

The New Authority for Schools Manual for Teachers

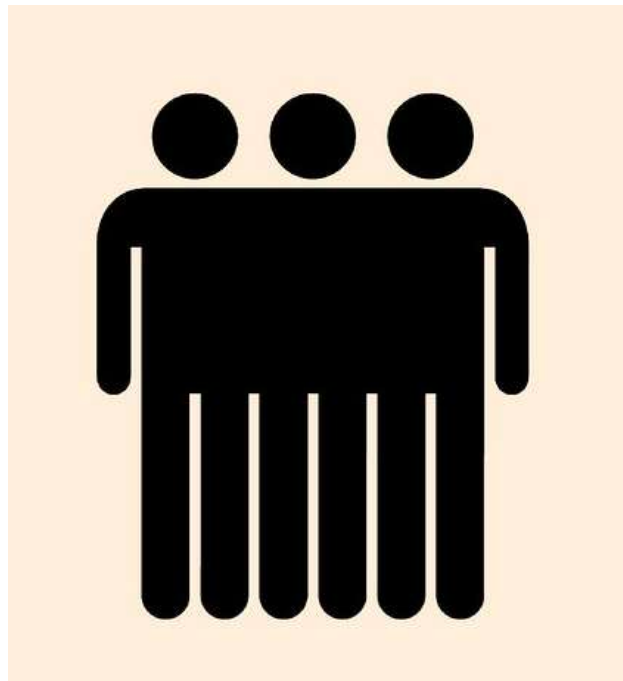


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Introduction – What is the New Authority

What is Authority?

“Teachers used to have authority!” “Parents used to be parents!” “I respected my father/mother”

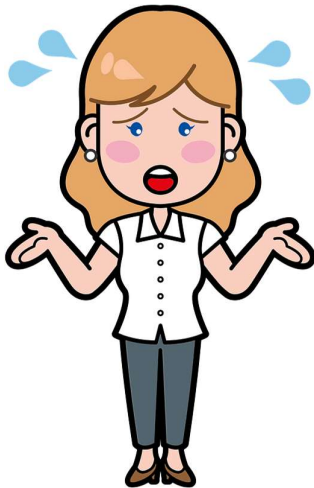


Once upon a time, adults had full authority over children. Children did what they were told, just because adults told them to. This authority/obedience relationship was built on fear, and came at the cost of relationships and wellbeing. Sadly, it also left the door open to abuse (Omer et al., 2013). These values have clearly been turned on their head, and replaced with a warm, attunement-based approach (Omer et al., 2013).

However, our current behaviour management practices have not evolved with our values, and are still rooted in the old, out-dated authority. Our experiences in schools show that this old authority no longer works where children simply defy teachers. The children are often then supported by their parents, and we see situations where teachers are pitted against parents, with the child’s behaviour becoming increasingly challenging. Where behaviour management practices have moved away from this approach, the lack of limits can bring a different set of challenges. We know from experience that there are some students who, no matter what we try, we simply can’t get through to, who may not have the regulation skills or sufficient access to their empathy to engage in meaningful discussion. This can lead to teachers feeling frustrated and helpless. They struggle to maintain their role as teachers and to provide a safe “anchor point” for students.



Why the need for a New Authority?



We are all familiar with the feeling that in order to be “a good teacher”, that we have to respond to all instances of rule-breaking, and somehow “win the battle” with a child. Consider the case of a highly motivated and dedicated young teacher who fell into exactly this trap. She was spending endless hours addressing the behaviours of one child in the class, correcting every misdemeanour, and leaving little time for teaching the rest of the class. This teacher was exhausted within a half-term, and wracked with guilt that she could not attend to the needs of her other students. Clearly, something was going wrong with the “authority” dynamic.

The “Old Authority” can:

- *Damage relationships*
- *Trap teachers in power struggles that only lead to further escalation*
- *Leave teachers helpless and isolated in the face of students who reject their claim to authority*

By contrast, let's think about another school, where a lack of clear discipline structures was causing problems for teachers. Teachers were responding to difficult behaviours with a warm, attuned, dialogue-based approach. However, we know that many students struggle to access their empathy, leaving many teachers feeling disempowered and isolated in their classrooms, almost feeling they were left with no recourse in the face of abusive behaviour. During a staff presentation, the words "But what am I supposed to do?" echoed through the room.



Dialogue-only approaches can:

- *Leave teachers with no means of setting limits, thus rendering them equally helpless and alone.*
- *Damage teachers' sense of safety and self-efficacy*

We are now **caught somewhere between** the old authority, which is no longer acceptable in society, and the new, more permissive system, which brings its own problems. Levels of aggression among young people are rising, and adults are feeling isolated and helpless in how to deal with this.



It seems that we need a "new authority", to set expectations and limits for children in a way that does not humiliate them or harm our relationships with them. We need a new authority that helps us step back into our role as teachers, so that we have the confidence and support we need to provide a safe and secure anchor for all of our students.

What is the New Authority

The New Authority is an approach that offers hope for teachers hoping to reclaim their authority, without humiliating or damaging relationships with young people. It is a set of tools that teachers can use when responding to challenging behaviour, based on carefully planned actions. The New Authority is grounded in the idea of building a caring but firm network of support around a child. It supports the child as a person and makes all efforts to build the relationship with the child, regardless of their behaviour. It assumes that every child has a "positive voice" inside of them that wants to come out, even if that voice has been dormant for a long time. It de-escalates conflict and follows up on key problem behaviours with planned, supported acts of resistance. It invites reparation and promotes the idea that damage = repair. It is a way to set firm limits without engaging in power struggles, all the while, preserving relationships. Omer (2021) identifies the fundamentals of the approach as adult presence, self-control, support and persistence.



The "New Authority" is based on **increasing adult presence** in a child's life. This conveys a message of support and interest in the child, but also sends a message of determined resistance to problem behaviours (Omer, 2021).

