



Information sheet:

Common responses recommended

For minor misbehaviours consider diverting, ignoring, or distracting a child or young person. If this is not successful, then you can move onto more planned responses.

See the common responses recommended and not recommended below.

Common responses – recommended

Verbal interventions

The way you speak to a child or young person can affect the outcome of a situation. Taking an authoritarian approach can encourage opposition and defiance. Lecturing, arguing, counselling, threatening, and answering back do not defuse heated situations.

It is important to stay calm and give the child or young person the opportunity to move out of the situation with dignity. They might or might not take this opportunity.

Avoid forcing the issue in front of the others. If the child or young person calms down you can follow up with them later.

Setting limits

Setting limits is about providing clear boundaries for the child or young person to respond. It is also about consistently enforcing consequences. It is a step-by-step procedure aimed at helping a child or young person to feel more secure and to regain control.

Gain attention by saying the child's name.
Ben.

Wait for him to look at you and praise. (Note: children of some ages or cultures may not look at you so look for a sign that you have their attention and praise them for that attention.)
Thank you.

Give direction, stating which behaviour is unacceptable.
Ben, you are upsetting Robbie.

Focus on what you want the child to do.
I want you to return to your desk and finish your writing.

If the child responds, then praise them.
That's good writing, Ben.

If the child doesn't respond, give a reasonable choice or incentive. Say what will happen if they do not follow the instruction. Remember the child may be highly anxious and therefore less rational. Avoid arguing with the child or young person.
Ben, you either do your writing now or at lunchtime.

Add an additional incentive.
If you do it now you will get your point and then you will be able to have a choosing time.

Give time. This is important. As long as the child is not disruptive, you can leave them to make their choice. If they don't choose the original instruction, follow through.
All right Ben, you have made your choice. You will not get your point and you will do your work at lunchtime.

If the child gets more agitated, stay in control. Despite your own tempted responses to irrational behaviour, focus on helping them regain control. Use an understanding, reasonable approach, set limits and be prepared to enforce them.

If the child continues to be disruptive you will need to go to the next step of your plan. For example, it might be necessary to isolate him from the other children.

Ben, go to the library corner and I will be there in a minute.

If they become aggressive, tell them you will need to move them to another part of the room or another activity or from the room. There needs to be a planned procedure for this in order to avoid further disruption. Firstly ask the child to leave or move. If necessary, escort them or fetch another person to assist them (walk alongside). If this has been practised previously there is rarely a problem.

When the child is out of the room or in another part of the room and the disruption and aggression has stopped, the incident is over.

High probability responses

A high probability instruction is one the child or young person is likely to follow. This is not rewarding behaviour but defuses a situation by diverting attention or giving the child or young person a face-saving way to extricate themselves from a developing situation.

Examples of high probability responses:

Let's go for a walk round the playground.

Will you go and get the swimming key for me?

Read in the library corner for a few minutes.

Examples of low probability responses:

We are going to the principal's office.

Come while I ring your parents.

You can also increase motivation by providing an incentive:

When you have got the key you can go back to join the other children.

If you go to the library corner quietly I will read you a story.

Seek assistance from other staff members

By seeing another teacher there a child or young person might understand that a situation has become serious and be more likely to comply with instructions. But it could also cause their behaviour to escalate. Know when to seek assistance and have a clear understanding about what the other teacher's role will be.

Working in partnership, two teachers can set limits, with one person giving directions and the other acting in a supportive role, concentrating on managing and defusing the situation and thus protecting others.

Common responses – NOT recommended

Ignoring

This can be appropriate with minor misbehaviour and as a planned response but not with extreme behaviour. It sends a confusing message about what is and is not acceptable. It could also lead to deterioration in behaviour.

Reasoning

In a highly emotional state, children and young people are often unable to reason and understand situations. The time for this will come later when they have calmed down.

Reprimands

Because a child or young person is emotional and less rational they are unlikely to respond positively to lectures, reprimands, or arguments.

Sarcasm and public humiliation

The child or young person will feel they have nothing left to lose and their behaviour might escalate. It is also likely that they and the other children will learn these techniques and use them on more vulnerable children. This response is also a breach of the requirement for schools to provide emotionally and physically safe environments for all children and young people.

Sending out of the room

Children and young people who are excluded from the classroom and left on their own can use this as an opportunity to continue the disruption, for example, by pulling faces through the window or banging on the door. Removing a child or young person from the room is only appropriate in situations of extreme violence (damaging property or hurting others) to ensure the safety of others.

Threatening to inform parents/caregivers

Threatening to inform parents might result in a loss of faith by the child or young person in the teacher and the school or centre. It could also result in physical or emotional punishment at home. It is appropriate to inform and involve parents, families and whānau when you're working as a team to come up with solutions, not as a threat to behave.

Restraint

If you need to use restraint because people are being hurt, follow the Safety Plan for that child or young person. Ensure parents and whānau know of and have had input into the Safety Plan. Avoid using restraint if there is any doubt about the teacher's physical ability to safely restrain the child or young person. If in doubt, make the environment safe and seek help. Restraint must conform to school and national policy.

Informal suspension

Informal suspension is sending a child or young person home during school time without following the suspension regulations. This deprives the child or young person of their rights to an education and is illegal under the Education and Training Act 2020.

