

Positive Behaviour Support: Reinforcement

Overview and rationale

Positive relationships underpin all effective classroom management practices. This resource is the sixth 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 reinforcement
- explain different ways to provide reinforcement; and
- develop and establish a menu of reinforcers.

Reinforcement 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 provide positive reinforcement 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:

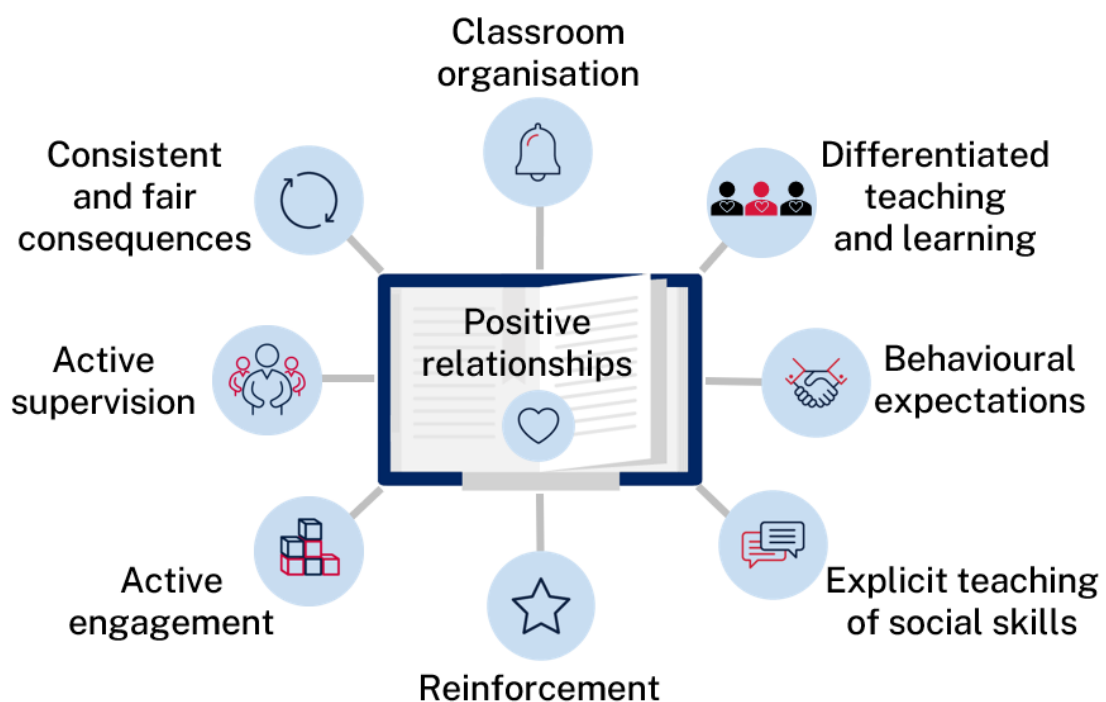
- a whole-school framework for behaviour support and student learning and wellbeing is in place

- 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 reinforcement. Refer to the separate resources for more information about each of the other eight components.



Reinforcement



Behaviour is predictable, functionable, and changeable. Providing students with reinforcement for expected behaviours is one of the most effective ways decrease unwanted behaviours and replace them with more appropriate alternatives.

Reinforcement is any consequence that encourages any behaviour to repeat or increase in magnitude in the future. It consists of two components:

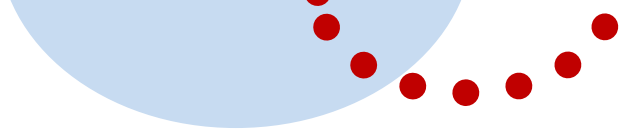
- providing high quality reinforcement for the appropriate behaviours that we want to see; and
- withholding reinforcement **or** providing low quality reinforcement for less desirable behaviours.

Behaviour is reinforced when we experience relief through being provided with something that we desire or having something removed that is contributing to the behaviour. This may include verbal praise, non-verbal acknowledgement, earning tokens, provision of tangible rewards, or opportunities to perform a task or participate in an activity. It can also include reducing volume levels in the classroom, providing a more achievable task, or removing an item with a particular texture or smell.

Effective reinforcement is age appropriate, contextually fitting, and sincere. It should occur immediately, contingent on the desired behaviour. It should be applied frequently when students are learning a new skill, and gradually faded as students become proficient. Tangible and earned rewards should be delivered in conjunction with specific, descriptive feedback which alerts the student as to why the reward was earned. For example:

'You waited your turn – that showed respect, so that's a point for your team.'

Knowledge of students is critical in selecting reinforcers. What one student finds reinforcing may not be reinforcing for another student, and what has worked with one class may not work with another. Teachers need to consider student interests and developmental levels. Younger primary students may enjoy public attention and small tangible rewards, while



older students may prefer private acknowledgement or opportunities to earn privileges.

It is a common assumption that older students do not need to be rewarded for appropriate behaviour, but we know that adolescents need high rates of positive feedback and respond well to appropriate reinforcement. It can be useful to compile a classroom reinforcement menu, with input from students, to provide variety and allow students to select their preferred reinforcer.

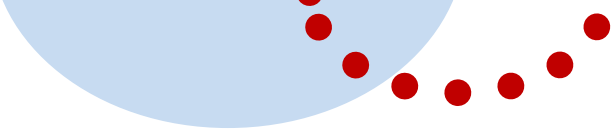
Example reinforcement menu

| Primary | Secondary |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• certificate• student of the week• teacher's helper• playground monitor• feed class pet• lucky dip• sit in teacher's chair for day• choose end of day game | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• free time• VIP pass for canteen• earn points for privileges• perform for class• listen to music• select YouTube clip to share• postcard home• student v teacher challenge |

While reinforcement is a critical component of effective classroom management, it is important to remember the importance of first teaching the expected behaviours. Students cannot demonstrate behaviours that they do not know how to do.

