reduce the learner's ability to self-regulate their behaviour and/or emotional state.

The effects of toxic stress on the developing brain

Learners who are experiencing, or have previously experienced, toxic stress might exhibit the following behaviours:

- Aggression
- Hyperarousal
- Hypervigilance– even when there are no triggers around
- Experience of brain and body being on alert all the time because of high cortisol levels
- Fight, flight or freeze - when a learner is in 'fight, flight or freeze' mode they cannot learn and it is their stress and/or defence mechanisms which can influence adverse responses.

The use of language here is important. Calling behaviour 'challenging' focuses on those who are challenged by the behaviour, whereas the term 'distressed behaviour' focuses on the person who is in distress.

Understanding what is happening in the brain of those showing signs of distress affords us the opportunity to do more than attempting to simply manage their 'challenging behaviour' and instead start to feel equipped to support their mental wellbeing. Behaviour management shouldn't be about managing other people's behaviour. It should be focused upon managing our own behaviour and, in turn, supporting and teaching our learners how to manage their own behaviour in the most appropriate of ways.

⁴ Pivotal Podcast Interview with Mine Conkbayir <http://www.pivotalpodcast.com/mine-conkbayir-184/>

Strategies to support⁵

Some strategies that a practitioner might adopt to support learners to manage their behaviour include:

- Investing time in creating rapport and developing relationships
- Modelling self-regulation
- Nurture – creating a positive emotional temperature in the room
- Creating a plan for behaviour
- Sharing strategies for understanding anger and distress
- Demonstrating accountability for managing own behaviour positively



⁵Trauma informed Classroom strategies: <https://www.edutopia.org/article/trauma-informed-classroom-strategies>



Creating a Welcoming Culture

Relationship and rapport are key to success of the culture in your organisation and classroom. Nurturing strong links and relationships at a time of peace will support more successful communication in times of conflict.

Connection is “the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued”⁶. Get to know your team and learners, engaging and interacting with genuine interest, to foster good relations. ‘What’s important to you is important to me.’

⁶ The Gifts of Imperfection: 11 Jan 2018 by [Brene Brown](#) (Author)

The Importance of Good Transitions

Learners will benefit greatly from a pre-admission visit by meeting staff and experiencing the physical and emotional environment of their learning environment.

Researchers from around the world have been investigating educational transitions for the past two decades and have produced many reports about the various long-term impacts that 'good' and 'bad' transitions can have on a learner. An example of this is a report published by Centre for Mental Health and the Charlie Waller Memorial Trust (CWMT). The report, *Finding our Own Way* (January 2019), explores the impact of transitions into and between FE and higher education (HE) on students' mental health and looks at how we can help learners through this⁷.

'Transition', however, isn't exclusively related to moving between educational phases. It can also relate to movement from class to class within an education provider. Whatever transition/s learners may be experiencing, especially if they are finding it particularly difficult, it is worth noting the importance of developing their sense of connection to the organisation and/or environment. Building a deep sense of pride and belonging can help reduce issues that the transition process presents.

Information sharing and, where possible, face-to-face meetings with peer professionals who have had previous involvement with a learner, can be beneficial. Being aware of any historical incidents or conditions which may be contributory factors to a person's recent behaviour can be a valuable source of information when attempting conflict resolution or, even better, conflict prevention.

Past history and useful background information may be sourced from previous educational organisations or other sources such as sports clubs, membership groups and family members. It is important that all learners, regardless of any previous negative experiences within education, are afforded the opportunity to make a fresh start and to be supported appropriately by all staff.

⁷ <https://www.cwmt.org.uk/single-post/2019/01/29/Schools-colleges-and-universities-can-do-more-to-support-students-to-make-successful-transitions-new-report-finds>



Calm, Consistent, Adult Behaviour⁸

Those who work in FE have a duty to role model the behaviour they would like to see to show what they expect from learners.

Managing one's own behaviour is the first step towards demonstrating the values important to your organisation. Remaining calm in the face of unwanted behaviour and refusing to take part in power play is paramount in demonstrating your commitment to supporting your organisation's ethos.

Establishing, agreeing and committing to the important consistencies in your organisation or class create certainty for all.

