



# Positive Behaviour Management

## Introduction

Welcome to your Tes Professional Studies course on 'Positive Behaviour Management', written in partnership with Mike Gershon, a leading educational author, trainer and consultant. This one-module course will enable teachers to understand the importance of using and maintaining rules in the classroom and how these rules contribute to a well-organised learning environment with high expectations. We will also explore how praise can be used to motivate and encourage positive behaviour in children, and how sanctions are used as a consequence for negative behaviour.

This course will help teachers to:

- understand how to use rules clearly and consistently to set high expectations for behaviour
- recognise the role that praise plays in reinforcing positive behaviour choices
- understand the need for sanctions
- learn how rules, sanctions, and praise, used in tandem, can be used to manage behaviour in a positive way and maintain a well-ordered classroom.

Is it possible for any teacher to be a master in behaviour management, no matter who they are or what they teach?

Think about this question as you go through the course.

## Using rules

Rules regulate behaviour. They exist in all social situations.

Think, for example, about the rules you follow when eating dinner with friends, when boarding public transport or when buying things in a shop. If rules are broken, social equilibrium is affected.

Because they regulate behaviour, rules allow us to predict the future with a reasonable degree of accuracy. This makes social situations easier to manage and allows us to co-exist peacefully and successfully. Without them life would be anxious, tiring, stressful and frustrating – so we should not be afraid of enforcing them.

A well-ordered classroom is always based on a set of clear rules. These rules are explicitly stated and reinforced by the modelled behaviour and expectations of the teacher.

So, for example, at the start of the year, we might lay down our explicit rules for a new class, displaying these on the board so everybody can see them.

As the year progresses, we would then implicitly reinforce and develop these rules through our actions. This habituates students into understanding what is acceptable and what is unacceptable in our classroom. In short, the rules of your classroom cause norms to develop.

To achieve the norms you want, you need to use rules in three specific ways.



### 1. The rules must be clear, fixed and fair

If they are not, students will be at least partially justified in challenging your interpretation or application of them, leading to difficulties.

For example, if you change the rules from lesson-to-lesson, then students will quickly come to question the legitimacy of the rules and wonder why they should bother trying to follow them in the first place.

### 2. The rules must be enforced without fear or favour

If they are not, students will observe that the rules apply to some people but not to others. This is a recipe for disaster.

For example, if you enforce a rule in one situation and then fail to do so in another, the student(s) who felt the force of the rule in the first situation will (quite rightly) feel aggrieved, damaging your relationship with them and their attitude to your lessons.

### 3. You must maintain very high expectations at all times

Assume that all students will follow all your rules from the start to the finish of the lesson. After all, why shouldn't they?

While there may be a difference between expectation and reality, the key point is the message you are sending to students. They will live up to your expectations – or down to them – based on where you set them. So set them high.

*Think about your own classroom practice and think of three 'non-negotiable' classroom rules that you would enforce. Remember that your rules should be clear and reflective of your high expectations.*

## Using praise

Praise **motivates**, **habituates**, and **stimulates**. These three functions all have a role to play in the creation of a positive learning environment. Click on each key word to learn more.

### 1. Motivates

Praising students for what they have done well motivates them to repeat that behaviour. This encourages the development of positive actions in the classroom. If you do not praise your students, how can they know that what they have done is the right thing?

Consider each of these examples of praise. What is good about them?

*"Excellent effort levels everyone - I can see people have their heads down and are really focused on making this a great piece of work."*

Praising the entire class is an effective way to reinforce that positive classroom behaviours are achieved together and gives collective motivation to keep trying hard. It also indirectly highlights to anyone who isn't currently focusing that they are the exception and shows them what they should be doing.



*"Well done Saida, that is a super answer. I like the way you connected your ideas to the evidence and showed how they complement each other."*

Saida is being recognised for her contribution to the question that was asked, but the praise goes further to give specific reasons as to why the answer is good and why the praise has been earned.

*"Thanks Brandon, I really appreciate you staying focused today – it's great to see you setting such a good example."*

Brandon was probably not focused yesterday, and this may be a regular occurrence. Giving genuine, thankful praise for this reason recognises the effort and change in behaviour and offers positive praise to a child who may not always feel like a 'good example' to motivate him to continue.

You should not stint on praise, but you should always ensure that it is genuine, sincere, and specific. Otherwise, students will cease to believe that what you are saying is true.

Pay particular attention to students who rarely receive praise, such as quiet students, students who tend to get into trouble or students who are low achieving. Just imagine what it must be like to go through day after day rarely hearing that anything you have done is good. Miserable.