The new authority is built like a network. Adults are encouraged to build a network of support around them, and their authority is drawn from the support that adults in the community lend one another when they take a united stance (Omer, 2011). Parents are in constant contact with other parents, the school and community figures. **Each member strengthens the network, which strengthens each member in turn. When adults stand together, their shoulders become “wider”.** The support of other adults lends the teachers and parents additional strength to resist certain behaviours, thus reducing isolation and powerlessness. Transparency is a key tenet of the approach.



The New Authority is grounded in the Non Violent Resistance approach, developed in Israel and inspired by the work of Ghandi (Omer, 2004). Non Violent Resistance (NVR) was first designed as an intervention for parents of children with significant behavioural challenges. While NVR is a specific parenting intervention, its underlying principles and ethos are referred to as the “New Authority”. In this manual, we will use the term the “New Authority” to mean an “NVR-informed approach”.

NVR was first used in Ireland in the area of Child to Parent Violence and Abuse (CPVA), although the value of the New Authority is starting to be recognised in any situation that is characterised by conflict between adults and children, including anxiety, eating disorders, conflict and violence (Kelly & Coogan, 2020). The approach has also been adapted for use in schools (Amiel & Maimon, 2019).

So what’s different about the New Authority?

- Unlike other approaches, it does not try to change the child. It is focused on changing adult behaviour to improve the relationships so often damaged when there is challenging behaviour.
- It focuses not on control, but on *influence*
- It moves away from rewards and consequences, which some children find difficult to cope with.
- **Connection before Correction:** It teaches adults new and effective ways to react to children/young people, by creating a safe, calm authoritative presence. As adults change their reactions to children/young people's behaviours, so children/young people's behaviours change in response.
- It is a means of resisting unwanted behaviour in a way that supports the child, but maintains adult authority. In this way, it is an approach that nurtures through both care and limit setting.
- **Strike when the Iron is Cold:** When responding to conflict, adults are taught the skills to delay their responses and de-escalate power struggles, thus creating “new conditions for relating” (Omer, 2013, as cited in Kelly & Coogan, 2020, p. 71). They are taught that ‘you don’t have to win’, and adults learn that power struggles only lead to further escalation (Omer, 2004). The New Authority is a model based on influence rather than coercion or control.



The approach accepts that we cannot force children to behave in a certain way, but we can appeal to the positive voices within children, and use a united, restorative approach to influence behaviour. Adults make their expectations clear, explaining that as they are there to support the child, it is their duty to resist certain behaviours. The child is invited to make reparation or reconciliation acts if harm has been done. However, even when appeals to the child's positive voice are unsuccessful, the process of resistance and reparation continues regardless. Adults persist in their efforts to connect, whether or not they receive a positive response from the child. This means that adult authority is not contingent on a child's behaviour (Omer, 2011).



Adults are taught to make reconciliation gestures, which build positive relationships, regardless of a child's behaviour. In addition, in order to preserve relationships, responses to many low-level behaviours are 'parked' while key behaviours are addressed. This removes certain demands from students who may be overwhelmed by expectations.

It cannot be denied that aspects of the New Authority approach are already present in many existing interventions – for example, the importance of relationship-building, limit-setting and the need for environmental adaptations. However, the New Authority builds on these approaches and pairs them with its basic tenets in a unique way. As it is an intervention that works through the adults surrounding the child, it avoids the risks of inequality associated with systems of rewards and consequences, which require a certain skill set that the child may not have. In this way, the New Authority approach supports the child, but maintains adult authority (Omer, 2011).



We will now introduce the steps you can take to create a New Authority in your school and classroom:

- Self Check-in
- Section 1: Planning for Success
- Section 2: Responding in the Moment
- Section 3: Following Up

***Note: De-escalation and Delay are concepts often thought to account for a great deal of change using the New Authority. If you would like to skip straight to those sections before coming back to the start, please feel free to do so.*

New Authority Key Concepts for Schools

When dealing with students who need support in order to meet behavioural expectations:

1. Plan for success:

- a. Prioritise relationship building
 - i. **Connect before you correct**
 - ii. Relationship building activities (connecting comments, shared activities, etc.)
 - iii. Reconciliation gestures
- b. Build network of supports
 - i. Link with colleagues
 - ii. Pre-emptive, positive call to parents at start of year
- c. Adjust your expectations. Remember, children do well if they can. If they are not doing well, it is because they don't have the skills to do so.
 - i. Consider what demands could be reduced – could the curriculum be adapted if it is challenging? Could they be allowed to present work in a differentiated way? Are there certain behavioural expectations we can park for the moment?
 - ii. **Prioritise behavioural goals – decide in advance what you will target and what you will tactically ignore**
- d. Increase teacher presence in the child's life
 - i. Increase supervision as needed
 - ii. Increase opportunities for interactions with adults
 - iii. Show that teachers, school management and parents are all talking to one another, building a caring but firm network of support around the student.
- e. Set your expectations
 - i. The announcement.
 - ii. Establishing a gradient of support



2. Responding in the moment. Remember, the only goal at this point is de-escalation and returning calm and peace to your classroom.

- a. Ignore what can be ignored
- b. **Redirect disruptive behaviours** – have a menu of 'distraction'/ 'redirection' tasks/jobs/suggestions/items/activities at the ready.
- c. **Reminders of expectations**. In a discreet and general way, the teacher can remind the student of their expectations and limits, without taking them on directly.
- d. **Delay your response**. "Bookmark" behaviours for a later response. Tell the student that you need to think about your response, but will come back to them once you have decided how to respond.
- e. **De-escalate conflict** – press pause, check in with yourself, empathise and validate the student's emotions. Do whatever is needed to restore calm, without getting into arguments/power struggles. You don't have to win.
- f. Call for the **support** of additional adults if needed. Ensure safety and support calming down.
- g. Debrief: Link with your own **support network** afterwards.



