

Positive behaviour support: Explicit teaching of social skills

Overview and rationale

Positive relationships underpin all effective classroom management practices. This resource is the fifth component in a suite of resources collectively called Positive Behaviour Support – Effective Classroom Practice, which are available through the Universal Resources Hub. It provides classroom teachers with support to:

- understand and describe the importance of teaching social skills
- describe the social skills needed for success
- explicitly teach social skills and problem-solving skills.

The explicit teaching of social skills is one of the many effective classroom practices which research shows has the greatest positive impact on learning and behaviour. These proactive strategies assist teachers to increase the time available for instruction, and decrease the amount of time spent responding to inappropriate or unwanted behaviour.

Effective classroom management is critical to the provision of a safe and supportive learning environment, and helps build positive relationships. Research has consistently demonstrated the relationship between effective classroom management and both academic achievement, and teacher and student wellbeing.

Target audience and instructions for use

Teachers across all school settings can use this resource to support all students P-12.

When to use/ timeframes: Teachers can use this resource at any time in the year as a stand-alone resource to support them to explicitly teach social skills or as part of the suite of effective classroom management resources. The first resource is about positive relationships, which underpins all resources in the suite.

This resource will work most effectively when:

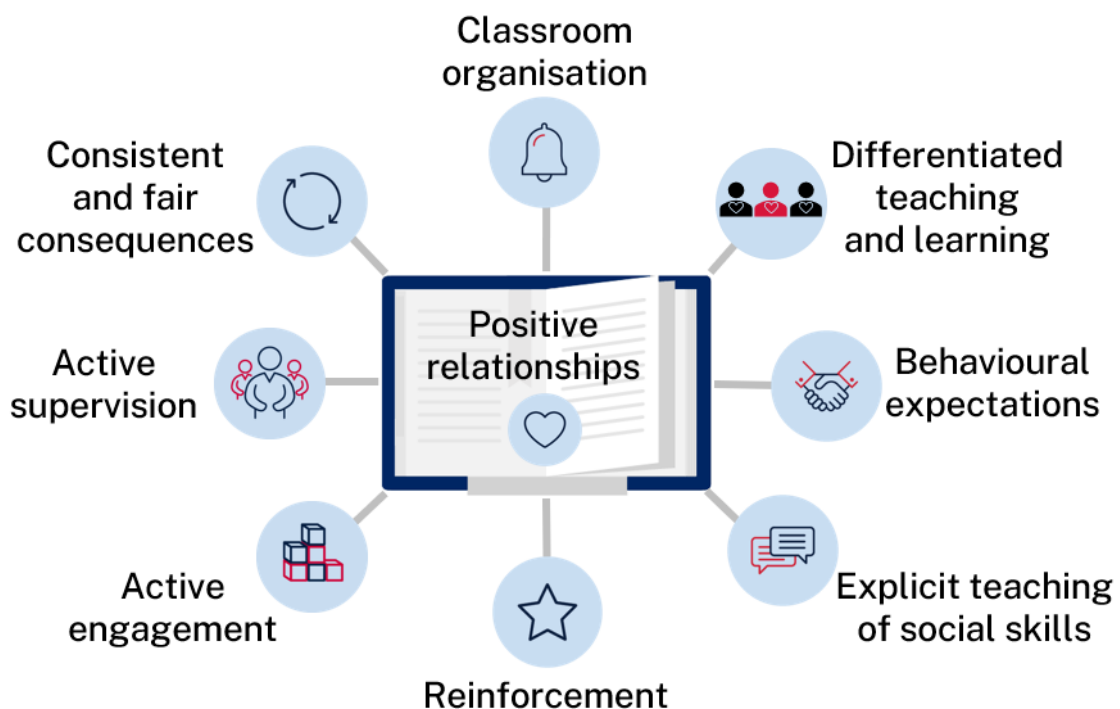
- a whole-school framework for behaviour support and student learning and wellbeing is in place

- schoolwide systems are in place for teaching, acknowledging and responding to behaviours
- data-based decision-making is in place to guide implementation
- classroom systems are linked to the schoolwide system of positive behaviour support
- effective pedagogy, including differentiation, is in place in classrooms.

Key components of effective classroom management

The visual below depicts the components of effective classroom management demonstrated by research to reduce rates of inappropriate or unwanted behaviour and increase student engagement with learning. Each component can be broken down into a number of practices, which teachers can utilise to build a positive classroom environment and maximise instructional time.

This resource focuses on explicitly teaching social skills. Refer to the separate resources for more information about each of the other eight components.



Explicit teaching of social skills

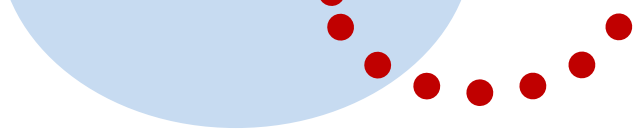


Expectations should be taught explicitly to students at the start of the year, when taking over a class from another teacher, or to new students when they join the class. In addition, expectations should be regularly reviewed, especially after breaks or when introducing new activities.