Change the mindset of these students by finding ways to praise them for their work, thinking or behaviour. For example, if you have a student with low literacy levels who finds writing difficult, engage them in a one-to-one discussion and then praise their speaking and listening.

## 2. Habituates

Habituation of positive, learning-focused behaviour stems from our use of praise. We are predisposed to repeat behaviours which lead to positive outcomes for us, so if we receive praise for acting in a certain way, we are more likely to repeat that behaviour.

Furthermore, students will observe you delivering praise to other students. This leads to vicarious reinforcement, wherein the observer sees what happens when certain behaviour is done, and then seeks to imitate that behaviour themselves to receive the same rewards.

## 3. Stimulates

Not only does praise have all these positive effects, it also stimulates rapport between you and your students. The logic is simple; we all like to feel good and we all prefer to work with and for people who are positive. Therefore, a teacher who regularly uses praise is likely to build rapport with their pupils. This will lead to stronger relationships which will make behaviour management much easier.

To illustrate the point, consider how you have felt during your own career when you have been thanked by managers or colleagues for the work you have done, and contrast this to how you have felt on the odd occasion when your efforts have been overlooked or ignored.

## Using sanctions

Sanctions are a necessary and important component of rules. If you do not have sanctions, then this sends out the message that rule-breaking behaviour will be tolerated.



Similarly, if you do not have sanctions but often use praise, students will begin to see you as a soft touch, knowing full well that their negative behaviour will go unpunished and that all they will need to do is show some positive behaviour in order to get back in your good books.

The main features of sanctions are that they are:

- **fair** - this means they retain moral authority and are difficult to argue with
- **reasonable** - this shows that they are grounded in rationality and promotes the notion that in our society we give punishments based on reasoning rather than arbitrary decision-making
- **enforced consistently** - inconsistency creates uncertainty, undermines the authority of the teacher, and creates precedents which students can use to argue (effectively) against the subsequent imposition of any sanctions - the argument being, "Well, if it didn't apply to so-and-so, then why should it apply to me?" You should identify your sanctions alongside your rules at the beginning of the year and make them clear to students. This way, no one can say they weren't warned.

You can make them clear in a number of ways. For example, by:

- displaying them on the wall
- talking to students about them during the first lesson of the year
- reminding students of them as a 'first and final warning' before implementing them
- using them if inappropriate behaviour develops
- speaking individually to students whose behaviour seems to be heading in a negative direction and reminding them what will have to happen if this continues.

You might also like to think about tacit sanctions such as showing disappointment, a disapproving look, or the removal of your trust. All of these work to further demonstrate to students that negative behaviour will always have a consequence.

That is the key to sanctions. They are about demonstrating that actions have consequences, that these consequences cannot be escaped and that they are a direct result of the decisions students choose to make.

The following video shows how a teacher uses positive behaviour management throughout the lesson to set high expectations for behaviour. Watch how he uses praise, encouragement and positive feedback to motivate students and to build positive relationships with them.

## Applying rules consistently

We talked earlier about the importance of using rules as part of positive behaviour management. We suggested that rules should be clear and that they should be applied consistently and fairly. But how easy is it to do this? To think about this, let us consider a fairly common written rule:

### No running in the corridors

What does this actually mean? On first glance it appears obvious, there must be no running in the corridors. But how would you interpret the rule in the following situations?

- A student speed-walks down the corridor.
- A teacher runs down the corridor to get to a lesson on time.



- A student runs down the corridor having been asked by a teacher to quickly grab something from another room.
- A student runs down the corridor claiming they are chasing after a mouse which has escaped from the science laboratory.
- A student runs down the corridor because they are late for a lesson. Thirty seconds before a teacher told them to get to their lesson as quickly as possible and threatened consequences if they were late.

These cases demonstrate to us that all rules are in some way interpreted as they are applied. Often this is not noticed because the application falls within a generally accepted sphere of what the rule means. At other times, it is glaringly obvious and can even cause major problems.

It is therefore important the rules set in your school and classroom are clear, simple to understand, and avoid ambiguity as much as possible. One of the best ways to ensure this is to model these behaviours yourself within the classroom.

## Summary

You have now completed your course on 'Positive Behaviour Management', in which you learned about using and establishing rules effectively, using praise to establish a positive learning environment, and using sanctions to effectively communicate that all actions, including negative and antisocial actions, have consequences.

To download your certificate, simply complete the accompanying questionnaire. When you have completed the questionnaire, there is the opportunity for you to leave feedback on the course and we would be very grateful if you would take a minute to do so.