3. Following up – Acts of Resistance

- a. Connect with colleagues and parents (access your networks of support) and support each other to make a response plan together
- b. Follow up with an “Act of Resistance”
 - i. Resisting comments
 - ii. Tightening vigilant care
 - iii. Using the gradient of support
 - iv. Time In
 - v. The check-in
 - vi. Public opinion
 - vii. Present suspension
 - viii. The sit-in
- c. Persist
- d. Reparation and follow up
- e. Link with colleagues to debrief

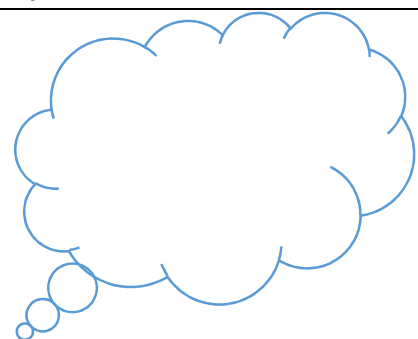
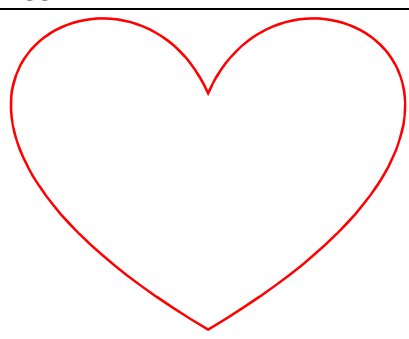
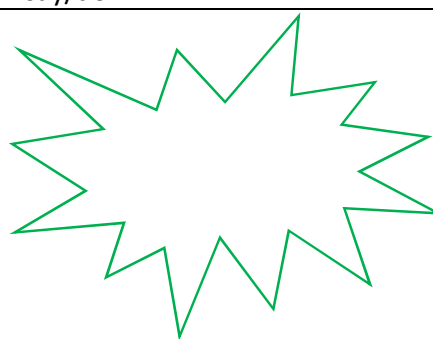


The above should be supported by School Leadership and written into the school’s behaviour/relationships policy

Self Check-in

It is important to recognise that dealing with challenging behaviour in the classroom is extremely stressful for teachers. We are all human, and when we are placed in stressful situations, our own stress hormones flood our brains. This makes it extremely difficult to think clearly, and we can be reactive rather than responsive. It is worth taking the time to think about what is going on for you when a student disrupts your class in any way. Try to be as honest as you can about your thoughts and feelings at such times – remember, it is normal to feel upset, challenged, stressed, angry or worried at such times. Teachers often also report feelings of inadequacy, isolation and incompetence when they are faced with situations that they do not immediately know how to handle.

When a student disrupts my class

I think....	I feel...	I say/do....
		

Whatever your thoughts and feelings when faced with disruptive behaviour, remember that it is human to have a wide array of feelings at such times. ALL feelings are okay. By tuning into them and being compassionate with ourselves, we can allow those feelings without being controlled by them. Once we know how we are likely to feel, we can make a plan for self-calming strategies we can use to help us take a pause before we respond.






When responding to challenging behaviours, the first step is ALWAYS to check in with ourselves first. This means stopping and pressing pause in the moment. Taking a few deep breaths, counting backwards, using a mantra to remind yourself of the positives, tensing and relaxing your muscles, reminding yourself of a helpful image or thought are some common strategies. Think about what might work best for you?

My Press Pause Strategies

•
•
•
•
•



Checking in with yourself involves checking-in in the moment, but it also means checking in with ourselves in a general way. We can't be present with children and young people if we can't first be present with ourselves. One way to check in and be present with yourself is to think about achievable tasks in the resilience/wellbeing areas of Safety, Calm, Connectedness, Efficacy and Hope (Hobfoll et al, 2007). Use the template below to reflect on how you are presently managing and caring for your wellbeing and then consider some possible short-term or long-term goals to target each of the five areas to promote your resilience and wellbeing.

Area of Wellbeing/Resilience	How I feel I am doing in this area now: Rating (1-5)	What I am doing for myself in this area at the moment	One small step I can take to increase resilience/wellbeing in this area
Safety  My physical and psychological safety			
Calm  My strategies to promote calmness			
Connectedness  My connections to family, to friends, to colleagues			
Efficacy  My ability to cope well with challenges; things I am proud of			
Hope  My personal plan/goal for this year			
Three things I plan to do that will support my wellbeing 1) 2) 3)			

Section 1: Planning for Success



Connection Before Correction



New findings from neuroscience show that certain young people are less well able than others to manage their thinking, their emotions and their behaviour. Very often, the students causing the most problems in classrooms are students whose nervous systems are more “sensitized” and more reactive than others. This means that they are less well able to learn from previous behaviour, less well able to control their impulses, and are certainly unable to learn from consequences imposed on them. However, these tend to be the children and young people who most frequently come up against our discipline/sanction systems. Correction or sanctions are more likely to reinforce the stress response in the body, and more likely to reinforce the young person’s perception of adults as unsupportive.

The New Authority recognises that it is only when young people feel safe and secure that they have access to the brain circuits that can calm them, regulate the fight-or-flight and stress responses, and thus engage socially and learn. That is why one of our key mantras is **Connection Before Correction**.

It is important to note that connection and correction need to be separated in time – we don’t connect with a young person and immediately follow up with a correction, which can take the good out of the successful connection. We connect first, and we **delay our correction** until we are ready to come back to it.

When you take the mantra to Connect Before you Correct, you automatically prioritise the relationship and choose to “step out of the boxing ring”. ****Remember: young people don’t learn from conflict situations – they can only learn positive behaviours in the in-between times when they are calm.*** It is important that this mantra is taken on as a whole-school approach.

Relationship Building in the New Authority

We know that relationship building is at the core of supporting children to manage their emotions and behaviour. Children need to hear a clear message that teachers like them, regardless of their ability to regulate their behaviour. In addition, children will not take direction from people they don't trust and like. Adult relationships with children whose behaviours challenge us are often fraught with difficulty, and this has often been a pattern for these students over many years. Ironically, the children with whom we most struggle to build healthy relationships are the ones who need us the most.



Relationship building activities can help you to restore a teacher-pupil relationship that has become lost under the weight of a pupil's behaviour. When pupils say or do the right thing, we are often silent. When they say or do the wrong thing, however, we often make a critical comment or gesture. We can learn to do or say a connecting action or comment when children do the right thing. In this way, we focus on highlighting positive attitudes and behaviour instead of only drawing attention to problematic issues. Sometimes teachers have to work very hard to find positive aspects. The types of relationship building activities that follow help with this search.