⁸ <https://pivotaeducation.com/classroom-behaviour-management/resource-bank/pillar-1-consistent-calm-adult-behaviour/>

Consistency in practice

Some approaches to consider:

- Consistent **language**, consistent response: Referring to the agreement made between staff and learners, simple and clear expectations reflected in all conversations about behaviour.
- Consistent **follow up**: ensuring 'certainty' at the classroom and senior management level, never passing problems up the line, teachers taking responsibility for behaviour interventions, seeking support but never delegating.
- Consistent **positive reinforcement**: routine procedures for reinforcing, encouraging and celebrating appropriate behaviour.
- Consistent **consequences**: defined, agreed and applied at the classroom level as well as established structures for more serious behaviours.
- Consistent, simple **rules/agreements/expectations**: referencing and promoting appropriate behaviour, icons, symbols and visual cues, interesting and creative signage.
- Consistent **respect from the professionals** - even in the face of disrespectful learners!
- Consistent **models of emotional control**: emotional restraint that is modelled and not just taught, teachers as role models for learning, teachers learning alongside learners.
- Consistently reinforced **rituals and routines for behaviour around the site** -in classrooms, in common areas, at reception.
- Consistent **environment**: Displaying the quality of a good organisation, consistent visual messages and echoes of core values, positive images of learners rather than marketing slogans.



Paying Attention Leads to Best Conduct⁹

A common consensus seems to be that behaviour change and not the reward itself is what brings about long-term learner-improvement¹⁰.

Consider the ways that you make your learners feel important. A culture of positive recognition will breed more desired behaviour. Sincere use of praise and recognition promote a positive culture and create some emotional currency for the times when things go wrong.

⁹ <https://pivotaeducation.com/classroom-behaviour-management/resource-bank/pillar-2-first-attention-to-best-conduct/>

¹⁰ Geoffrey James (2016) Transforming Behaviour in the Classroom: A Solution-Focused Guide for New Teachers

As teachers we can give or create:

- Personal acknowledgement
- Moments of sincere, private verbal praise
- More reflective comments, written and verbal
- A mechanism for positive referrals that is individualised
- Subtle, discreet praise
- 3:1 culture for learners and professionals when delivering messages that can be perceived as positive or critical
- A class display that reflects success
- An agreed rewards structure, class rewards and/or organisational rewards
- Catching learners doing the right thing regularly

Using Praise

- Praise should be appropriate to the circumstances and age.
- Praise should be timely.
- Praise should be perceived by the receiver as sincere.
- Praise should be clearly linked to the reason it is given.
- Praise should be dignified and respectful.
- Praise can be public or private.
- Gratuitous praise should be avoided.
- Praise must be plausible and specific, or it will appear false.
- Spoken praise can be accompanied by other forms of rewards.
- Praise should be an expected and enjoyed part of the life of the class.
- Rewards may be provided where targets have been met (individual and group).
- Rewards may be extrinsic – tangibles, tokens, opportunities and can be powerful when linked to community benefit, 'paying into a system or culture'.
- Rewards may be intrinsic – status, recognition, acknowledgement, validation, value and appreciation.
- Praise and rewards should be understood and valued by all.

Reinforcing Routines¹¹

When you become aware of inappropriate behaviours, or even an absence of a positive behaviour choice, it is likely that there is a need for a routine for the required behaviour to be taught explicitly.

This can be done in three simple and memorable steps and then rehearsed and practiced until everyone is clear on the expectation. For example, a routine for how learners should enter the learning environment following a meet and greet could be broken down into:

- **Step 1** – Check seating plan and sit calmly
- **Step 2** – Coats, jackets and hoods off and ‘Ready’ for learning
- **Step 3** – Have correct equipment/books/materials out.

Use practical routines to support behaviour and culture:

- Teach routines relentlessly and enthusiastically!
- Agree interesting ways to take answers.
- Establish a routine for delivering instructions.
- Check for understanding to encourage questions – “If I haven’t explained that properly please tell me now.”
- Have creative signage that reinforces learning thresholds, rules and agreements; routines on the door, marking physical and learning boundaries.
- Use a countdown – embellished with clear instructions, allowing learners to finish their conversations.
- At the beginning and end of each session – personal acknowledgement, friendly, interested in the individual.

