

Modifying the Learning Environment

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Many aspects of classroom life may contribute to student's misbehavior: the physical arrangement of the classroom, boredom or frustration, and transitional periods. The classroom climate and physical arrangements can encourage desirable behavior.

Change the Environment

Rearrangement of the classroom must consider flow of traffic, teacher proximity, and student movement. There should be adequate space between quiet and active work areas. However, too much space can encourage some students to run; while too little space can lead to bumping each other (Ruef, 1998). While good room arrangement is not a guarantee of good behavior, poor planning in this area can create conditions that lead to problems. Try implementing changes in one setting at a time. To accommodate the needs of individual students, consider the following changes:

- Provide a study carrel for students who are highly distracted by classroom noises.
- Clearly define each student's space, activity, and learning centers. Students can progress through these at a predictable schedule.
- Seat students preferentially. Students with vision or hearing difficulties need seating in the front of the class. Some with distracting behaviors do better if seated away from the center of the class.
- Arrange student seating to allow for maximum visibility and accessibility to the learning activities and to limit distractibility.
- Provide earphones for noise sensitive students to wear during noisy times.
- Be aware of all components of the environment; some students may be sensitive to sounds, smells, textures, and colors.

Increase Predictability

A predictable classroom is a secure classroom for many students. "A classroom schedule that is well-designed and implemented consistently may be the single most important factor in preventing challenging behaviors" (Strain & Hemmeter, 1997). Students with ADD, and other attention or behavior problems, do best in a structured classroom—one where expectations and rules are communicated to them, and academic tasks are carefully designed for manageability. Consider these strategies to provide predictability:

- Implement a daily schedule. When students know what to do and when to do it, many behavior problems are avoided (Ruef, 1998). Students can learn the routine of each day and a weekly planner if helpful for older students.
- Teach transition behavior. Predictable changes in classroom routines may require movement to another area in the school, listening for directions, and gathering of materials. Teach student the expected behavior to minimize student uncertainty.
- Teach and practice routines for infrequent and unexpected events. For fire and disaster drills, teaching students how to line up, the appropriate noise level, and speed of exit will help them to manage the unexpected event. Also teach students appropriate behavior for visitors and substitute teachers.

Examine your instruction and interactions with students in ongoing classroom life. Your own behavior as a teacher can reduce misbehavior, increase instructional time, and maintain group focus and management of students.

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