



Behavior Management Series–Issue #17

Why Some Children Make Unnecessary or Inappropriate Noises or Sounds

Academic Possibilities: Inability to complete or understand academic assignments may trigger acute anxiety in some children. As a result, this nervous tension may be released through noises and gestures.

Environmental Possibilities: Some children who exhibit attention seeking noises or sounds may be doing so as a result of poor parenting skills which have not set boundaries or made the child aware of consequences for inappropriate actions. Further, the child may not feel he or she receives enough attention and may “ask” for the spotlight in the classroom inappropriately.

Intellectual Possibilities: Some intellectually low functioning children may exhibit some of these symptoms as a result of immature behavior.

Language Possibilities: Not Applicable

Medical Possibilities: Inappropriate, unusual, or unexplained noises, sounds, animal sounds and so on may be an indication of Tourette Syndrome. Tourette Syndrome (TS) is a neurological disorder that appears to be genetically transmitted in most cases. Tourette Syndrome is one of a number of disorders classified as Tic Disorders. Tics are involuntary movements which present themselves through motor or sound. Tourette Syndrome has several forms, one of which is:

Complex phonic tics: These represent involuntary linguistically meaningful utterances or expressions, such as repetitive use of phrases. Examples include:

- making animal-like sounds
- unusual changes in pitch or volume of voice
- stuttering
- coprolalia: socially taboo phrases or obscenities sounds

Perceptual Possibilities: NA

Psychological Possibilities: The release of nervous tension or a nervous habit may account for this behavior in some cases which may then be secondarily reinforced by social reactions.

Social Possibilities Some children tend to get social recognition for their “ silliness” which in some cases may involve noises or actions. These behaviors are reinforced by the laughter pr reactions of his classmates. The child therefore “chooses” social status in spite of classroom consequences.

What To Do When This Happens

- Be sure to contact the parents and have the child checked immediately for any neurological or medical problems first.
- Discuss with the student whether or not the noises being made are voluntary or involuntary.
- Assuming the noises are voluntary, explain to him or her that you will not tolerate this type of behavior in your classroom.
- Explain that this is a classroom and not a place for games and joking all the time. His or her behavior is not appropriate and it must stop.
- If the behavior stops, reward the child privately so that he notices that you are aware that he is doing a better job controlling his behavior.
- If the behavior does not stop, enforce a consequence that will teach child that this noise making needs to stop.
- Give the student more opportunities to participate in class so that he has the chance to make noises in a constructive way.
- When the student raises his hand, provide verbal praise so that he knows that this type of behavior is what is expected of him in your class.
- Have the student sit next to a peer who exhibits behaviors which you would like reinforced.
- Be sure that you do not reinforce the behavior by laughing at what the child is doing. Sometimes, his noises may be funny and amusing. If this occurs you will just make the situation worse.
- Meet with the school psychologist to see if there are any extenuating circumstances that might be creating this pattern of inappropriate behavior.
- In order to deal with this pattern, you must understand the different sides that are working at the same time. First, the child’s need for attention is not the problem. The problem is in the child’s choice of behaviors to derive attention. Therefore, you need to do the following:
 - o Provide the child with controlled attention when he least expects it. For example, go over to him when not expected, call him up to your desk for reassurance or observation of a positive behavior when not expected, and let him know at the end of the day the things that you found to be most positive.
 - o Meet with the child individually and preempt the inappropriate behavior. This means that you need to tell the child before he enters the room in the morning that you will not allow him to act in this manner in the classroom any longer, and, there will be serious consequences if the rules are not followed. These consequences should be determined prior to discussing this situation with the child. Explain that you expect cooperation, and that if necessary, you will provide him with other outlets for humor. This may have to be repeated over several mornings to reinforce the seriousness of your beliefs.
 - o The above 2 suggestions assume that the child may be able to provide the appropriate humor in a controlled setting. However, if the child’s sense of humor is highly inappropriate, immature or does not respond to the limits then the child

should be referred immediately to the school psychologist and/or Child Study Team.

- Children who are not able to respond to external boundaries may be involved in a much more serious problem than at first thought. The quickness of the referral in this case is best for all involved.

Why Children Write and Pass Notes In Class

Academic Possibilities: Some children pass and write notes in class because they are bored with the academic topic being taught. What is being discussed is not interesting to the child and therefore, the child passes notes because of the lack of interest.

Environmental Possibilities: Passing notes in class is something that almost all children do. Yet it needs to be reinforced at home that this behavior is not acceptable. Parents have to remind children about the purpose of school and what is acceptable behavior. If this is not done, the child may feel as though he can get away with this behavior with no consequences.