¹¹ <https://pivotaleducation.com/classroom-behaviour-management/resource-bank/pillar-3-relentless-routines/>



Scripted Interventions¹²

Planning what you are going to say when you intervene with behaviour will keep you and the learner safe and give you the best chance to provide a measured response.

Scripted interventions are predictable and concise. A 30 second intervention is enough time to deliver a tough message softly and get in and out of the situation quickly, without escalating the situation or neglecting the other learners you are working with.

¹² <https://pivotaleducation.com/classroom-behaviour-management/resource-bank/pillar-4-scripting-difficult-interventions/>

Example 30 second script structure:

- **Open well** – “I’ve noticed you’ve had a problem starting this morning.”
- **Physical approach** – kneel down next to the learner, pull a chair up or stand at the side of the classroom side by side with them – preferably have the learner looking down at you.
- **Refer to why you are there and a specific rule** – “You know our rule about getting involved with the group. I can’t have you sitting outside of it, I need you to be involved.”
- **Sanction** – at the second stage of a stepped consequence system – “I’m going to need to see you for five minutes at the end.” The learner will more than likely protest at this stage. It’s important at this point to remind the learner of previous good behaviour that you have ‘pegged’ in a positive note or other previous interaction. “Do you remember last Thursday, I gave you that recognition postcard? You had a brilliant week last week. You were kind, you brought in that extra research, your group work was great – that’s the behaviour I need to see now/that’s the behaviour I want to see from you. Thank you for listening.” Then you leave the situation.

It’s harder to argue with someone who is praising your previous good behaviour. Holding your nerve at this moment is the real heart of behaviour management. This is where you can model that emotionally resilient adult behaviour for the learners.

How to begin

Don’t try to use it immediately with the most challenging learners. It will probably take a couple of weeks to become confident and fluent in delivering the 30 second scripted intervention. If you feel you need to adapt the script to your situation, don’t make it too elaborate and don’t leave out the step of reminding the learner of their previous good behaviour.

Fogging

To support the intervention, use the age-old technique of ‘fogging’. Fogging means rather than heightening emotions by entering into an argument or power play, agree with the learner by saying something like, “I understand what you are saying, and yet I’ve noticed that...and our rule is...and you’re better than that...” This shows that you are listening to the learner. Fogging helps you to avoid entering into ‘power play’ and a cul-de-sac of an argument. Another phrase to consider is, “Be that as it may...” This can all help to reduce the likelihood of escalation.



Top Ten Behaviour Intervention and De-escalation Strategies

'De-escalation is more often than not subtle and effective learner management. When staff de-escalate well, it is almost like the learner doesn't realise it...' (Steve Brown, 2014).

Brown celebrates using a checklist to guide staff, 'lots of professionals use checklists to remind them of what they need to do and what they need to remember... to inform them of risks and solutions in more high-risk circumstances'¹³. See below a guide or checklist of strategies.

¹³ Steve Brown (2014) Autism Spectrum Disorder and De-escalation Strategies: A practical guide to positive behavioural interventions for children and young people.

1. Take an empathic and non-judgmental approach

If someone says or does something you perceive as strange or irrational in behaviour, judging them or discounting their feelings can have an adverse effect on the situation as it unfolds. Whether or not you think those feelings are justified, they are a reality to the other person. Actively listen to create or maintain a connection.

2. Respect personal space

Personal space is 360 degrees, horizontal and vertical. Towering over a learner, standing in front of doorways and exits or being in any other way intimidating with your use of space during an intervention can provoke an unwanted response.

Have an awareness of the effects of your positioning in relation to the learner. In some cases, an individual may feel supported and anchored by close proximity and in others de-escalation is more successful when there is more distance.

3. Use of Non-Verbal Communications (NVCs)

Being mindful of gestures, facial expressions, movements, and tone of voice can be of benefit in de-escalation. The more a person feels loss of control, the less they hear other people's words. Learners are then more likely to respond positively to non-threatening, non-aggressive NVCs.

4. Consistent, calm, adult behaviour

Behaviour influences behaviour. Remaining calm, rational, and professional when responding to behaviours is imperative. Behaviour interventions should be delivered with both parties' dignity intact.