The discipline hierarchy

(adapted from the Incredible Years – Teacher programme)

- The most effective way to prevent challenging behaviours is to build relationships with a child or young person.
- When responding to unwanted behaviour, start with ignoring, distracting, and diverting before moving onto a more planned response.
- Use discipline as a last resort and always choose the least intrusive approach first. Deliver discipline on a foundation of 'massive' attention/praise/encouragement for desired behaviour.



Time out

When they are upset, many children need space and time to calm down. Time out is a specific, rehearsed response to extreme behaviour – hurting others or property. Children are less likely to learn desired behaviours or how to problem-solve in time out, but it can defuse a situation.

Before using time out:

- Understand the need a child is communicating with a particular behaviour. Understand the triggers and stimuli (ensure the time out doesn't reinforce the behaviour it follows or fulfills a need such as avoiding something).

- Make sure it is part of a planned approach and that it is one of a number of approaches to support and encourage positive behaviour.
- Consider other responses first, such as redirecting, ignoring, distracting, withdrawing privileges or other logical and natural consequences.
- Ensure it is used in the context of lots of positive reinforcement for desired behaviours and is built on the foundations of a positive relationship with the child.
- Provide an abundance of social and emotional coaching and positive feedback for behaviours you want to see.
- Clearly define expectations and regularly provide feedback when these are met.
- Ensure 'time in' is rewarding and stimulating so that a child doesn't want to miss out on this time.
- Immediately follow time out with praise of desired behaviours.

Time out can work for children up to the age of 8-10. For older children, consider a response-cost consequence rather than time out.

Types of time out

There are three ways of looking at time out:

- time out to **remove a child from reinforcing stimuli** that might be triggering or reinforcing their unwanted behaviour
- time out to **calm down**
- time out as a **punisher** (this should be used with caution).

The Ministry of Education discourages isolating a child by closing them off in another room without supervision. Removing a child from the room might be necessary to ensure safety of people rather than as a form of time out. Consider instead removing the child from the reinforcing situation (activity) but not from the environment or room.

A description of time out to calm down and how it works

Children and young people can learn how to calm down and reflect on their actions in time out to calm down.

- Work with colleagues to ensure everyone agrees what behaviours time out to calm down will be used for, the rationale and how it will be used.
- Have a teacher support plan so that the teacher is given support to use time out to calm down and the rest of the children carry on with their activities.
- Record and monitor time spent in time out to calm down. You can then see if it is having the desired effect. The length of time a child is in time out to calm down may increase initially but will eventually decrease. The number of times a child is sent to time out to calm down should also eventually reduce. This will only happen if more attention is being given to the child for behaviours you want to see than for behaviours you don't want to see. If this doesn't happen, you need to relook at its use.

It is imperative that children and young people understand what behaviours will result in time out to calm down, where they go, how long they are there, and what they are supposed to do there.

Explain these things:

- That forgetting the rule about keeping your hands/feet to yourself will result in the command, "(name) you hit so you need to go to time out to calm down".
- How long time out to calm down will be – three minutes for a three-year-old, four for a four-year-old and five minutes for children five and older. This is the minimum time, provided the child is calm for the last 1-2 minutes. A time out to calm down may take considerably longer than the minimum time in order for the child to calm down for the 1-2minutes required.
- That timeout to calm down is a time to calm your body.

Rehearse these things:

- Walking to time out to calm down spot (chair, mat or whatever the class/centre decides is an appropriate inclusionary place. For pre-school children this may be, “(name) you hit you need to sit” and the child simply sits).
- How to ignore when someone is annoying you (minor irritating behaviours) and how to ignore someone when they are in time out to calm down.
- What to do in time out to calm down – how to take deep breaths and feel your body calm down, positive self talk (eg, “I can calm down and can try again”), positive imagery.
- When time out to calm down ends. The teacher goes to the child, tells him/her the time out to calm down is over and invites them to return to an appropriate activity. Praise them as soon as possible for behaviours you want to see.

Visit the Incredible Years website for time out to calm down flow charts for early childhood and school-age children.

Tip

Look at what you can do to make your classroom or centre a stimulating, supportive, and well-managed learning space where positive behaviour can thrive.

- Build caring relationships with children and young people. Respect what each one brings to the class or centre (from home, their culture, and peers). Allow the experiences of the child or young person to be recognised in the classroom or centre.
- Have high expectations of all children and young people (be sure they are achievable).
- He moana pupuke ka ekengia e te waka – a choppy sea can be navigated. Have belief and faith that children and young people can grow and learn new strategies and behaviour.
- Be flexible, adjust the programme, and use a range of learning strategies.
- Use a range of interactions – instruction, monitoring, coaching, recognition, feedback, feed-forward, and individual and group interactions.
- Anticipate issues, plan, and improvise.

Caution: There are no quick fixes. Single, unplanned interventions on their own may not be effective. You also need to:

- understand the purpose of the behaviour (for example, to avoid or obtain)
- address the events that contribute to the behaviour
- identify whether you need to teach new behaviours or positively reinforce what a child or young person already knows
- identify whether you need to make changes to the environment around a child or young person
- decide how you will discourage unwanted behaviours
- provide extra helpings of rewards, encouragement, and praise for positive behaviour
- experiment – it will take time and numerous adjustments to get it right for a child or young person