



# 10 Behavioral Considerations for Teachers in the Post-Pandemic Classroom

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The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant effect on everyone's lives. **Many experts agree that school-aged children have been among the hardest hit.** Remote learning and isolation from friends and teachers for an extended period have created anxiety, depression, and extreme uncertainty for children. While virtually all students have all returned to the classroom, the effect of this disruption still exists and the consequence is a very large population of school-aged children who are lost, angry, confused, and temperamental.

As a result of these pandemic-related issues, **schools across the country are experiencing a sharp increase in the number of behavioral challenges in the classroom.** Teachers are having to regularly handle disruptive and, at times, violent behaviors. To successfully navigate this environment of heated emotion, frustration, and misbehavior, teachers and school administrators must be properly trained on how to de-escalate contentious situations and modify the way they communicate with students. When escalation becomes violent or dangerous, school staff must understand when and how to intervene appropriately—in some cases potentially using physical restraint in a safe, effective, and legal way.

**Here are 10 important learnings for teachers as they work to maintain safe and productive classrooms, as well as tips for better managing behavioral challenges in the classroom:**

## **1 Post-Pandemic Stress is Real & Still Ongoing**

Children have and continue to face any number of difficult and stressful situations within their homes, such as out-of-work parents, new household routines, altered family dynamics, and a loss of privacy. This is in addition to general concerns about the health and safety of their families. These issues can have significant effects on a child's behavior that they carry around with them wherever they go.

## **2 Social Engagement is Key to Student Self-Identity**

School-aged children, more so than adults, define themselves and find their identities through interactions with peers. If social engagement is taken away, children can easily lose their way and face problems. Teachers should encourage greater student-to-student interaction during classroom time, recess, and other times to foster enhanced peer engagement.



### 3

#### Be Patient when Re-Introducing Basic Classroom Skills

The extended physical absence from school will cause many students to fall behind academically, socially, and behaviorally. Even basic classroom skills such as following instructions, being organized, lining up, following a schedule, and being able to sit still will be impaired. Due to their isolation, many students may also lose their ability to self-regulate their emotions, contributing to outbursts, refusals, and other challenging behaviors. Teachers need to be patient and work with students to reteach and rebuild these skills.

### 4

#### Ease into Disciplinary Actions

Students are adjusting to all sorts of new safety protocols and procedures. While it is necessary for teachers to enforce these new policies, they would be well advised to not overreact or use fear as a tactic to get students to comply. If a student is not being diligent about wearing a mask, for example, the teacher should calmly explain the importance of masks as opposed to telling the student their actions could cause people to die. Point out the value of mask-wearing, praise students who wear their masks properly, and look for opportunities to catch students wearing their masks. Focus on who is doing it right, not punishing every mistake.



## **5 Remember that Challenging Behavior is Not a Personal Attack**

Teachers need to remember QTIP and WAIT. Quit Taking It Personally and Why Am I Talking. When issues arise, teachers should remember whatever happens or is said is not a personal attack (even if it feels like it) – it is directed at their role as an authority figure in this person’s life. And similarly, lecturing a student on their behavior will only cause additional frustration for all involved; the teacher should say what needs to be said and then move on.

## **6 Re-Evaluate & Re-Establish Your Behavioral Expectations**

Patience is paramount as the pandemic continues to affect students. Teachers should expect everything is going to take more time and energy and overall progress will be slower across the board. This can create a lot of added stress for teachers who are still expected to meet curriculum requirements in a timely manner, so they should not be shy about asking for and accessing additional resources within the school or district.

## **7 When in Doubt, Focus on De-Escalation**

De-escalation of behavioral disruptions always needs to be the primary objective. Teachers should pick their battles, separate angry students and try their best to immediately calm the situation. Once under control, the teacher can then work with the student, guidance counselors, or parents to resolve larger issues.

## **8 Your Classroom is Not a Place or Substitute for Therapy**

If a teacher decides to have age-appropriate conversations with students about the pandemic and how it has affected their lives, those discussions should not turn into therapy sessions. A classroom is not the place to have students talk about extremely emotional issues and doing so can cause distress and alarm for others.

## 9 Reward Good Behavior, No Matter How Small

Finding ways to reward good behavior is exponentially more effective than looking for ways to punish bad behavior. Teachers should acknowledge appropriate behavior, which will go a long way toward reinforcing what is and is not acceptable.

## 10 Follow Protocol When Addressing Behavioral Challenges

While the pandemic and readjustment of students to being physically back in school has changed a lot of circumstances, most of the basics regarding the handling of behavioral challenges still apply. Tactics such as giving students alternatives to misbehavior, resetting the situation, making sure teacher response is commensurate with the situation, and focusing on de-escalation should still be used.

The pandemic has exacerbated an already growing problem of behavioral challenges in classrooms across the country. Most important is that teachers and administrators are given the tools and training to handle these situations safely, effectively, and with respect.



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