5. Feelings in focus

Getting the facts into a perspective context is important, however, how a person feels is a major factor in dealing with behavioural situations. In certain behaviours, people have trouble identifying how they feel about what is happening to them. Ask questions that support the other party in expressing their feelings. Be prepared to listen to the other's perspective without interruption even if it is different to your own. Remain curious and open to finding out something you don't know.

6. Use 'drive bys'

Before speaking, attempt to refocus a learner with gentle reminders of the expectations. Use simple encouraging gestures or signs to point them in the right direction before challenging them directly. Examples of drive bys may be: putting the necessary equipment on their desk, a thumbs up, pointing to the sign of the rule needed to succeed or asking if they are ok.

7. Script your interventions

Agree a script for landing a tough message softly. Explain to learners what you have noticed, remind of the rule or agreement and calmly state what needs to happen next or what their options are. Ensure you are assertive and not aggressive. Planning a script ensures you are focused and helps you to avoid verbosity.

8. Set limits

If a person's behaviour is aggressive, defensive, hostile or disruptive, an appropriate action to take is to give them clear, simple, and enforceable limits. In circumstances where a person acts in a belligerent way, offer concise and respectful choices and consequences.

9. Fogging and redirecting

Directly responding to challenging questions can result in providing additional oxygen to a difficult situation. If a person challenges your authority, an effective way of managing the situation is to redirect their attention to the issue at hand. Your ego doesn't need to enter the conversation.

10. Allow take up time

Allow take up time for a learner to make a decision. When being asked to turn your behaviour around space should be granted to do this. The learner should have the opportunity to do the right thing. Give them a few moments to consider what you have said to them. Although silence can cause a feeling of awkwardness, it can also be used as a chance to pause, reflect and allow a settled period of calmness to occur. This approach can provide a person with the opportunity to stop, take stock of the situation, consider what's happening around them and work out in their own mind, how they should proceed.

The aim for these strategies is to encourage and allow learners to feel they can chose to make the appropriate choices rather than feeling cornered into it.



A Restorative Approach¹⁴

A restorative approach is a way of working with conflict that puts the focus on repairing the harm that has been done.

It is an approach to conflict resolution that includes all parties involved. It asks all parties to share what their involvement was, how the incident of conflict has affected them and to agree what needs to be done for things to be put right. It aims for a win-win outcome from incidents of conflict.

¹⁴ <https://pivotaleducation.com/classroom-behaviour-management/resource-bank/pillar-5-restorative-conversations/>

Why are Restorative Approaches helpful?

Staff, young people and parents/carers who work restoratively report that this way of working leads to:

- A more respectful climate
- A shift away from sanction-based responses that aim to 'manage' behaviour, toward a more relational approach
- Better relationships amongst learners and staff
- People being more honest and willing to accept responsibility
- People feeling more supported when things go wrong
- A calmer, quieter and more productive learning environment

The success of a restorative approach is dependent upon all that happens before the event. Ensure you have laid appropriate foundations down to build the most supportive climate and culture to allow restorative meetings to take place effectively.

“Prevention is the key” - says Dutch Detective Inspector Thorlief, working in anti-terrorism, who is famed for bringing back radicalised young men into the community - “allow them to be open and candid about their experiences and raise them again as citizens.”¹⁵

There is no magic wand or cure all set of questions that work in isolation. In order to repair a relationship, there must be a relationship in existence. The foundations are laid before things go wrong.



¹⁵ Pivotal Podcast Episode PP151

Using the strategies discussed above as a framework is useful when considering your intervention. These strategies are based on the Pivotal Pillars for managing behaviour¹⁶:

- **Pillar 1: Self-regulating** – ensuring your own behaviour is in check before attempting restorative conversations. Your reputation of fairness and caring will carry you a long way.
- **Pillar 2: Focusing on the positives** – having a foundation of knowing the individual as better than the moment of conflict.
- **Pillar 3: Having watertight routines that support behaviour and culture** – working from a framework of agreed expectations for success.
- **Pillar 4: Scripting safe and respectful interventions** – having respectful and safe behaviour interventions in which both parties' dignity is intact.



Reparation will not give you the instant satisfaction that comes from instigating punishment. It will give you a platform to build relationships that change and improve behaviour for the long term. Learner and staff member discuss the behaviour and not the learners' character.

The discussion is structured to address and understand what happened and what can be done to improve the situation for all involved whilst reinforcing expectations and resetting behaviours for the next lesson.