Expectations will also need to be retaught when students continue to make behavioural errors – this may need to be done with the whole class, with groups of students, or with individual students. Reteaching should include coaching and practice and teachers should look for early opportunities to acknowledge students for following the classroom expectations. Reteaching should not be presented as punishment.

Social skills needed for students to meet behavioural expectations should be taught in exactly the same way that academics are taught. The example below describes the steps involved in explicitly teaching a social skill to meet a behavioural expectation.

Step	Example
Identify skill to be taught	Waiting your turn in a whole class discussion
Define the context	Whole class lesson – teacher asking for ideas; waiting your turn is part of being respectful
Explain key steps or components	Put your hand up and quietly wait for the teacher to call on you
Show how the behaviour is used	Model of correct hand raising/non-example of snapping fingers or calling out; Role plays
Practice	Teacher poses questions and students practice raising hand and waiting
Monitor	Teacher scans and moves around room, looking for students raising hands and waiting
Reinforce and reteach, as required	Teacher provides verbal acknowledgement for correct hand raising and reteaches, as required



For older students, or once students have consistently demonstrated the skill, more emphasis should be placed on reminders, monitoring and positive reinforcement. It is also important to integrate the teaching of expectations into the regular curriculum, using real-life situations and examples of when the selected skills are needed.

Teachers should review the curriculum and classroom activities to determine which skills will need to be taught to students. Taking the time to explicitly teach social skills results in increased academic engagement and fewer behavioural issues.

We cannot assume that students come to school with the necessary social skills to succeed in the school environment. Some of the skills that will need to be explicitly taught include:

- using manners (define and demonstrate what you consider these to be)
- listening to others
- coming prepared to learn
- asking for help
- following instructions
- accepting feedback
- staying on task
- contributing to discussions
- waiting your turn.

In addition, students need to be taught the prerequisite social and emotional skills necessary for academic success, wellbeing and positive relationships. These skills are best taught in the environment in which they are needed, not in a segregated setting or social skills group.

Teachers can support student understanding and use by verbalising the cognitive processes involved and asking for examples of what the skill looks like and sounds like. For example:

'The lawnmower outside is noisy, but I'm just going to focus on my job and not let it distract me.'

'How would we know if someone was listening? What would we see or hear?'

All students will take time to learn and acquire social skills, but some students process and understand social situations differently to others, and so may experience difficulties in making and keeping friends. Explicit teaching of social rules and skills, with lots of opportunities to practice, can help these students to acquire the skills they need to navigate social situations. It's important to remember that when a student is not able to fully participate, it is usually because of the systems and structures in place, and a lack of understanding, not because of their abilities. Research has found that peer mediated [secondary interventions](#) and [primary interventions](#) are one of the most effective approaches for supporting the inclusion of students and the development of social skills at school.

Social skills needed for school success

Self and Social Awareness	Self and Social Management Skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding feelings • Dealing with emotions – self and others • How to relax • Dealing with teasing • Accepting and giving compliments • Responding to correction or being wrongly blamed • Introductions • Tolerance for others • Joining in and accepting newcomers • Sharing and taking turns • Playing a game • Saying sorry • Dealing with peer pressure • Making conversation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expressing emotions • Problem solving • Conflict resolution • Working with others • Making decisions • Negotiating • Adapting to changes • Roles/Responsibilities • Following directions and rules • Completing work independently • Listening to instructions • Producing quality work • Persevering • Attempting challenging work



Role plays

Role plays can also be an effective way to practise new skills in a supportive environment. When using role plays, remember to teach students what to do as a role play participant and as an audience member. It is not advisable for students to demonstrate incorrect behaviour (non-examples) due to the risk of reinforcing negative behaviours, although at times it may be appropriate to involve older students in demonstrations.

Teachers can help students to develop problem solving skills by teaching specific strategies which teach students to take responsibility for their own behaviour.

Common examples include:

- 'Ask three before me' which provides students with a list of three options for answering a question before asking the teacher for help (for example: skip and go back; Google; ask a friend);
- the High 5 for dealing with teasing (ignore, talk friendly, talk firmly, walk away, report);
- the [Solution Wheel](#) (student chooses a solution to try from a class generated list of solutions to common problems).

Teachers can also prompt problem solving through questioning, modelling (including think aloud), scaffolding and acknowledgement of students' efforts.

Additional information

While this resource provides an explanation and examples of explicitly teaching social skills, it is important to remember that becoming an effective classroom teacher involves a thorough understanding of the principles of positive behaviour support. The aim of classroom management is for students to become self-managing, and to create a respectful learning environment where positive relationships are fostered, and individual learning is encouraged.

Becoming an effective classroom teacher also takes [self-reflection](#) and deliberate practice. Self-assessment and coaching have been shown to improve implementation of [effective classroom practices](#). Teachers are therefore encouraged to work with colleagues and school leaders to develop and refine classroom management understanding and skills.