Intellectual Possibilities: Children who have lower levels of intelligence may not grasp many concepts. Because of their slow ability, they may become frustrated by the work. In the process, they pass notes to other children because of their inability to understand what is going on in class. Similarly, those with high levels of intelligence may pass notes because they are so bored with the class work and have so much extra free time that they write notes while others are doing their work and then pass the notes when the teacher is not looking.

Language Possibilities: Children with language problems may pass notes with phrases like “What is she saying, “What does this mean”, or I don’t understand the teacher”.

Medical Possibilities: Not Applicable

Perceptual Possibilities: Same as Language Possibilities

Psychological Possibilities: Passing notes is normally not a serious psychological problem. However, there are some underlying messages regarding the reasons why kids do it. For some, it is a need to “be bad” and do something against authority that is not too dangerous. For others, they need to pass notes to discuss the heartache they are feeling or the “crush” he or she has on another student. Psychologically, passing notes is the child’s way of communicating to peers, when communication is not allowed. However, the continuation of this behavior after boundaries have been set may indicate a more compulsive act and should be investigated.

Social Possibilities: The most probable reasoning for passing notes in class is based on social interaction. This is the way children and adolescents socially deal with one another when they absolutely have to talk but are not allowed. The writing and passing of notes becomes a form of social bonding between students.

What To Do When This Happens

- Writing and passing notes is something that is to be expected in an elementary school. The fact is, all children will write and pass notes. Therefore, you should determine what

your policy will be involving writing and passing notes at the beginning of the school year.

- Have a class lecture on the first day of school about your policy on writing and passing notes. Explain to all students why you do not want it happening. Furthermore, discuss with them what will happen if they are caught writing or passing notes.
- If a particular student always writes and passes notes, you can do the following
 1. Move the student and his desk to the front of the room near you. This way, if he/she is writing or passing notes, you can see him/her with much more ease.
 2. Let this student have more interaction with other students throughout the day. Many times, children pass notes because they want to communicate with a friend and they have not had the chance to do so during the day.
 3. Have many structured activities that involve group work. When children have a lot of free time, they may get involved with activities which may not be suitable for the classroom.
 4. Sit down with the student 1 to 1 to discuss the situation. Get his/her opinion about why this is occurring and whether or not he/she believes he/she can stop. Be fair but firm with him/her.
 5. Reward the student with verbal praise when you see him/her working on projects or topics which you know are completely school related. Let him/her know that you recognize that his attention is focused on proper activities and that you are very pleased with his/her work habits at that time.

Why Children Make Frequent Visits To The Nurse

Academic Possibilities: Children who feel under intense academic pressure either as a result of a lack of understanding or just feeling overwhelmed may use visits of the nurse to avoid academic pressure, failure, embarrassment, or reaction.

Environmental Possibilities: Children who suffer separation anxiety from their parents will frequently visit the nurse in hopes of being sent home. Other children may visit the nurse on a regular basis to derive nurturance and attention not experienced at home.

Intellectual Possibilities: Same as Academic Possibilities

Language Possibilities: Same as Academic Possibilities

Medical Possibilities: There may be a variety of medical reasons why children frequently visit the nurse. This factor should always be considered first and ruled in or out first before assuming other factors.

Perceptual Possibilities: Same as Academic Possibilities

Psychological Possibilities: Some children frequently visit the nurse for nurturance, security, attention, recognition or stability. If the motives for such visits include those mentioned, then the child is using the nurse to relieve the tension of need deprivation. If this pattern is reinforced, the child learns to associate it with relief and may continue to increase the frequency of the visits.

Social Possibilities: Some children who may be experiencing social stress or rejection may utilize the nurse during times when social interactions and the fear of rejection may be the

highest. These children may visit the nurse during recess, lunch, or free time when the chances of social interaction are greatest.

What To Do When This Happens

- Since this issue may have medical roots, we strongly recommend that you immediately seek out consultation with the school nurse, school psychologist and the principal for purposes of the child's safety, your liability, the school's liability, and the parent's rights.

Why Children Threaten To Hurt or Kill Themselves

Academic Possibilities: For some children, trying to succeed in an academic setting is not possible. As hard as they try, they cannot do it. Regardless of the reason why, it normally creates great frustration. When there is no outlet to turn to or the realization that academic grades will never get better, they may try to kill themselves because of their constant failure in school, lack of hope for the future, fear of disappointing parents who may have high expectations etc..