1. Shared Activities



One-on-one time is important; while shared activities do not need to be for long periods of time, they help strengthen teacher-pupil relationships. If there are long term problems, some teachers may spend much of their time avoiding pupils for fear of arguments and disagreements and also because they have lost their connection. Time during shared activities should be for connecting only and no critical comments should be made during this time. The time can be short because often shorter, frequent periods are better to start with to lessen the chance of negativity or escalation taking place. Sometimes, a teacher may ask a special education teacher to use the child's

allocated time to take the main class, freeing the mainstream teacher up to spend one-one-one time with the student. Such activities could include board games, getting-to-know-you worksheets, outdoor activities/games or even just helping the student with a task in a friendly, one-to-one setting.

2. Reflective Listening

Reflective listening allows a pupil to talk for short period of time (i.e. 3-5 minutes) without interruption, correcting, reasoning or offering solutions. Then the teacher reflects or paraphrases back to the student what they think they heard. Ask them whether you've gotten it right! This type of reconciliation gesture is very helpful for regulating a distressed pupil. Its intention is to support a child in changing their mood, not their mind. During a period of reflective listening, teachers should try to show interest in a quiet and attentive way. Encourage by nodding, smiling or validating emotions (e.g., "wow, that sounds tough"). At first, you may find it



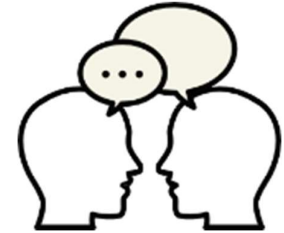
challenging to listen reflectively, particularly if a pupil shows anger and/or hostility. However, it does become easier with practice and this relationship gesture works best when teachers can park their feelings

temporarily while they listen. Remember, this is not the time for offering solutions – only for validating how the child felt in the situation. You may offer a solution if the child asks for one, or if you have asked them first if they would like to hear an idea. However, if you move too quickly to solutions, you will lose the impact of your reflective listening. When in doubt, validate emotions!

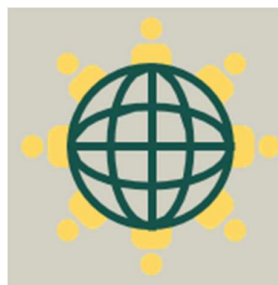
If something comes up in the conversation that you find difficult to listen to, try to press pause and decide to come back to pick it up again at a later time. If you need time to think about something, tell the student this – e.g., “that’s an important point, I need to think about this a little more. I’ll come back to you tomorrow about it.”

3. Connecting Comments

These are pre-planned, connecting statements that boost relationships between teachers and students. Plan your comments considering the three Ts: Timing (when to talk), Tone (how to talk), and Talk (what to say).



Teachers can develop their own pre-planned appreciation or praise comments. They could be as simple as a friendly greeting or a thank you, or more elaborate as praise for a specific act or attribute. Such comments, if practiced regularly, can help to shift stuck patterns of negativity and criticism that can take hold in classrooms when there are long-term challenges with pupils. We may bring in the idea of an imaginary magnifying glass to help ‘magnify’ past positive experiences or tiny current ones that are not easy to find. This may help to find strengths or positive attributes in our pupils (and ourselves). Remember that some students may not feel comfortable with direct praise, and keeping it more low-key can be helpful in such cases. Praise can be immediate or delayed, although it should never be mixed in with criticism. For example, resist the urge to say things like “I like how calm you are this morning – if only you were always like this!”. Aim for a ratio of 3:1 – 3 connecting comments for every correcting comment you make.



Reconciliation Gestures



What are Reconciliation Gestures?

Reconciliation gestures involve making small gestures that show a child or young person that you care, which help build the relationship. However, reconciliation gestures are not rewards for good behaviour. In fact, they are offered regardless of a student's attitudes and behaviours. They are designed for children who struggle to "earn" rewards. We know that when young people present with challenging behaviour, their relationships with the adults around them often suffer. Reconciliation gestures help you reconnect with a pupil, and show the child that you like them.



They can be seen as acts of unconditional positive regard. Gestures only need to be small and regular, not expensive or extravagant. Reconciliation gestures are sometimes called "relationship gestures", "non-contingent rewards", or simply, "acts of kindness". Put simply, teachers use reconciliation gestures to improve the relationship with a pupil, not as a reward for desired behaviour.

Reconciliation gestures depart from more traditional behaviourist approaches. We let go of the idea that positive gestures can only happen when a child has earned them. The teacher offers them at any moment that they feel is suitable. There are no strings attached to the offer. If the pupil refuses the offer, this is accepted graciously. We also let go of the idea that a child should respond with gratefulness, affection or remorse for previous misbehaviours, if your gesture is to be genuinely unconditional. Reconciliation gestures must **never** be withdrawn due to bad behaviour.

Reconciliation gestures are the ultimate "redirect", and can be an extremely powerful tool when a teacher needs to de-escalate a conflict situation. If a student tends to become overwhelmed or have outbursts, it is helpful for teachers to have planned a few options for reconciliation gestures in advance. Providing a treat or allowing a child to engage in preferred activity, rather than correcting behaviour in the heat of the moment, can de-escalate a conflict rapidly.

Guiding principles

- **Connect before you Correct:** We know that in the heat of the moment, a child is not able to respond to reasoning or correction, due to their nervous system arousal at that time. Connecting in an empathetic, compassionate way with the child is the best immediate response.
- **De-escalate and delay:** De-escalating conflict by any means possible is the number one priority. Remember, we are allowed to **delay** our response to challenging behaviours, and we know that we will follow up at a later stage with an act of resistance. We "strike when the iron is cold".

A reconciliation gesture can calm a situation and support a child to come safely back to regulation. The use of a reconciliation gesture rather than a correction may seem counter-intuitive to many teachers, but we would urge you to try it out – in the long run, it saves you from ruining your lesson by spending a long time engaging in conflict with a student. It also saves you from further damaging the relationship with the student, and shows the student that you believe that they would do better if they could.

