

## Case Studies

### HELP FILE

#### Demands Attention

*Dear Jenny, "I have a grade 2 boy in my class who has a poor attention span, is restless and fidgety, cannot complete tasks, but is most disruptive because of his attention seeking behaviour. I have tried several techniques including giving him feedback at the end of the day as to how many times (we count them), he demands my attention. This is not working and it has been suggested that we send him to a 'time-out' room each time he behaves like this. I am very much against this. Can you suggest some techniques which we can use instead? Can you help?"*

#### Jenny Replied

Thank you for writing to me, I feel most concerned for this little boy. I would really like to see things work for him. It would greatly help me to have a little more background regarding the school's discipline policy and student welfare ethos. Also you did not mention what has been done to date - skills, techniques etc.

However, with the story you have provided, I will give you some thoughts to work on. Please note that to assist you with specific behaviours, you need to describe exactly what he does in class, then I can suggest specific skills to manage that particular behaviour. So at this stage my suggestions and comments are generalised.

I am going to share a few basic concepts and management ideas .... let me know which of these are helpful and assist you in managing him.

The first and most important thing is to understand what motivates his behaviour.

- Behaviour is a message - a child's communication of how they are feeling and coping in their world. This little boy is obviously communicating a need to be noticed because a) he's not coping and b) he's unhappy .... cannot do what he is supposed to do at school and therefore cannot belong in class through the normal learning process. His over-riding need is to find his 'place' in class and to belong there and to feel valued. This isn't happening, so he is acting out and trying to let you know, - his way of asking for help.
- So what do you do? MOST importantly - he is a small boy who needs to feel loved and cared about no matter what. Yes, it would seem he has a problem, but maybe he is just a late developer in these areas - every child develops at a different pace and at different times in different areas - we all get there in the end. The problem with schools is they want every child to do the same thing at the same time - then teaching a group of children is easy, but life is not like that and particularly with young children e.g. some children can read at 3 or 4 and some not until they are 7 or 8 - all within the normal range.

- Your relationship with this little boy is the key. He needs to feel valued as a person in your class and then you can start guiding him to feel able in whatever way, in whichever area he can. Give him little responsibilities, like small tasks to assist you and others; things that he is appreciated for. But don't overdo it, just ask him to do something - then describe what he has done and thank him e.g. "You collected all the books up as soon as I asked you. Thank you". He needs to experience and then to internalise his abilities - what he can do as well as what he is able to do. He will then start to feel better about himself and feel encouraged to try things that are a little more difficult for him. This will take time and gentle training - working from what he can do - small tasks linking into his abilities and what interests him. This will bring his interests and abilities together into the learning arena.
- What really concerns me here is the focus on his negative behaviours - he is only going to feel worse and to act out more. The key is to enable him is to work from the positive - what he can do, not what he can't do. You are quite right to be concerned about sending him to 'time out'. Putting him in a room by himself would be sending a major negative message - that he is 'different' and 'a problem' - whether that would be the intention or not doesn't matter. What matters is how he would see this action in his own private logic - he will surely see being sent to a different room as punishment and he will experience huge rejection. You will have lost before you start - what you say to him in mitigation won't change the painful messages he receives and he will be very hurt and likely become remote and inaccessible as well.
- If working in a small group is a problem and distracting for him, then suggest that he could work better away from others and feel better about his work and offer him a quiet corner in the classroom. So when needing to concentrate he has a special place where he knows he can go to - but when the class is working as one, he should be part of the whole. Enable him to take himself off to his special work place when he needs to concentrate. The fact that he doesn't slow down enough to complete a task shows a great deal of energy. There are ways of helping students deal with excess energy - boys can be very physical and opportunities to run and do some quick physical exercises during school can be most helpful to them. Even lighting can effect children's concentration ( bright fluorescent lights are not recommended). Quiet music can soothe and relaxation exercises can also help.
- Encouragement is the key to enabling, but encouraging a child is a very special skill and it isn't just praise - this needs to be well understood and practiced. How we view a child is subjective and what one teacher may see as a problem, another will see as a challenge. I would think there are many positives with this little boy - list them - use them as your basis for enabling him to achieve in your classroom.

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- Following instructions can be quite a difficult thing to do. Even an adult cannot remember more than 3 instructions in a row. So be very aware of how you give instructions - some learn by listening, others by seeing e.g. a demonstration or written up (older). Tune-in to how he best remembers - try out a few different ways of giving him instructions ... let him tell you which way he finds easiest to remember and to follow.

Please let me know if this helps and come back to me with any more questions, or examples of what he does. Please do not let them move him into a solitary room - he is likely to become a "behaviour problem" and should that happen and his sense self worth could be seriously affected.

**Jenny Mackay**