Behaviour Specific Feedback

Teacher feedback is one method of reinforcement with strong empirical support. Yet studies have consistently shown that teachers provide more correction statements than statements which positively acknowledge behaviour. It has also been shown that higher rates of positive teacher feedback are associated with increased teacher and student wellbeing, more positive classroom environments and increased academic engagement.



Behaviour specific feedback gives specific, positive verbal feedback indicating approval of social or academic behaviour. This is one of our most readily available forms of feedback

The recommended ratio of positives to correctives varies in the research, but a ratio of 4:1 is widely accepted as optimal. This does not mean that teachers should correct students after four praise statements, but rather that teachers should be aiming to provide more positive feedback than corrective statements over the course of a lesson or school day.

Feedback should be specific, describe the behaviour that the teacher would like to see more of, and recognise effort and success. For example:

'You started work straight away.' or *'Everyone is on time.'*

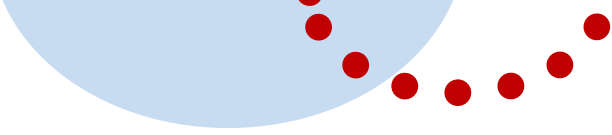
Reinforcement is not synonymous with praise. It is important that feedback sounds sincere and considers student preference for public or private acknowledgement. Praise can be a punisher for some students. General positive statements, such as 'good job' or 'great' do not have the same teaching effect because students may be unaware what they are being acknowledged for.

Consistency

A consistently applied system for teaching, modelling, reinforcing and responding to student behaviour supports staff and student wellbeing.

Consistently teach, model, and reinforce school expectations. Individual teachers should first embed the school-wide expectations in their own classrooms. For example, if the school-wide expectations are to 'be safe, respectful learners', then these should be used in a classroom context. When consistently applied, expectations can foster a safe, predictable learning environment within which students can thrive. A consistently applied school-wide system for teaching, modelling, reinforcing and responding to student behaviour benefits staff and student wellbeing.

Consistently and fairly respond to disruptive or unproductive student behaviour. Teachers need to consistently respond to disruptive or unproductive behaviours. By having a clear system in place to address disruptive or unproductive behaviour, issues can be effectively addressed.



Specific positive feedback. Specific positive feedback involves describing the behaviour, providing a reason or rationale for the behaviour is important and a positive consequence.

Students need to be explicitly told which behaviours were in line with expectations and earn the teacher's acknowledgement. General praise or commonly used phrases such as "good job," though important for a pleasant classroom, are inadequate for building and sustaining desired behaviour.

To be effective, positive feedback should specifically describe the observable behaviour language of classroom expectations. Teachers should describe exactly what they saw that they want the student to continue doing in the future. It should also include a rationale of why the behaviour is important. Providing a rationale helps students to learn the benefits of the expected behaviour.

Additional information

While this resource provides an explanation and examples of reinforcement, 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 your school leaders to develop and refine classroom management understanding and skills.



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 [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, particularly 1.2 and 1.6
 - Standard 3, particularly 3.3, 3.4, and 3.5
 - Standard 4, particularly 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4
 - Standard 6, particularly 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4.
- [NSW Wellbeing Framework for schools](#) – behaviour, discipline and character education.

Existing resources

- [Behaviour Support Toolkit](#)
- [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](#)
 - [Classroom Management: 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

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Evidence base

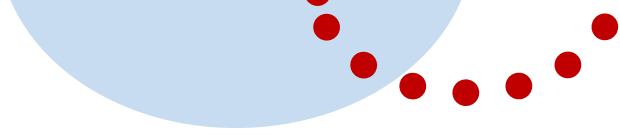
Research has consistently demonstrated:

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

For an overview, see:

Allen, G., Common, E., Germer, C., Lane, K., Buckman, M., Oakes, W., & Menzies, H. (2020). A systematic review of the evidence base for active supervision in Pre-K-12 settings. *Behavioral Disorders*, 45(3), 167-183.

Ashman, A. (2019). *Education for Inclusion and Diversity* (6th Ed.). Pearson.



Barker, K., Poed, S., and Whitefield, P. (Eds.). (2022). School-wide positive behaviour support: The Australian handbook. Taylor and Francis, New York.

Ennis, R., Lane, K., Menzies, H., & Owens, P. (2018). Precorrection: An effective, efficient, low-intensity strategy to support student success. *Beyond Behavior*, 27(3), 146-152.

Galkiene, A., & Monkeviciene, O. (Eds.). (2021). Improving Inclusive Education through Universal Design for Learning. Springer Nature.

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Haydon, T., Hunter, W., & Scott, T. (2019). Active supervision: Preventing behavioral problems before they occur. *Beyond Behavior*, 28(1), 29-35.

Howell, M., Dounavi, K., & Storey, C. (2019). To choose or not to choose?: A systematic literature review considering the effects of antecedent and consequence choice upon on-task and problem behaviour. *Review Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, (6), 63-84.

Hulac, D., & Briesch, A. (2017). Evidence-based strategies for effective classroom management. Guilford Publications.

Marzano, R., Marzano, J., & Pickering, D. (2003). Classroom management that works: Research-based strategies for every teacher. Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development: Alexandria, VA.

Strnadová, I., Dowse, L., Danker, J., & Tso, M. (2020). A review and synthesis of educational supports for students with disability: Evidence based practices in Australia. Summary review. UNSW Sydney.