



Didactic guide

**Classroom management strategies
without losing your temper (or your
dignity)**

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Introduction

What is this guide and who is it for?

This guide explains practical, evidence-based strategies to manage a primary classroom effectively. You will learn how to prevent problems before they start, how to respond when things go wrong, and how to keep your calm when everyone else is losing theirs. Classroom management is not about being the strictest teacher in the school. It is about creating an environment where learning can happen.

This guide is intended for:

- Trainee teachers about to start their teaching placement.
- Early career teachers who feel overwhelmed by challenging behaviour.
- Mentors and tutors who want to help their trainees with practical strategies.
- Teacher trainers looking for structured materials for workshops on behaviour management.

Myths vs realities about classroom management

Myth	Reality
<i>"Strict teachers have better control"</i>	<i>Pupils comply with strict teachers out of fear. They cooperate with firm, fair, warm teachers out of respect. The second group works better in the long term.</i>
<i>"If I shout, they will listen"</i>	<i>Shouting raises the noise floor. Next time you will have to shout louder. Silence is more powerful than volume.</i>
<i>"Good teachers never have behaviour problems"</i>	<i>Every teacher has behaviour problems. The difference is how they respond. You are not a bad teacher because a child misbehaves.</i>
<i>"I need to be friends with my pupils"</i>	<i>No. You need to be kind, clear and consistent. Friendship is optional. Respect is mandatory.</i>

How to use this guide (methodological proposal)

You can work with this material in three ways:

1. Sequential reading (for initial training) – Follow the four blocks in order: prevention, intervention, de-escalation, and reflection.
2. Quick reference by function (for practising teachers) – Jump directly to the strategy you need (e.g., "What do I do when two pupils are fighting?").
3. Practical workshop (for groups or seminars) – Use the case study at the end to practise strategies through role-play.

Block I. Prevention

(before anything goes wrong)

The best behaviour management happens before the behaviour occurs. Prevention is not magic. It is about routines, expectations, relationships and environment. Get these right, and most problems will never appear.

“An ounce of prevention is worth a kilogram of intervention. And it saves your voice”

Function	What does it mean?	Example
1. Establish clear routines	Pupils need to know what happens, when, and how. Predictability reduces anxiety and misbehaviour.	<i>Teach the routine for entering the classroom, asking for help, sharpening pencils, going to the toilet, and transitioning between activities. Practise them.</i>
2. Set expectations, not just rules	Rules are negative ("don't talk"). Expectations are positive ("we listen when someone is speaking").	<i>"In this classroom, we raise our hands. We speak one at a time. We try our best. That is who we are"</i>
3. Build relationships before you need them	Pupils behave better for teachers they like and trust. Relationship is not soft. It is strategic.	Learn two things about each pupil: one academic strength and one personal interest. Use that information.
4. Arrange the classroom strategically	The physical space influences behaviour. Seating arrangements, visibility, and traffic flow matter.	<i>Put pupils who need extra support near you. Separate pupils who distract each other. Make sure you can see every pupil from wherever you stand.</i>
5. Plan for transitions	Transitions (between activities, before break, leaving the classroom) are when misbehaviour happens. Plan them.	<i>"In 2 minutes, we will finish. When I clap twice, you stop, look at me, and wait for the next instruction"</i>

6. Use non-verbal signals	Your voice is a limited resource. Save it. Use gestures, facial expressions, and agreed signals.	<i>A hand up means "stop and listen". A finger on the lips means "silence". A nod means "good, continue". Teach these signals explicitly.</i>
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A note on routines: the invisible scaffolding

A classroom without routines is chaos. A classroom with routines is calm. Routines are not about controlling pupils. They are about freeing their attention for learning. When pupils do not have to think about where to put their coat or what to do after finishing a task, they have more mental energy for maths and reading.

Teach routines explicitly. Do not assume they know.

Reflection question:

Think about your own teaching placement (or a lesson you observed). Which transition was the messiest? What routine could have prevented that mess? Write the instruction you would give pupils before that transition.

Block II. Low-level intervention

(small problems, small responses)

Most behaviour problems are low-level: talking out of turn, calling out, being off-task, minor fidgeting. The mistake many trainees make is either ignoring them until they explode, or responding with the same intensity as a major crisis.