¹⁶ <https://pivotaleducation.com/classroom-behaviour-management/resource-bank/>



Top Tips on Creating a Positive Culture and Managing Behaviour

Below you will find a list of useful practical strategies for a creating a successful teaching and learning culture. These are top tips on how to turn the theory on behaviour into practice to be shared with teams.

Professionals who manage behaviour well:

- **Meet and greet at the door** – the best early intervention in behaviour management is at the door¹⁷.
- **Catch learners doing the right thing** – nobody wants insincere praise and it can be easy to catch learners doing the wrong thing. Develop the ability to catch those more challenging students doing the right thing as well as the learners who consistently do the right thing.
- **Deal with poor behaviour privately and calmly** – avoid as much as possible the public humiliation or public sanctioning of learners. This will be destructive to the relationship you've have invested in and is counterproductive. You would be undermining your own professionalism.
- **Relentlessly build mutual trust** – the relationship you have with learners sustains you and carries on into the future. It is worth remembering that positive relationships are continually developing and not exclusively assigned to the first week of a new term.
- **Directly teach the behaviours and learning attitudes you want to see** – have a plan so that you know the behaviours you are trying to teach and the learners know what behaviours they are trying to learn.
- **Talk about values** – never talk about behaviours in isolation – always relate them back to the culture you are trying to build and the values and truths you have as a class and as a teacher. When the classroom or workshop values directly link to a whole organisational system, this helps build a sense of belonging and connection to the college culture. 'This is how we do it here' should be the overarching message.
- **Follow up, follow up, follow up** – professionals who follow up are the ones the learners decide to behave differently for. Write it down if you have a difficult incident with a learner, then you have the control back – you can decide when and how to follow up. Equally, follow up needs to be consistently applied for positive reward or recognition as well as consequences to inappropriate behaviour choices. Ensure that if you promise or commit to something then you are able to follow it up.

¹⁷ Edutopia article: Waldorf Methods to Use in Your Classroom. Six tips to spice up the day. [Malaika Costello-Dougherty](#) August 31, 2009

This how-to article accompanies the feature "[Waldorf-Inspired Public Schools Are on the Rise.](#)"

<https://www.edutopia.org/waldorf-public-school-morse-tips>



A Learner-Led Curriculum

Creating an accessible and diverse curriculum with purpose that directly relates to your learners will prove beneficial in your approach to behaviour management.

Getting to know your learners and working with them to create a curriculum that is relevant and relatable to their lives builds trust and is more likely to lead to success.

Tomlinson (1996)¹⁸ makes clear the importance of ensuring that there is an appropriate 'match' between the learner and the delivery of the curriculum. The first step of this match is to ensure that individual learners are on the most appropriate programme.

¹⁸ Inclusive FE <http://www.csie.org.uk/resources/tomlinson-96.pdf>

Disengagement from learning, whether it manifests itself as overtly challenging behaviour or as extreme withdrawal, can be a signal that a learner is not placed in the most appropriate programme, or that the level of learning is too hard or too easy.

Delivery style is as important as curriculum content. It is important for you and your colleagues to examine your own curriculum delivery, ensuring that you consider the learning preferences of all your learners. Disengagement is far more likely to occur when learners fail to see the relevance of what they are learning in relation to their own personal situation, or they feel demotivated by the way the subject is being presented to them.

Consider the most effective ways that the curriculum can be introduced into your own FE organisation, discuss new innovations around cognitive capacity, instructional design and utilising educational research models. The curriculum co-creation toolkit, aimed at supporting learners with SEND is available at:

excellencegateway.org.uk/content/etf2942

The toolkit is an excellent resource and a great way to involve learners with their input on deciding what to learn and in what ways they might be taught. The toolkit can help in personalising study programmes and providing context to assisting learners in taking more control in their lives, as they go about learning how to make decisions and express their personal preferences about their own learning journey.



We hope you have found this guide to be useful. It was designed to support those working in the further education sector to support and improve behaviour within their learning environments as well as to promote organisational cultures driven by positive values. There are no magic strategies, however, and it is key to remember the importance of modelling accountability and self-control as well as reasonable and proportionate responses that develop the foundations to a positive behaviour culture.

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