Environmental Possibilities: Some children have home lives which are incredibly sad. They may be sexually abused, physically abused or neglected. They may also be going through a nasty divorce between their parents. There are numerous possible environmental reasons that create depression. However, when the environmental factors overwhelm the child, he or she may not see any way out other than self destruction since he or she may decide that life is no longer worth living.

Intellectual Possibilities: Same as Academic Possibilities

Language Possibilities: Everything we do in school involves language. Whether it is communication or comprehension, it is something that surrounds us all day. For some children language problems are very severe. These problems can be terribly stressful, leading to tremendous insecurity and anxiety and social ridicule and rejection. If these feelings become too much to handle, the child may believe that he wants to end his life.

Medical Possibilities: Some children may feel as though they have been dealt a bad hand in life with respect to medical condition. Whether it's because he is deaf, blind, in a wheelchair, has no arms, etc. it can create a great sense of feeling as though "I am very different". If the child does accept his differences, it can lead to serious depression. This can then lead to eventual attempting of the taking of his life

Psychological Possibilities: Children can be seriously depressed. It is not just adults that experience this mood. When depression hits in for whatever reason there can be a sense of learned helplessness on the part of the child. The idea that my life will never get better and it is hopeless makes the child think that perhaps life would be better for everyone involved if he she were dead. Sometimes extreme guilt and anger can be internalized leading to depression and thoughts of self destruction.

Social Possibilities: Some children are never accepted by others. For whatever reason, they are social outcasts and do not fit in. This can be very stressful for some kids, especially if they really

try to fit in. When this type of situation compounds itself, the child may think that he will never have any friends in life and will always be alone. This can lead to the thoughts of killing himself. Other times children who are bullied or picked on unmercifully will sometimes see no way out because of the intense day to day social ridicule and pressure.

What To Do When This Happens

- This is an issue where we strongly recommend that you immediately seek out consultation with the school psychologist and the principal for purposes of the child's safety, your liability, the school's liability, and the parent's rights.

Why Some Children Tease Other Children

Academic Possibilities: Children who feel academically inadequate may displace their inadequacy on others who they perceive as more adequate by teasing and picking. This behavior takes the spotlight off their academic limitations.

Environmental Possibilities: Teasing to a point is part of everyday life. However, when a child uses this behavior frequently or with a constant need to upset others, then the motivation may be very different. The frequency and intensity of the teasing behavior is crucial. If teasing is frequent and intense then there is a strong possibility that the child may be venting some tension, frustration, anger or abusive experiences. Certain parenting styles which profess teasing at the expense of someone's self esteem, or picking behavior as a means of venting parental frustration can contribute to this. Other possibilities may include older siblings that resort to intense teasing of a younger child. This child then in turn goes off to find his own victim.

Intellectual Possibilities: Some children with limited intellectual ability may lack the social skills and maturity to fully understand the consequences of their behavior.

Language Possibilities: Same as Perceptual Possibilities

Medical Possibilities: Not Applicable

Perceptual Possibilities: Some children with perceptual deficits may not always pick up the social nuances or possess the social skills to monitor feedback from other children. As a result, they may not always be aware that what they are saying may negatively affect others. Teasing in this case may be innocent and an attempt to be funny or liked. However, it may not be well thought out and have negative consequences or reactions.

Psychological Possibilities: Teasing in a frequent and intense form is usually an outlet for suppressed (pushed back) anger or frustration. While there are times when the person will directly tease the individual with whom they are angry, they may also displace this anger through teasing on others. In other cases children who feel insignificant tease other children to heighten their level of importance and power in the eyes of other children.

Social Possibilities: Some children may tease others to gain the social spotlight and look more important in the eyes of his peers. Other children may tease for attention, thinking that they will be noticed by that particular individual. However, depending on the extent and nature of the teasing rejection may occur, increasing the child's social anxiety.

What To Do When This Happens

- Discuss with the child 1 to 1 how this type of behavior will not be tolerated in your classroom. Go over with him what the rules of the class are and that people are to be respected at all times.
- Have a class talk about other people's feelings and how everyone needs to be treated kindly.
- Talk to your librarian about having the child read a book about friendship and feelings.
- Remove the child from any group activities when he engages in such behavior. Do this immediately so that he understands that the behavior is unacceptable and he is being reprimanded for it.
- Have the child engage in self-esteem activities to promote his self-worth. Many times, a child makes fun of others due to his own insecurities.
- Discuss with the school psychologist about the possibility of talking with the child either individually or in a group about respecting other people's feelings.
- If the problem persists to the point where it is affecting the child's everyday functioning, his situation should be brought up to the Child Study Team in the school so that his situation is appropriately evaluated.