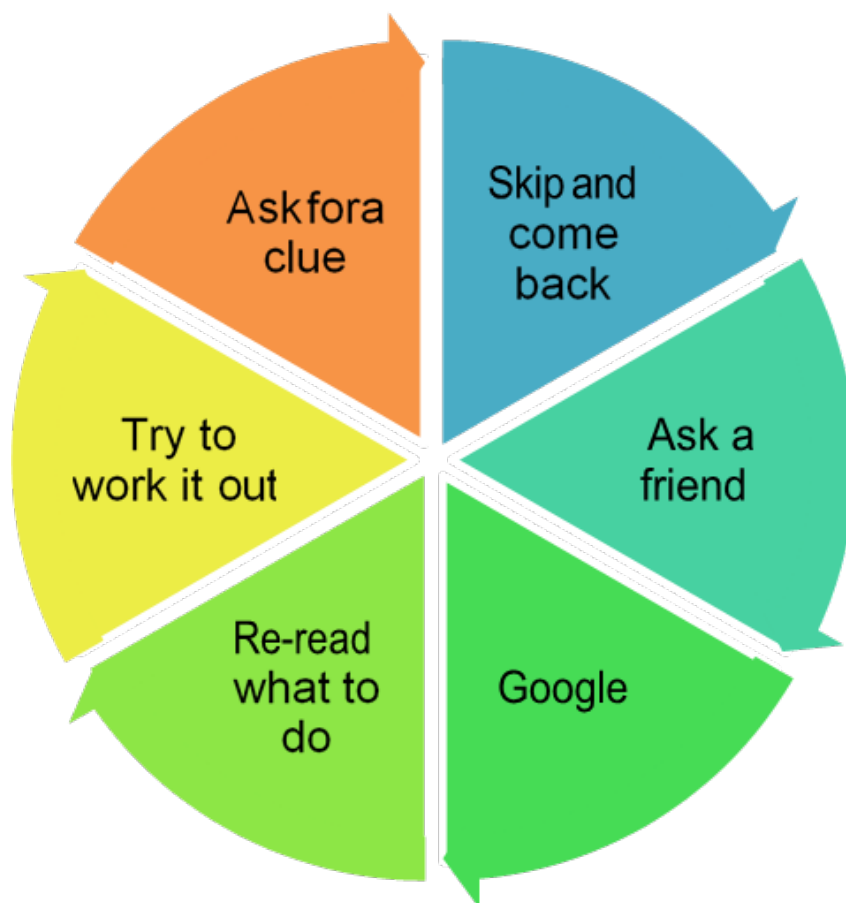
Solution wheel

The Solution Wheel is a specific strategy, designed to support problem-solving and decision-making. It is possible to create a Solution Wheel for a number of different classroom issues, for example:

- What to do if you are being teased.
- What to do if you are having difficulty with a task.
- What to do if you are feeling angry.

The Solution Wheel is a visual display containing a number of different solutions to common concerns. Solutions can be generated in a whole class meeting; then when a difficulty arises students can be encouraged to select a strategy from the wheel to try.

Example Solution Wheel: I'm stuck





Alignment and identified need

System priorities and/or needs

This resource aligns with:

- the [Student Behaviour Strategy](#)
- the [Inclusive, Engaging and Respectful Schools](#) policies
- the [Premier's Priorities](#) to improve outcomes in literacy and numeracy and HSC attainment
- the [New South Wales Department of Education's strategic outcomes](#) of improving academic achievement and wellbeing.

[School Excellence Framework](#)

- Learning domain – Learning culture, wellbeing, curriculum, assessment
- Teaching – effective classroom practice

Relevant frameworks

- [Disability Standards for Education 2005](#)
- [Australian Professional Standards for Teachers](#)
 - Standard 1: 1.2 and 1.6
 - Standard 3: 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5
 - Standard 4: 1, 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4
 - Standard 6: 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4
- [NSW Wellbeing Framework for schools](#) – behaviour, discipline and character education.

Existing resources

- [Behaviour Support Toolkit](#)
 - [Social emotional learning](#)
 - [Conflict resolution](#)
- [Behaviour Professional eLearning:](#)
 - Classroom management fundamentals
 - Understanding behaviour support planning
 - Introduction to Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL)
 - PBL Tier 1 School-wide support

- PBL Tier 1 Classroom support.
- [Inclusive Practice hub](#)
- CESE:
 - [Classroom management: Creating and maintaining positive learning environments](#)
 - [What works best 2020](#)

Consultation

Materials adapted with permission from the Guide to Effective Classroom Management (Queensland Department of Education).

Reviewed by:

- Behaviour Services, Behaviour and Student Participation
- Delivery Support, Student Support and Specialist Programs

Last updated: August 2022

Anticipated resource review date: February 2023

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Evidence base

Research has consistently demonstrated the importance of effective classroom management as a component of effective teaching; the relationship between effective classroom management and teacher self-efficacy and wellbeing; and the positive outcomes associated with a small number of specific classroom management practices.

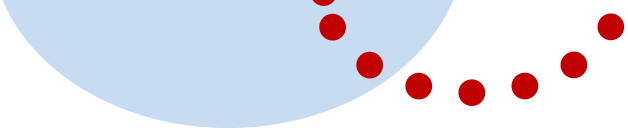
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