“Respond to a ripple with a ripple. Save the tsunami for the tsunami”

Function	What does it mean?	Example
7. Use the look	A calm, steady look at the pupil (without interrupting your teaching) is often enough.	You are teaching. A pupil is talking. You stop, look at them, wait 2 seconds. They stop. You continue. No words.
8. Use proximity	Move closer to the pupil who is misbehaving. Your presence is often enough.	<i>Walk towards the pupil while continuing to teach. Stand near their desk. Do not stare. Do not interrupt your lesson.</i>
9. Use a private signal	Agree a non-verbal signal with a pupil who struggles. It is discreet and respectful.	<i>"Luis, when you start calling out, I will touch my ear. That means: remember to raise your hand. No one else will notice"</i>
10. Use their name positively	Say their name in the middle of a neutral sentence. Not as a reprimand.	<i>"As María was saying earlier...", "Carlos, you made a good point about...", "Laura, can you read the next sentence?"</i>
11. Give a choice (with both options acceptable to you)	Two choices, both fine with you. The pupil feels autonomy. You get what you want.	<i>"Daniel, you can either start the worksheet now, or read the instructions once more and then start. Your choice"</i>
12. Redirect with a question	Ask a question about the task. Bring their attention back without confrontation.	<i>Pupil is drawing instead of writing. "Mateo, what was the first step of the experiment again?" (Not: "Stop drawing and work.")</i>

The 5-second rule for low-level disruption

Before you intervene, pause for 5 seconds. Ask yourself:

1. Is this actually a problem, or is it just annoying me?
2. Will it stop on its own if I ignore it?
3. Can I solve this with a look, proximity, or a name?

If the answer to question 2 is "yes", ignore it. If the answer to question 1 is "it is annoying but not stopping learning", ignore it. Save your energy for things that matter.

Reflection question:

A pupil is tapping their pencil on the desk. It is annoying you, but they are still doing the work. What do you do? (Write your answer before reading the next line.) If you said "tell them to stop" – try ignoring it. Tapping often stops by itself. If it does not, try proximity or a private signal. Not every noise needs a consequence.

Block III. De-escalation

(when things get hot)

Sometimes a situation escalates. A pupil is angry, defiant, or distressed. Your normal strategies stop working. This is the moment when many teachers make things worse by matching the pupil's intensity. De-escalation is about lowering the temperature.

"You cannot put out a fire with gasoline. Calm is contagious – but so is panic"

Function	What does it mean?	Example
13. Lower your voice	When they shout, you whisper. It forces them to quiet down to hear you.	<i>Pupil: "THIS IS NOT FAIR!" You: (quietly, calmly) "I hear you. Let's talk about it in the corridor"</i>
14. Reduce your words	The more words you use, the more fuel you give. Short sentences. Calm tone.	<i>"Stop. Breathe. Walk with me" (Not: "Why are you behaving like this? I have told you a hundred times...")</i>
15. Do not argue about facts	Arguing about what happened ("you did", "no I didn't") never works. Skip it.	<i>"We can talk about what happened later. Right now, I need you to step outside with me"</i>
16. Offer a face-saving way out	The pupil is trapped in their own anger. Give them a way to comply without losing dignity.	<i>"I know you can do this. Take a minute, then come back and show me you are ready. I will wait"</i>
17. Remove the audience	Many pupils perform for their peers. Remove the audience, remove the performance.	<i>"Let's talk in the corridor" (Privately, without an audience, most pupils calm down quickly.)</i>
18. Know when to stop and ask for help	You are not a superhero. Some situations need a senior leader, a pastoral support worker, or a safe space.	<i>"I am going to call the headteacher now. Not as a punishment. Because we both need help to solve this"</i>

What de-escalation is NOT

De-escalation is not:

- Giving in to demands ("fine, do whatever you want").
- Ignoring dangerous behaviour.
- Being weak.

De-escalation is:

- Choosing calm over confrontation.
- Postponing the consequence, not cancelling it.
- Protecting the relationship so you can teach tomorrow.

Reflection question:

A Year 5 pupil shouts: "I hate you! You are the worst teacher!" You feel your face get hot. Your instinct is to shout back or send them to the headteacher immediately. What is the de-escalating response? Write one sentence you could say.

Block IV. After the storm

(repair, reflect, restore)

The incident is over. The pupil is back in class or in the office. What now? Many teachers move on as if nothing happened. That is a mistake. The minutes and hours after an incident are when learning happens – for you and for the pupil.

“The crisis is not the end.

