

Case Studies

HELP FILE

Inappropriate Laughter (6)

"I have a preschooler who insists on laughing at nothing. It may sound trivial, but I see it as a large sign of disrespect and it is becoming a problem with the other students. Is there a technique or method you recommend?"

Jenny Replied

I was interested to receive this enquiry. In order for this student's behaviour to change you need to manage the situation.

It is important to realise that children just feel and act and therefore this student is not aiming to show disrespect he's just doing something because he feels okay / 'good' when he acts in that way. Don't take the behaviour personally - children don't aim to 'get at' their teacher - they just feel and do ... you just happen to be the one there at that time. Therefore move yourself into neutral mode - this is key to your management of the situation. When he laughs, take 5. It may irritate you but just use a bit of self talk *"I find his behaviour irritating but I am the teacher here."*

"He needs my guidance to learn to behave differently."

Children who continually misbehave are often just trying to find their place of belonging in the group ..or to feel significant - this from Dreikurs' research - refer to his book 'Maintaining Sanity in the Classroom'. This little chap is unconsciously looking for attention. He needs to learn to stop his behaviour but his need for attention is a far greater behaviour determinant than anything you as his teacher say to him at this stage. You need to enable him to be noticed for positive behaviours not misbehaviours.

The key to understanding what is happening here and why the behaviour is repeated lies in you feelings and your responses. You need to reflect on what you do and say when he behaves in this way .. and to change his behaviour you need to look at responding differently ... it is a little like a dance and you need to teach him the steps so he can learn a different dance ... i.e. behave differently.

What happens when this little chap laughs? That is the question you must answer and then look at how you and even the other children respond.

I would suggest that people notice him, and if they do that they will reinforce his behaviour Getting attention can be a something he is unconsciously needing to feel better about himself - this behaviour is not driven by conscious thoughts - it is to fulfil an unconscious need. Strategies to manage ... there are many -- a couple below - please let me know what happens and what works, I would so appreciate hearing about it all.

1. Ignore the behaviour ... it will eventually stop when no one reacts. I had a little boy who refused to join the morning circle ... It took 6

weeks of ignoring his behaviour - eventually he was the first to be sitting ready to start.

2. Catch him doing it right notice him when he does positive things ... just describe what he does and how you or whoever else appreciates when he does don't make a big deal about it ... just acknowledge quietly. He will then achieve belonging and significance through positive behaviour and not misbehaviour i.e. laughing inappropriately.
3. He may be copying someone else or a TV character and quite possibly is just experimenting and may not understand what laughter is about ... At this age this is most likely ... I would enjoy chatting with him and asking if he has a favourite character on television or in a story ... he might even be copying a bird ... have you spoken to his parents to see if he is doing it at home? .. but don't make a thing about it they may have a simple answer to the problem ... but avoid any fuss etc. that just plays into attention seeking and you don't want that
4. He is a little chap ... there is no disrespect ... he is just doing something because he needs to. Our job is to teach him what is appropriate behaviour ... it may just need someone to say ... we don't laugh for nothing ..people laugh when they have a bubbly feeling rising inside them ... don't know about my description but talking about what makes you laugh and doing it through a fun story in class could be the best way of managing this so everyone understands and knows what laughing is there are some lovely children's stories - do be aware that what causes children to laugh changes - at that age it is mostly slapstick and animals and people doing funny things.

I hope this is helpful please come back and let me know how you go...

Jenny Mackay