



Behavior Management Series -Issue#4

Why Children Bother Other Students Who Are Trying To Work

Academic Possibilities: Children who may not understand the work assigned or feel academically inadequate may divert their discomfort and attempt to get others to stop working so that they do not feel so different. At other times, children who are lost or confused with academic tasks may vent their frustration by bothering others.

Environmental Possibilities: There are times when children who are not receiving enough attention at home will search for any opportunity to get it. As a result, when in the classroom, such children may feel insignificant and desire some attention to ease their tension. Since they are driven by their tension, their judgment is impaired and they will do anything to get their need fulfilled without regard for the situation or the boundaries or rights of others. The key here is that any behavior that reduces tension is used regardless of the circumstances, the players or the consequences.

Intellectual Possibilities: Children with limited intellectual abilities may lose their attention quickly and bother others in an immature manner to get them to play rather than work.

Language Possibilities: Same motive as Academic

Medical Possibilities: Bothering others may be indicative of a child with Attention Deficit with Hyperactive Disorder. These children exhibit several symptoms of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity, and it is not uncommon for them to constantly bother others at the wrong time.

Perceptual Possibilities: Children with perceptual difficulties may not possess the internal processing necessary to perceive a situation as inappropriate. Their timing and mode of behavior may be misperceived as being appropriate.

Psychological Possibilities: Children who are highly anxious, angry, overwhelmed or oppositional defiant (not able to follow rules or intrudes on the rights and properties of others) will bother others quite frequently. The key factor here is the child's lack of internal controls and response to boundaries. Some children who lack internal control are unable to set their boundaries. These children may respond to the external control set up by teachers and other authority figures. In this case, there is a problem, but not as serious as a children who does not

respond to any external control by any authority figure i.e. principal. In this case, the child is considered totally out of control and may require a very restrictive educational setting.

Social Possibilities: Some children who have a neurotic need to be accepted will continuously bother certain children whom they wish to notice them. This bothersome behavior actually defeats their desire since negative feedback by the other child or teacher is common.

What to Do When This Happens

- Sit down with the student and discuss what you are seeing. Explain to him that his behavior is becoming problematic in the classroom and that it must stop.
- Give the child the opportunity to explain side of the story. It is very important that you find out why he/she is bothering others. Is it because he does not understand assignments? Needs excessive attention? etc. provide labels since many times children cannot communicate what they feel because they lack the appropriate label for their feelings.
- Try to get involved with the student as much as possible so that his focus is taken off of the other children.
- Have the student sit next to a peer who can help him out and who is also a compassionate and understanding child.
- Let the student participate as much as possible in class discussions so that he feels that he is getting the attention he needs.
- If the student is consistently bothering the same people, then remove the child from that area. If necessary, move his seat closer to you so that you can keep an eye on him.
- Contact the parents if the situation warrants it. Find out from them if this is a behavior specific to school or whether he does this at home.
- When the child is not bothering others, praise the child for his great behavior.
- When the child is bothering others, be sure to act immediately to let the child know that the behavior is not acceptable.
- If necessary, discuss with the school psychologist about the possibility of setting up a behavior modification program for the child in the classroom so that reinforcement is delivered in an appropriate manner.
- 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.

Why Children Are Boy or Girl Crazy

Academic Possibilities: There are times when a child cannot succeed in academics. Because of this, he may need help from others. Yet, by always having a girlfriend, he has found someone who may be able to help him with class work or home work which he cannot do independently.

Environmental Possibilities: Some children may be boy or girl crazy because they see this type of behavior as acceptable within their families. For example, a girl who has 2 older sisters may see them talking about boys all of the time. Also, children with parents who are divorced may see one of them dating many people or engaging in very sexually promiscuous behavior. These children then come to believe that this is a normal way of life, so they begin to like the opposite sex earlier than others.

Intellectual Possibilities: Not applicable

Language Possibilities: Not applicable

Medical Possibilities: Some children go through puberty much earlier than others. Whether this be for the males with pubic and body hair, a changing of the voice or the development of sperm or for the girls with the development of breasts and the onset of menstruation (menarche), the fact is that some kids experience this a few years earlier than most. When this occurs, the change in hormones can create new and exciting feelings for them. Consequently, they begin to have emotions pertaining to sexuality which they have never had, partly due to biological and physiological changes.

Perceptual Possibilities: Not applicable

Psychological Possibilities: Some children feel the need to be boy or girl crazy because it gives them something that they are missing in their lives. More often than not, they have a need for attention and desire to be loved. They like members of the opposite sex not because it necessarily feels right but more so because having a girlfriend or boyfriend involves both giving and receiving affection and “love”. These feelings may be something that they consciously or unconsciously feel that they are not getting in their lives. Their lack of confidence in their ability to be alone then strengthens the need for a boyfriend or girlfriend.