Case Study

Kayleigh, 14, was persistently defiant in her Geography class. She ignored the teacher's instructions, never completed homework, persistently spoke over the teacher and disrupted other students in the class when they were trying to work. The teacher had tried several sanctions – extra homework, detentions, phone calls to parents – but they seemed to only make Kayleigh more resentful and angry. After months of the same behaviours with no improvement, the teacher decided to try a different approach. After a particularly stressful lesson, the teacher pulled a bag of treats from her desk, and offered a mini bar of chocolate to Kayleigh at the end of the class. The teacher described how Kayleigh's face lit up in surprise and delight. This was the first gesture that showed Kayleigh that the teacher liked her. The next lesson went better, and the teacher found opportunities to praise Kayleigh in the next lessons. She started to bring small treats for Kayleigh on random days, and over time, the relationship between the teacher and Kayleigh started to change. As the relationship got better, Kayleigh became more willing to take the teacher's direction. The teacher herself was amazed at the power of a bar of chocolate.



Am I not rewarding poor behaviour?

Many teachers struggle with the idea of reconciliation gestures, as they worry that they will reinforce poor behaviour, and that it may look as if they are rewarding it. However, using this strategy involves a shift in mindset. We don't treat students like animals that we can train with treats and punishments, but rather we accept them as whole and complex individuals, who need support in order to thrive. Some children have fewer skills than others in terms of their ability to meet behavioural expectations, and they need a differentiated approach to behaviour management. If we take Ross Greene's (2008) assumption that "children do well if they can", it suggests that children who struggle to regulate themselves and follow rules need not punishment, but compassion.



We know that relationship building is at the core of supporting children to manage their emotions and behaviour – children will not take direction from people they don't trust and like. Adult relationships with children whose behaviours challenge us are often fraught with difficulty, and this has often been a pattern for these students over many years. Ironically, the children with whom we most struggle to build healthy relationships are the ones who need us the most. Reconciliation gestures are a step in the right direction for such children, and can start a cycle of positivity where previously there was only conflict.

Examples of Reconciliation Gestures



- Treats (sweets, magazines, etc.)
- Going on an errand outside the class
- Taking on a particular responsibility in the class
- Homework passes
- A positive note on desk/ in journal
- Allow them to share a story with the class
- Added privilege
- Connecting comment
- Compliment
- Ask about their day/weekend
- Offer help

Make a list of others you can think of here:

Teachers who have used reconciliation gestures report that they change interactions with a student for the better. They also facilitate positive teacher presence in a child’s life. Reconciliation gestures are simply offers of activities or treats that are not connected to any behaviour, good or bad, by the child. The goal of reconciliation gestures is for the teacher to let the student know they are valued for no other reason than they are their student.



Building your Network of Support

Teacher Isolation

Isolation is a major cause of distress in parents and teachers. The teacher stands alone in front of the class – typically, teachers work next to each other but not with each other – the teaching profession is “structurally isolating”. As a result of isolation, teachers often work in a professional culture of comparison and hiding difficulties. Teachers who feel isolated and helpless may complain “I can’t respond because there are no sanctions”. This can lead to a narrow search for punishments, which is **often ineffective and escalatory**.



Circles of Support

The New Authority offers an alternative. To work against isolation, the idea is that through transparent communication and mutual support, you build a network of support around you. Creating alliances & support systems for teachers:



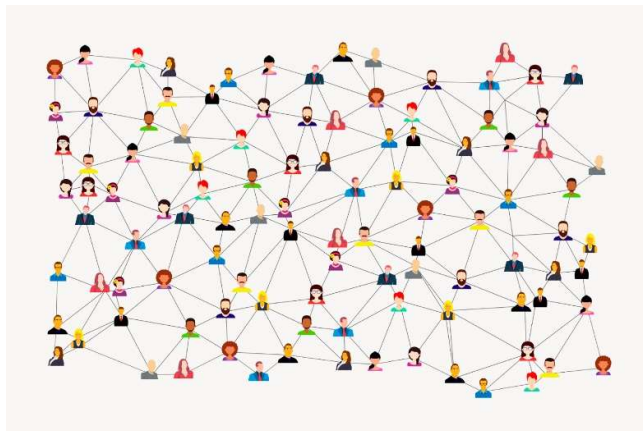
- **Re-establishes & legitimises** positive authority
- Allows teachers to **act without escalation** & aggression
- Increases teacher’s ability to **influence children’s** behaviour
- **Unites the teacher, the school community & parents** in the struggle against unwanted behaviour.

It can be difficult initially to tell other people when we are experiencing behavioural difficulties in our classrooms. We can worry that needing help is a sign of weakness. However, the New Authority is built on the strength we draw from the people around us – this is how we fight isolation and weakness.

Transparency takes strength and courage, and it pays off in the long term. The child/young person can no longer depend on adults staying silent, but instead, faces a united front, where all the adults around them know what is happening and are standing together. The support network come together to show support and care, but also to persist and resist against certain behaviours. Each member strengthens the network, which strengthens each member in turn.

1. Network of Colleagues

Your first circle of support is from **teacher peers and school leadership** – confronting discipline problems and aggressive behaviour is never the responsibility of the lone teacher but of the entire teaching staff. The basic premise is that a teacher confronting negative behaviour gets help from at least one other teacher. It is essential that school leadership form part of the circle, and steer the entire school towards using their support networks.



This means planning as a school for how teachers can recruit support when needed. Many schools will establish a “presence team”. Ideally, a “presence rota” is created, which ensures there are people available for “presence duties” at all times throughout the school day. That way, a teacher who needs the support of another school team member always has someone to call for support. Consider with your colleagues how this might be scheduled, and made available for everyone to have easy access. The presence team’s rota should be displayed in the school in a visible location.

Note: In order to feel supported, teachers must have the backing of school leadership in taking this approach.

