
I N S I G H T S

FOR FAMILIES



Emotional and Behavioral Issues



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INSIGHTS FOR FAMILIES is provided by your child's school in recognition of your role as a partner in education. Insights is produced by Marcia Latta, communications consultant.

Managing student behavior in the classroom has become a hot-button issue in schools around the country. Poorly behaved students that create distractions in the learning environment for other students are a challenge that both new and veteran educators struggle to address.

In extreme cases, teachers say they are fending off physical violence, such as kicking and biting, and parents are complaining about disruptions that affect their children.

Is this a new normal?

In the last several years, teachers have reported higher rates of student misbehavior. Teacher survey results in a Scholastic and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation report show that behavioral issues are present in all grade levels and have a significant impact on the entire classroom. Discipline takes time away from teaching and learning.

“Concern about behavior issues was not limited to any particular demographic group. While teachers who worked in schools in low-income areas reported concerns about behavioral issues at a higher rate (65%), teachers who worked in high-income areas were not far behind. In high-income areas, 56 percent of teachers reported more behavioral issues that interfere with teaching and learning.” <https://bit.ly/2oDZnyQ>

Don't blame the child

The rise in student behavioral problems is a result of a variety of issues that impact kids: social media influences, social and emotional issues from family dysfunction and poverty, and even the national political tone. Regardless of why, it is essential to address behavior without blaming the child.

One of the best ways to do that is to focus on positive behavior. Behavioral expert Doug Maraffa emphasizes the need for schools to set up a climate of positive support for all students. “Current student outcomes are based on our current school culture.”

Parents can have an important influence on school climate and culture by being involved in their child's school and classroom. Establishing good communication with school staff is an important step in sharing concerns about climate that may impact learning for all students.

Parents can also help improve climate by understanding the need for all students to succeed. Students who are acting out emotionally or misbehaving in class should not be labeled as one of “those kids.” The strength of a school is based on the ability for all kids to succeed. According to Maraffa, school climate and culture is influenced by our beliefs: “Do we believe the child is a problem or the child has a problem?” <https://bit.ly/2MOldgm>

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Tips for parents

The good news for parents is that school leaders are aware of the issues that contribute to unruly classroom behavior, and there are many resources to help and coach teachers in supporting positive student behavior.

Everyone wins when all kids get the help they need to be ready to learn. Parents with concerns about classroom disruptions due to behavioral issues should talk to teachers and principals about their approach to a system-wide positive school climate.

For parents whose children have emotional or behavioral challenges, there are resources to help manage these challenges.

Social and emotional development

Age-appropriate physical development is easier to see, but social and emotional development is just as important. These skills will help them manage stress, build healthy relationships and thrive in work and social settings. Effective ways to support this growth are:

Lead by example, by modeling positive behaviors.

Be affectionate.

Be considerate of feelings, wants and needs.

Express interest in daily activities.

Respect their viewpoints.

Express pride in accomplishments.

Provide encouragement and support during times of stress.

<https://bit.ly/2oGh9Sg>

Challenging parent issues

It is hard for parents to watch their children struggle with the disappointment and challenges of childhood, especially when they feel the natural consequences of their own choices. Those struggles are hard to watch but necessary for growth. These tips are from family therapist Janet Lehman:

Parent the child you have, not the child you wish you had. Parents must accept the child they have rather than the child they think they should be. Managing behavioral issues can be easier without resentment from wishing your child didn't have them.

Let your child experience the pain and discomfort of natural consequences.

Accepting the results of the choices we make is a natural part of growing up and taking responsibility for our actions. Parents can't and shouldn't protect children from these important lessons.

Worries about judgment, shame and blame from others is not productive. It is stressful when children act out. Worrying about what other people think is not helpful, and it makes a bad situation worse. Be aware of these feelings and develop ways to increase positive self-talk that will help you stay calm for you and your child.

<https://bit.ly/2qyWAcR>