Social Possibilities: Having a girlfriend or boyfriend, especially at an early age, can be a great sense of status within an elementary school. If you start to date early, the odds are high that people will know about it, making you popular within the school. This social status is something that many children desire, and decide to attain it by being boy or girl crazy.

What to Do When This Happens

Most of the time, being boy or girl crazy does not inhibit a teacher's functioning within the classroom. Truthfully, it is not something which often warrants too much concern. However, if you find that it is a problem in your classroom, we suggest that you do the following:

- Discuss appropriate boy-girl behavior in class as a group lesson.
 - Explain that friendship does not have to involve hugging and kissing.
 - Give creative writing assignments for expressing the feelings that the child may be having.
 - Have a professional within the school give a class talk about the nature of relationships and friendships in elementary school.
 - Talk to the student privately to discuss the feelings he is having and how he should be acting within the school.
 - 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.
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Why Children Are Bullies

Academic Possibilities: In general, bullying type behavior is an expression of some type of frustration or insecurity on the part of children. In some children who suffer from academic frustration, they will bully other children because they cannot succeed at schoolwork they know others can do. Their bullying behavior is just a manifestation of frustration from their academic failures, and they are displacing their anger towards those who are weaker than they.

Environmental Possibilities: Some children may become bullies as a result of the pressure or stressors experienced at home. These may include unrealistic expectations from parents, poor parenting skills, not being able to live up to a sibling's success or in the most serious of cases, physical abuse at home, which results in them releasing their frustrations out on those weaker than they.

Intellectual Possibilities: There are cases when limited intelligence can lead to bullying behavior. Some children may feel very inadequate as a result of this limitation, and have to find other means of gaining status by picking on children who are not as strong as they.

Language Possibilities: Children who have difficulty communicating as a result of language limitations may release their frustration through their behavior rather than their words.

Medical Possibilities: Some children may become bullies because of a truly aggressive tendency that they possess. This aggressive behavior may be due to a neurological impairment or chemical imbalance. Also, some medications taken by children may increase aggressive tendencies, leading to the possibility of bullying type behavior.

Perceptual Possibilities: Some children have difficulty perceiving the world as others do. Frustration may be because they do not see things the way everyone else does. In order to release their frustration, they become the bullies of the school because they need a release for all of the conflict, anxiety, and tension.

Psychological Possibilities: Certain psychological factors (i.e. low self esteem, anxiety, depressed mood, etc.) can create a state of inadequacy in some children, and increase their levels of tension. They may deal with this by acting out their tension through aggressive behavior on those smaller than they are. They become bullies not because of high confidence but rather much more so because they feel inadequate in some way about themselves. Their psychological insecurities need to be vented, and they choose to do so by picking on children whom are either smaller than they are or those who they feel not threatened by.

Social Possibilities: Some children may feel socially rejected, socially inadequate, and feel as if they do not fit in. They may deal with these feelings by physically acting out their frustrations by becoming a bully. Also, bullying may be seen as a status of power within peer groups. Children who become bullies may be doing so to get peer recognition and show their friends just how "powerful" they are.

What to Do When This Happens

- The approach suggested here has three parts. The first is to set boundaries around the inappropriate behavior, the second part is to sit with the child and find out what the need is to bully others and the third part is helping the child change behavior patterns.
- The first part includes sitting with the child alone with no other students around. Keeping in mind that bullying behavior is not a sign of strength, but a sign of a fragile ego, do not hesitate establishing yourself as the benevolent authority.
- While you understand that he may have issues that cause him to act this way, and you will help him try to understand them, you will not tolerate this behavior.
- Discuss the seriousness of the situation, and the consequences if it continues.
- For the second part you may want to try to help the child understand the reasons why he is being a bully. Try to get him to verbalize what he is feeling or why he does what he does. If he is unable to verbalize or label his feelings you may want to provide him with some labels for what he may be feeling. For example, you may want to say that in the past you have noticed that other children who bully have done so because they feel they are not doing well in school, have problems at home or feel rejected by other students.
- Suggest to this student alternate means of resolving future conflicts. Many students who consistently fight know no other alternative in handling difficult and stressful situations. They need to be educated on other means of response.
- If this is a consistent pattern of behavior on the part of any student, talk to the school psychologist about setting up a meeting with the parent(s). This will provide the parents with what has been happening in the classroom, provide you with getting feedback on issues at home that may be contributing to the situation, and offer parents specific parenting skills which may help all involved.
- Develop a behavioral contract explaining what is expected of this student in the classroom with rewards and punishments for either following or not following through. This contract is something a school psychologist should be well trained in developing.

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.

Why Children Cheat

Academic Factors: Cheating is often a cover-up for academic inadequacies. Children, who fear being seen as academically inadequate by either their teacher or more importantly peers, will often cheat to protect their fragile state of inadequacy. They believe that since they cannot succeed on their own, their only chance is to cheat.

