



Angry, upset, aggressive or violent

Behaviour support and student management are key aspects of teaching. Teachers and other school professionals are constantly required to respond to challenging, difficult or emotionally 'needy' students on a day-to-day basis. The following strategies can be used as part of general teacher practice or more formally through the establishment of individual learning plans, behaviour support plans, student management plans or whole school management plans.

For guidelines, templates and more information on writing behavioural support plans, created by the Victorian State Government, Department of Education and Training, [click here](#).

Note that some behavioural problems may be related to anxiety associated with trauma. If the student is exhibiting agitated behaviour, irritability or outbursts of anger, implement the below suggestions. The student who is very aggressive, distressed and upset needs time and space before they can reason with others. Discuss consequences for unacceptable behaviour when they are calm and can think and talk rationally.

Develop an agreed and predetermined set of procedures with the student and other staff and the principal. The student may benefit from a *Student Behaviour Plan* as used in Victoria.

Teacher strategy

1. Recognise frustration indicators or cues before anger.

Purpose. To avert an angry outburst from the student.

Action. Observe fingers clenched, pulling at jumper or shirt, speech becoming louder. Allow the student to calm themselves by giving them some 'space' before interacting or making a request. Have a quiet space they can go to.

Teacher strategy

2. Catch the student acting in a pro-social manner.

Purpose. To reinforce appropriate social behaviour and to amplify it as positive, promoting pro-social behaviour, rather than the constant negative reinforcement associated with correcting poor behaviour.

Action. Use descriptive praise when you see the student acting in a pro-social way. For example, 'Sam, I like the way you asked for help' or 'Thank you, Paige, what kind words you used when helping Akol.'

Teacher strategy.



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3. Use gentle interventions, on a continuum, to enlist cooperation.

Purpose. To enlist co-operation. The student may believe they have or may have endured 'harsh' or inconsistent treatment by authoritarian figures in their life. They can react in an oppositional manner, blaming others and not taking responsibility for their reactions. They respond best by 'not being cornered'. Choose language wisely.

Action. Use a non-hierarchical approach that demonstrates to the student a commitment to fair and reasonable treatment. For example:

- Use your sense of humour to distract and calm the student.
- Give a simple redirection or an opportunity to 'self-correct'.
- Ignore rather than reprimanding or having the student 'lose face' in front of others.
- Notice 'good' or positive aspects of the student's behaviour.
- Allow some student control by providing an 'illusion of choice', that is, provide two teacher preferred choices as options for the student to choose and act on one.
- Foreshadow that a warning may be given in a moment or two.
- Continue to demonstrate 'respect' for the student and 'liking' the student, but mentioning the positive behaviour you are looking for (e.g. listening, quiet working).
- Build on their special interest or strength by linking any request you make of them with their area of strength.

Teacher strategy

4. Help the 'angry' student develop an area of expertise.

Purpose. Students who are angry, upset, aggressive or violent often have gaps in their learning. Build rapport and help the student see that believing in one's own capabilities and accepting help can lead to positive change and growth in learning.

Action. Get to know the student's interests, skills and potential areas for further development. Help the student develop new skills or areas that might appeal to the student.

For example, while many students learn to read and spell the 100 most frequently written words often teacher support stops at that point. Helping a student to master an extended word list may help their literacy to become more functional and other areas of the curriculum more accessible. For example, use the 354 words in the Oxford Wordlist. See <http://www.oxfordwordlist.com/pages/search.asp>



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Teacher strategy

5. Rate upset/angry behaviour.

Purpose. To use the student rating of the upset/angry behaviour as a tool to help in reducing the behaviour.

Action. Use a feelings thermometer or vertical number line to illustrate the concept. Ask the student to rate the upset/angry behaviour from 1 to 10 (where one is 'not upset' and 10 is the 'worst upset possible'). Ask, 'What would it take for your upset behaviour to be one or two points less?' Discuss the student's response and develop a simple plan to carry out actions to reduce the behaviour.

Note. This may not be effective if the student is highly agitated.

Teacher strategy

6. Put things in perspective.

Purpose. To help the student to realistically rate their levels of upset/anger to better match a situation.

Action. Assist the student to rate the upset out of 10. Brainstorm words like 'annoyed', 'frustrated', 'cross', 'peeved', 'chilled', 'angry'. With an increased emotional vocabulary re-rated the upset. Emphasise that there is no need to overreact or get 'upset and angry' when you really only feel 'upset and annoyed'.

Note: This strategy is not suitable for a student who is highly agitated. If the student is out of control do not attempt to help them put it in perspective rather conduct this activity retrospectively once the student has calmed down.

Teacher strategy

7. Devise a 'what would it take' action plan.

Purpose. To teach the student to become calm.

Action. Ask, 'What would it take for your 'upset' to be one or two points less?' Discuss the student's response and develop a plan to carry out actions to reduce the upset behaviour. The student may need to be guided in possible solutions.



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<p>Teacher strategy</p> <p>8. Brainstorm alternative behaviours with the student who is commonly angry and aggressive. Focus on calm alternatives.</p>
<p>Purpose. To assist students draw upon alternative ways of dealing with anger. Aggressive behaviour can be a habit based on faulty thinking (e.g. 'He deserves to be punched!' or 'Hitting others is fun!') and exposure to aggressive role models.</p>
<p>Action. Challenge the idea that aggression is fun, or acceptable. Engage the student in pro social activities including physical activities to channel aggressive tendencies.</p>

<p>Teacher strategy</p> <p>9. If the student is violent, act on duty of care obligations to all students and yourself.</p>
<p>Purpose. To ensure the safety and wellbeing of all students and yourself by exercising your duty of care obligations and occupational health and safety responsibilities.</p>
<p>Action. Calmly direct the class to stand and quietly leave the room and to assemble at a pre-determined area or buddy teacher's classroom. Immediately inform the principal of your actions and ensure one or more staff members keep the student who is being violent safe and in view.</p> <p>If the student is making serious threats of imminent violence, a senior staff member should call the police and child's parents immediately if necessary.</p>

<p>Teacher strategy</p> <p>10. When the student is aggressive, intolerant, and regularly harasses others, apply consequences within a problem-solving framework.</p>
<p>Purpose. To contain and manage the student while promoting pro social behaviour.</p>
<p>Action. Use natural and logical consequences within a problem-solving framework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Set limitations on play areas, subject choices and who the student plays or associates with and when, to keep other students safe. ○ Enquire about any conflict or 'pressure' at home, school or work. If the student lives between two homes, how might they feel more connected with all adults and other blended family members? What do they miss or would



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they liked changed or modified the most?

- Offer a responsibility such as assisting the PE teacher or the School Maintenance Officer once a week for on-going pro social and co-operative behaviour.

Teacher strategy

11. If aggressive behaviour is seen as 'acceptable' by the student and/or in his and her family, use a 'games' metaphor and/or seek professional support.

Purpose. To convey expectations about the school's and community's values and standards, if a student's upbringing (and current family attitudes) are in conflict.

Action. Talk to the student (and parents) about the different 'rules' and expectations for behaviour at home and at school. Just like there are different rules for different games, there are different rules for different settings. Support this learning with *values education* and calm and consistent consequences for unacceptable behaviour.

Principals and senior staff members may attempt to modify exposure where possible to aggression e.g. inappropriate MA15+ computer games, adult rated films, a bullying sibling or 'harsh' and unreasonable parenting.

Note: Seek agency or other professional support to assist the family to establish alternative behaviour.

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