2. Involving Parents

It is vital that parents and teachers work together when resisting certain behaviours. It is important that parents understand that you have their child’s best interests in mind, and that you want to support their child and also support them. It is only through demonstrating this care that parents will offer you support in return. Here are a few ways to slowly build up your circle of support with parents:



1. Make a pre-emptive, positive call to parents of your target students early in the school year, simply to touch base. Ask a little about the student’s interests, and explain that you are hoping to get the year off to a good start by building the relationship with their child.
2. Send positive feedback/notes home whenever possible.
3. As a school, it is a good idea to start inviting groups of parents to the school building, to start building parental presence in the school, while also strengthening the sense of mutual support.

This will form a solid foundation for when you need to work together with parents in the future. Remember, when adults stand together, they give each other **“wider shoulders”**.

Adjusting your Expectations

Very often, the children causing the most problems in our classrooms are children whose nervous systems are spending more time in fight/flight/freeze mode. These states are more active in any people who have sensitised alarm systems: children from chronic stress backgrounds, children with neurodevelopmental differences or delays AND anyone in a state of stress or overwhelm.

Guiding principles

- **Connect before you Correct:** We know that in the heat of the moment, a child is not able to respond to reasoning or correction, due to their nervous system arousal at that time. Connecting in an empathetic, compassionate way with the child is the best immediate response.
- **Children do well if they can:** Children have a natural drive to develop into their best selves. If they are not doing so, it means that something is blocking them, or they do not have the skills needed.

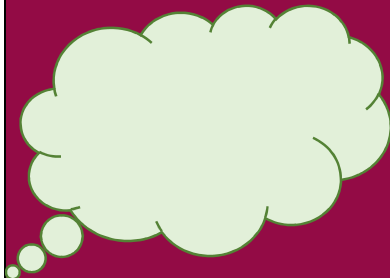
What Stress and Distress can Look like in the Classroom

Presentation	Distress state
Defiance, talking back Confrontational Aggressive non-compliance (“you can’t make me”) Bad language/anti-social behaviour/physical aggression “I don’t care” attitude	Fight mode
Frequent requests to leave class or simply leaving Disrupting class (avoiding work) Not responding to requests	Flight mode
Staring blankly Quietly completing work, blank expression Not participating/engaging in discussion	Freeze mode

When you see these behaviours in the classroom, it signals that young people are in a state of stress, dysregulation and overwhelm. Stress is what happens when the perceived demands of the environment exceed our perceived resources. This means that these students need not punishment, but **additional accommodations** from us as teachers in order to support them to do well and thrive. Our first step is to see how we might be able to reduce feelings of overwhelm by **adjusting our expectations** and **reducing demands** wherever possible.

Steps for Teachers to Adapt Expectations

1. Reduce cues of danger/threat in the environment by **reducing demands**. Consider what demands might be overwhelming the student:



- a) Is the academic material too challenging?
- b) Is the student overwhelmed by social demands? (e.g., during group work, at break times)
- c) Is the student *able* to meet the behavioural expectations? (e.g., can they inhibit their impulses, can they remain seated, etc.)

2. If they don't have the skills to meet an expectation, **adapt your expectations**:

- a) If the academic material is too challenging, can you adapt it for them? Can you assign less work, or easier work? Could you remove literacy demands from a task? How else might you differentiate the task?



- b) If the social demands are too much for a student, how could you support them? Could you allow them to work individually rather than in groups? Or could you increase structure within the group, giving them a clear and manageable task? Could you increase adult presence within the group? On yard, what might you or the school team do to increase supports, rather than expecting the student to manage independently? Is there a quiet/calm area available to them? Could break activities be structures? Could adult presence in the yard/corridors be increased? Could the student be given an “out” if they need it?

- c) If the student does not have the skills to meet behavioural expectations, are there certain behavioural goals you could “park” for the moment? Could you allow that not all students necessarily have the skills to follow all rules? Could you decide to “tactically ignore” certain disruptive behaviours?



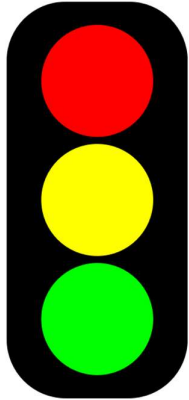
Teachers may fear that if they adjust their expectations, students will simply learn nothing (either academically or behaviourally) and they will have failed them. Remember that **students in a state of stress cannot access their learning state** – students in a state of dysregulation or overwhelm are already learning nothing, as their brains are in “survival mode”, rather than “safe and social” mode. With such students, your first and only goal is to support them to return to a safe and social state, where they can then become receptive to learning.



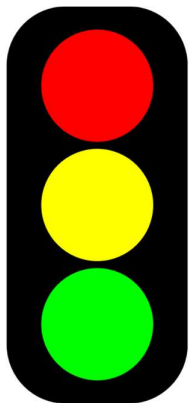
Prioritising Behavioural Goals using 'The Traffic Light System'

Teachers can engage in ways to prioritise behaviours of concern by using the Traffic Light System. This is simply a way to prioritise issues so that problems become more manageable and less overwhelming. Using the Traffic Light System can reduce the pressure you are under in the classroom, by helping you to choose your battles wisely. This helps with de-escalation, because you now have permission to tactically ignore many of a pupil's minor-but-irritating (MBI) behaviours! This can dramatically reduce the amount of time spent on conflicts in the classroom, creating more time for teaching and positive interactions.

We use the traffic lights to prioritise types of behaviours.



- 1. Red Light behaviours:** One or two issues only. Always the most serious or dangerous ones. These are the issues you will focus on.
- 2. Amber Light behaviours:** Issues that you may work on, but they should not be the most serious issues. The Amber Light behaviours should be considered "parked", or temporarily on hold.
- 3. Green Light behaviours:** Minor-but-irritating behaviours that you will now ignore. The vast majority of issues tend to be considered Green.



Red light behaviours: _____

Amber light behaviours: _____

Green light behaviours: _____

Parent-Teacher Meetings for Pupil's with Behavioural Problems

Using the Traffic Light System often requires collaboration with parents. However, meetings with parents of children with behavioural difficulties can be challenging, and require skilled diplomacy. You may find it useful to follow a two-step model such as the one outlined below.

