

Using Reverse Psychology to Kick out That Rebellious Behaviour!

I have often heard colleagues, parents and carers ask the question – How do I ignore this type of behaviour? This child is always disturbing my class and is deliberately upsetting me. What do I do with a rebellious child? How do I get rid of this unwanted and challenging behaviour? I am fed up!

As a teacher and parent, I have learnt and I am still learning how to deal with various unwanted and challenging behaviour in children labelled “Rebellious”. I agree that it could be very annoying, distracting and challenging dealing with children who display continuous unwanted behaviour at home, school or anywhere. Most times, these children do not like been told what to do or how to do things. They do not like taking instructions and orders from others. They want to do things their own way whether it is acceptable or not to others and society.

From my point of view, there is a reason for displaying any form of behaviour. Behaviour stems from having learning difficulties which could be linked to personal, emotional and social issues. This will not be discussed in this article. I will define behaviour as the **“Outward action(s) of what we feel or perceive of ourselves and the world around us”**. To understand why children display certain challenging and repeated behaviour, I suggest that we work from the following:

- What is the background of the child?
- Observe times and dates when this behaviour is displayed by the child.
- What precipitates and triggers the behaviour?
- What are the child’s likes and dislikes?
- With whom does this behaviour frequently occur?
- Has a lot of negative terminology been used with this child i.e. Do not do that! You can’t! Stop that!
- How does the child react to commands, orders and instructions?
- Has the use of positive language not yielded expected result?

If all strategies put in place are not working, then it may be time to use “REVERSE PSYCHOLOGY”.

What is reverse psychology? This is an act of getting someone to do the opposite of what you want them to do without giving them orders or instructions. It is actually directed at soothing their emotions which could be their ego.

Reverse psychology has helped me to deal with challenging behaviour in children. Instead of always acknowledging unwanted behaviour, reverse psychology has helped me to calmly ignore it! Here are some examples of how one can use reverse psychology to change certain unwanted behaviour in children.

1. Take a deep breath and stay calm when confronted with repeated “rebellious” behaviour.
2. Use positive and challenging actions and words to get the child to reverse his or her actions. For example, if a child has a habit of not eating, invite the child to challenge you in an eating competition. Unknowingly the child in trying to compete with you could eat up his/her food before you finish yours. Same could apply to a child who does not like to tidy up. Put the child to a challenge of who will tidy up the quickest.

3. Child A keeps making silly sounds when you are teaching a group of children. This has been going on for days. His/her intention is to distract other children and this upset you. Child A seems to always be seeking negative attention. Simply say to child A, "I know you have good listening skills and I know you will answer the questions correctly at the end of the lesson". Avoid mentioning that behaviour or reacting to the behaviour. Simply act positively instead of reacting negatively. In another instance, you could commend the good listening skills of the other children and this could make child A adjust his or her behaviour appropriately.
4. Child B is not sitting properly in the classroom and you know this has been a trend for him to distract the other children from listening. He is also fidgety. Calmly ignore him and acknowledge other children's good sitting and listening skills. Child B is likely to then sit properly and listen attentively.
5. My own example was that, I got tired of arguing with my daughter about what to wear to school when she was still at nursery. One day, I decided not to argue with her but allow her wear what she chose to wear. She wore her pyjamas and I took her to nursery like that. I had secretly taken extra clothing and quietly asked the teacher to change her when she was ready. When I picked her up after school, she looked sober and said her friends asked her why she wore pyjamas to nursery. She apologised to me and said that she should have listened to me. When we got home, together, we agreed to sort out clothes to be worn the next day the night before. She would help me choose mine and I will help her choose hers. This new plan worked out well. All that unwanted behaviour every morning stopped!
6. Child C likes to cause a lot of trouble in the playground. Every strategy to get rid of this behaviour proves futile. You could put a plan in place - Playground captains. Child C is made a permanent playground captain and will work with any other chosen child to monitor unwanted behaviour in the playground. Child C is likely to become very conscious of the fact that he/she has to be of good behaviour in the playground. Gradually, that challenging behaviour is reversed. Child C's energy is now channeled towards helping other children attain the wanted behaviour in the playground. Child C gets lots of praises and he/she feels very important. This technique could also be used at home.

Finally, I would advise that reverse psychology should be used alongside other skills for handling social and behavioural difficulties in children who have been labelled "Rebellious". There is really no one perfect method of handling behavioural issues. However, studies have shown that results are mostly achieved through the use of more positive skills and techniques. Reverse psychology is certainly one of those positive techniques and I strongly recommend it to parents, carers and teachers.

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