What you do afterwards is what matters”

Function	What does it mean?	Example
19. Repair the relationship	After a conflict, you need to rebuild. A short, calm conversation restores trust.	<i>"I was upset. You were upset. That happened. Now, we start again. I am glad you are back"</i>
20. Separate consequence from emotion	The consequence is not delivered in anger. It is delivered calmly, later, as a fact.	<i>"Because you shouted and refused to leave, you will miss 5 minutes of break today. That is the consequence. Now it is over"</i>
21. Reflect on what triggered the incident	Behaviour is communication. What was the pupil trying to say? Was it boredom, frustration, hunger, tiredness, or something at home?	<i>Ask yourself: what happened just before the incident? What need was not being met? What could I have done differently?</i>
22. Plan the re-entry	After a serious incident, the pupil needs a plan to return to class successfully. Do not just open the door.	<i>"When you come back in, you will sit at the front table. You will start the worksheet. I will check on you in 5 minutes. Okay?"</i>
23. Document what happened	Write it down. Dates, facts, what you did, what the pupil did, what happened next. This protects you and helps the pupil get support.	<i>A short note in the behaviour log: "12 Nov, 10:30am. Luis refused to stop calling out. After two warnings, he shouted. He was removed to the support room. Returned at 10:50. Consequence: 5 minutes missed break"</i>
24. Look after yourself	You will have bad days. You will lose your temper sometimes. You are human. Forgive yourself, learn, and try again tomorrow.	<i>Talk to a colleague. Go for a walk at lunch. Do not take the behaviour home with you. Teaching is hard. You are allowed to find it hard.</i>

A note on documenting behaviour

You document behaviour for three reasons:

1. To identify patterns (does it always happen before break? after lunch? in maths?).
2. To protect yourself (if a family complains, you have a record).
3. To get the pupil support (external professionals need data).

Document facts, not judgments. Not "Luis was aggressive". But "Luis pushed the chair and shouted 'no' three times".

Reflection question:

You had a terrible lesson. You shouted. You feel guilty. You want to hide in the staff room. What is the most professional thing you can do in the next 30 minutes? (Hint: it is not hiding.)

*“he best classroom manager is
not the strictest.*

*They are the calmest, the
clearest, and the most
consistent.*

*You do not need to be loud to
be in charge”*



Short case study

(for seminars or group work)

Situation:

Tomás is a trainee teacher in his second week of placement in a Year 4 class. The class is generally calm, but Hugo (age 8) is challenging. Hugo:

- Calls out answers without raising his hand (5-6 times per lesson).
- Refuses to start worksheets, saying "I don't want to" or "this is boring".
- Yesterday, when Tomás asked him to stop talking, Hugo said "you are not my real teacher" and turned his back.

The mentor teacher has told Tomás: "You need to manage this yourself. I am here to help, but you need to try first."

Tomás feels frustrated and slightly scared of Hugo.

Task for trainees (in groups of 3–4):

Identify at least 6 functions from the four blocks and apply them specifically to Tomás's situation. Write exactly what Tomás could say or do for each strategy.

Possible answer (do not show immediately):

Block I (prevention):

- Function 1 (routines): Tomás explicitly teaches the hand-raising routine at the start of his next lesson. "When you want to answer, you put your hand up. I will see you. I will call on you. If you call out, I will wait."
- Function 4 (strategic seating): Tomás moves Hugo closer to his desk, away from his chatty friend.

Block II (low-level intervention):



- Function 7 (the look): When Hugo calls out, Tomás stops, looks at him calmly, and waits. No words. Hugo stops.
- Function 8 (proximity): Tomás teaches standing near Hugo's desk. Hugo starts the worksheet.
- Function 11 (choice): When Hugo says "I don't want to", Tomás says: "Hugo, you can either start with question 1, or you can start with question 3. Your choice."

Block III (de-escalation – for the "not my real teacher" comment):

- Function 14 (reduce words): Tomás does not argue. He says calmly: "I am your teacher today. Please face the front."
- Function 15 (do not argue about facts): Tomás does not say "yes I am, I am a trainee but I am still..." He just repeats calmly: "We can talk after class. Right now, face the front."

Block IV (after the storm):

- Function 19 (repair): At break, Tomás says to Hugo: "Hugo, we had a difficult moment. It is over. I want to start again. You are a good pupil when you try. Okay?"
- Function 24 (look after yourself): Tomás talks to his mentor at lunch: "That was hard. I think I handled it okay, but I felt shaken. What could I have done better?"

Bonus reflection for the seminar:

Tomás did not send Hugo to the headteacher. He did not shout. He did not win a big victory. He just kept the lesson going. Is that success? What would success look like for Tomás after one week of using these strategies?



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