Stage 1: Prioritizing

Prioritizing is a key ingredient to ensure success, because focusing on too many goals can be overwhelming. The Traffic Light System recognises that not all challenging behaviours are equal. For example, not doing homework is not the same as destruction of school property, and using the toilet without permission is not the same as a defiant refusal to complete activities or tasks in the classroom. The temptation to address *all* issues at once muddies the messages and can lead to high levels of conflict. Understanding this promotes working towards partial but realistic goals, while significantly enhancing your authority as the teacher.



When meeting parents, you may find it helpful to start with a focusing statement:

I've been thinking about the recent period, which must have been hard for [pupil's name]. I've concluded we should help [pupil's name] by prioritising our concerns. I think there are some behaviours we can ignore or "park" for now, so that together, we can focus on one or two behaviours we need to address.

Together with the parent, make a list of the priority behaviours that must be addressed. These will be called the Red Light behaviours. Make sure to limit yourselves to two main behaviours - for example, verbal or physical abuse of pupils or school staff, vandalism, leaving the class without permission or skipping school.

You and the parent(s) can then consider the remaining behaviours of concern and decide whether they are Amber or Green behaviours. The behaviours that can be overlooked (Green behaviours) will change from one teacher to another and one pupil to another, considering a pupil's individual needs. For example, making noise, failing to copy work from the whiteboard, talking out of turn, etc.

Prioritising using the Traffic Light System shows parents that you have their child's best interest in mind, while also ensuring that the approach is consistent both at home and at school. Ideally, parents will also benefit from being given 'permission' to let certain less serious behaviours slide at home for the time being.

This reduces the number of conflicts in the home, and thus opens up space for positive interactions.

Sometimes teachers may find it hard to settle on the Green behaviours they can ignore, because they are concerned about the impact on themselves and the rest of the class. Remember, **tactical ignoring** is a legitimate behaviour management strategy that removes the possibility that you might accidentally reinforce the behaviour by giving it attention. The consequences of tolerating certain MBIs can be easier to handle than the consequences of continuous conflicts in the classroom caused by continuously correcting MBIs. Tactical ignoring will reduce the amount of time spent on correcting behaviour and free up extra time for teaching and relationship building. This ultimately enhances your status as the teacher, it does not reduce it. Don't worry about concessions showing favouritism – remember, the same as we differentiate our academic content based on a student's abilities, we differentiate our behavioural expectations based on a student's ability to meet them. Every teacher treats pupils with individual needs differently anyway!

Stage 2: Establishing Daily Contact

With stage one complete, you and the parent(s) should agree on daily contact for a period of up to three weeks, after which contact is made as necessary. Three weeks is enough time to observe results if one or two issues have been prioritised. Communication must be personal, but can be short. Positive reports are particularly important for strengthening the emerging alliance between yourself and the parent(s). When problems are reported home, parents are requested to tell their child that they spoke to their teacher and know what happened, and that they are going to think together about a suitable response. You should try to hold a weekly meeting with the parents and the pupil to discuss the past week's behaviour. (In the New Authority approach, this strengthens adult presence in the child's life, and it demonstrates adult authority, through adults coming together to persist and resist against certain behaviours.)



Guiding principles

- **Connection before Correction**
- **Build your network of support/wider shoulders:** The support network come together to show support and care, but also to persist and resist against certain behaviours. Each member strengthens the network, which strengthens each member in turn. By standing together, adults give one another “wider shoulders”.

A daily call may seem like a big ask in the beginning. Therefore, it is important to emphasise that this daily communication is required for a limited time only. However, this approach is a good investment that will certainly pay off!



Teacher Presence

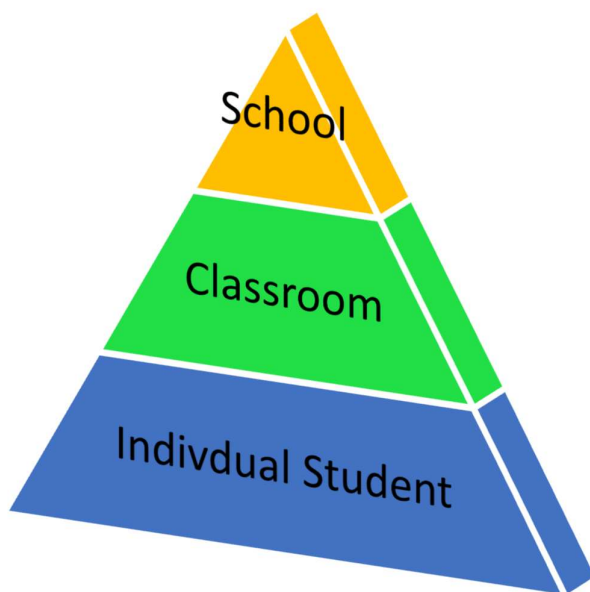
Teacher Presence

'Present' teachers behave in a way that lets students know: "I'm your teacher. I'm close and on top of the situation because I care". Presence helps teachers step back into their authority role, in a safe way that builds and repairs relationships. Students experience having a teacher who cares and is responsible for them and teachers feel they carry influence and significance in their students' lives. This serves as an "anchoring function" for students and helps them to feel safe and protected.

Presence is central to the New Authority. The New Authority stresses the importance of teacher presence in students' lives, as well as teacher presence in the classroom, the corridors and the yard, and occasionally at home while requesting support from or supporting parents. Research has shown that increasing adult presence and tightening supervision (also referred to as "vigilant care") is one of the best means of preventing a long list of negative behaviours, including fighting and violence, falling grades, truancy, school dropout, smoking, alcohol and drug use, mixing with a negative crowd and delinquency (Omer, 2016).

Levels of Teacher Presence

As illustrated below, teacher presence occurs at the level of the individual, the classroom and the whole school.



- Presence at the Individual Student level means the teacher's personal relationship with individual students and their parents.
- Classroom presence demonstrates that classrooms are teachers' domain, and teachers set the expectations in their classrooms. Teachers' presence at the classroom level strengthens teachers' authority and provides students with a sense of protection and belonging.
- Presence at the Whole School level is shown when the entire staff is represented (e.g., school assemblies, presence in the yard and on corridors, etc.).