Environmental Factors: Cheating may be the result of severe avoidance of parental reactions sometimes brought about by excessive expectations which the child feels he cannot meet, abuse, comparisons or competition with siblings and so on.

Intellectual Factors: Children with limited intellectual abilities may cheat because they know that they can not do as well as other children without extra “help”. Since children want to succeed, the only way in their minds to do so is to cheat.

Language Factors: Same motive as Academic

Medical Factors: Children with medical problems may miss a great deal of school. Missing so many days can create real anxiety and tension when it comes to turning in assignments, keeping up in class or taking quizzes and tests. All of these absences make the student feel that the only way to succeed is to cheat.

Perceptual Factors: Same motive as Academic

Psychological Factors: Cheating can either be the result of high levels of anxiety or a pathological (ingrained) part of a child’s personality. The latter is more serious and may require professional intervention. This level occurs when the child cannot differentiate between cheating and reality, and truly believes in what he is doing is acceptable even though reality presents a very different picture. Other children may cheat impulsively to avoid failing at that moment. In these cases, the children do not consider consequences but may feel guilt afterwards.

Social Factors: Children may often cheat to gain status with a social group. Feeling inadequate or insignificant and wanting to be accepted may cause them to cheat in order to maintain their status within their peer group.

What to Do When This Happens

- Before taking any action, obtain all the information about the situation at hand. You do not want to jump to any conclusions or make false accusations without being at least reasonably sure that what has occurred constitutes cheating. Remember that cheating is a symptom and the real cause is what is important.
- If you believe that the child has cheated, do not address the situation in front of any other child or adult. This will avoid embarrassing the child. If you do it in front of anyone, you

increase the chances of the child lying to you because he will not want to be “publicly humiliated”.

- If you are reasonably sure that cheating has taken place, do not use entrapment. This means that you do not try to trick the student into admitting what he has done.
 - Be very diplomatic and direct in confronting the child with what you know to be the facts. Explain the situation in a clear, convincing, and straight forward approach without any form of yelling or screaming. Be firm in what you say and show the student that you are serious.
 - After explaining your point of view, ask the child if he now wants to rethink what was done. Don't put him on the spot at that moment if he says nothing in response. Tell him that “We will talk about this again some time today when you are ready but we will definitely talk about it today.”
 - If the child admits to cheating, say that you appreciate the honesty, and then tell him what the consequences of the behavior will be. This should be something already determined by you, and “the punishment should fit the crime.”
 - Finally, if the child does not admit to cheating, you must then act as if it were true, based on the overwhelming evidence, and enforce the consequences. Tell the child in this case that the evidence indicates that cheating did take place and that class rules have been violated.
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Why Children Become Class Clowns

Academic Possibilities: Some children who feel academically inadequate may become the class clown in hopes of diverting the academic inadequacies. In some cases, this type of child hopes to be removed from the class so that he does not have to face ridicule or embarrassment regarding academic failures.

Environmental Possibilities: Children may become the class clowns as a result of family interactions involving humor. In some homes with this pattern, some children are not provided the necessary boundaries and structure. This leads to the child's inability to distinguish "appropriate exhibition" from "inappropriate exhibition" of the humor.

Intellectual Possibilities: Here again, the child may use humor to divert the attention away from limited intellectual ability. It may also give him some platform for feeling adequate.

Language Possibilities: Not Applicable

Medical Possibilities: Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) may result in a child using inappropriate humor since boundaries become difficult for the child to maintain. The inappropriate use of humor may be only one of several inappropriate behaviors exhibited in children with this condition.

Perceptual Possibilities: Same motive as Academic Possibilities.

Psychological Possibilities: The need for attention brought on by a lack of attention at home can result in "class clown" behavior. A child who uses humor in an appropriate manner and at an appropriate time does not have this problem. On the other hand, the child who uses humor at the wrong time and place is more motivated by neurotic need and anxiety than the desire to be funny. The levels of anxiety can be seen in the child's inability to discriminate between appropriate and inappropriate.

Social Possibilities: Social reinforcement of a child's humor can provide a child with social importance and reinforcement. This reinforcement can be very strong, and the need to be in the spotlight can overshadow implications or consequences. The child receives so much social attention that he becomes unwilling to give it up for fear of being insignificant.

What to Do When This Happens

- You should always keep in mind that being a class clown may be sending a message. This means that the child's real motive for his behavior is not actually defined but is being indirectly communicated through humor.
- 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:

1. 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.
2. Provide the child with controlled activities that will allow for the social presentation of his or her humor. For example, give a time at the end of the day when he can tell the class an appropriate joke or a funny story. This set time in the child's schedule may satisfy the need for group attention.
3. 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.

The above factors (1-3), 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 set in #3, 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.