Increasing Teacher Presence

The simplest way to establish presence in your classroom is through your physical behaviour. A teacher who circulates between the rows of desks, checks whether students have access to the necessary materials and resources when required, and approaches students who are struggling or disruptive, builds up and conveys presence. Physical presence in the classroom is a core tool to bolster teachers' authority, both in relation to discipline and academics.



What to Expect

Instead of creating distance between teachers and students (through punishment, exclusions, etc.), the New Authority is founded on determined presence. Teachers' authority is built upon the determined presence of the teacher in relation to the individual student and the classroom. Teachers' presence is clear when students experience teachers as close and interested, but also as determined in the face of behaviours that challenge. The greater your presence, the less likely students will disregard or ignore you. If teachers pair presence with the other fundamentals of the New Authority (e.g., self check-in, networks of support, and persistence), they will be more effective in the following ways:

- Their isolation and vulnerability will be significantly reduced;
- They will have more balance, more personal impact in the eyes of students and more influence;
- They will discover coping mechanisms that will enable them to achieve goals that are currently difficult to attain and they will build relationships with hard-to-reach students.

Linked ideas

- Self Check-In/Press Pause
- Build your Network of Support/Wider Shoulders
- Resist and Persist

Strategies for Creating Teacher Presence

Strategies for developing teacher presence with individual students:

- Promptly **learn students' names** to quickly build a significant presence that helps earn appreciation and cooperation from students;
- Create **personal index cards** to enhance personal relationships with individual students and build status in relation to the whole class: The card is a cardboard rectangle folded down the middle so it can stand on a desk with the student's name on the front of the card. Throughout the year, the cards become a channel of communication between teachers and students by sticking stickers with personal messages on the inside of the card where teachers can mark progress, thank students for jobs well done in the classroom, or indicate an area that requires improvement. Gradually, not only teachers but also students begin sending messages through the "**personal mail**" of the index cards.
- Establish personal contact with each student and their parents from the beginning of the year through the procedure of **advance communication** with the class parents, even before the first parent-teacher meetings: Inform your students you will call their parents in the first few weeks of the school year to get to know them personally. Prepare a list of about three students per day. Keep the first conversation with parents positive, and try to speak with both parents. At post-primary level, you may have to consider how best to manage this at a whole school level – does the form teacher for each class take the lead? Is it for year heads? Are incoming first years prioritised? Efforts should always be made to make positive contact early in the year with parents of students with known behavioural challenges.
- When teachers make initial contact on a positive basis at the beginning of the school year, the level of **parental cooperation** later is higher if and when a teacher needs to contact the parents to address a behavioural or academic problem.
- Take the time to get to know the students – find out about an interest or a skill they have. Ask questions about these things.
- Plan what you can do to build relationships, particularly with the most challenging students in the classroom. See if there is a way you can spend even a short period of time with them, one-to-one.
- **The more challenging the behaviour, the more we increase presence and supervision** in the student's life. Increased supervision can also be called "vigilant care".
- Some teachers keep a **Contact Card** with each student's name, key teacher, and parent contact details on it. Students fill this out at the start of the year, and the teacher keeps the cards visible on their desk. This is also a show of presence of the other adults in the student's life.
- Deal with disruptions by a show of **focused presence**: firstly attempt to redirect the student to something else (e.g., a job to complete for you, or a preferred task). This shows the student you have noticed them, and can also prevent further escalation.
- If disruption continues, or when a student crosses a line, stop teaching, turn your whole body towards the student and call their name. Stand in your place, quietly watching the student, and wait with a neutral expression on your face for them to resume their task. Remain in this posture for 20 seconds. Your willingness to wait quietly for this long demonstrates **determined presence**;
- If the disruption continues, take it to the next level: Slowly approach the student and stand there quietly for another 20 seconds. Signal to the student with a hand gesture that

they must resume their work. If they do, stay in this position for another few seconds, and only then bring your attention back to your class and resume teaching;

- If the disruption continues, take it to the next level: Approach the student again, take out a notebook and write down the student's name. If you keep contact cards, present the card to the student, as a sign that you plan to follow up with other support adults. Make a note of this yourself to remind you to follow up later and make sure to do so, when you have had time to plan the follow up carefully, with other adult supporters if needed.
- If the disruption continues, take it to the next level: Advise the student that you would like to talk to them at the end of class. Call on the student at the end of the class and ask them to stay with you. It is best to walk towards the door a few seconds before the end of the class, stand at the door and ask the student to stay with you. Following this procedure strengthens authority towards the entire class;

Strategies for developing teacher presence at the classroom level:

- Teacher presence can be established right at the outset of the school year. A **class teacher** who prepares the classroom before the students enter on the first day of school, and greets them at the door wishing them a good start to the new year, conveys the message: "Welcome to my classroom!"
- The class teacher also makes an assigned seating plan. This demonstrates that **the classroom is your space**, and you are holding a map.
- Instead of spending most of your time facing the class or sitting behind a desk, walk through the rows of desks in your classroom length- and width-wise to convey to your students "I am close, and I care!";

Strategies for developing teacher throughout the school:

- Systematically increase teacher presence (supervision) in **troublesome areas** that lack teacher presence (e.g., toilets, changing rooms, or the yard) to significantly reduce the frequency of behavioural incidents.
- Create and maintain **routine activities** (e.g., making a corridor and yard monitoring schedule) that allow teachers to demonstrate presence and stay on top of situations.
- For the first three days of the school year, the principal, deputy principal and two other teachers stand at the school's entrance. This facilitates a **double welcome** for students: First at the school entrance and then at the classroom door by the class teachers. The staff members welcome each student, shake their hands and wish them a good year.
- Consider recruiting parents to join your presence team. Increasing parental presence in a school building can be a powerful tool to show students that there is a community of care around them.
- Where there are significant challenges that require more presence and increased supervision/vigilant care, parents can sometimes help with increasing presence in certain areas. Getting students used to parental presence around the school is important.



Setting Expectations/Anchoring

The New Authority is a compassionate, relational approach that does not blame or shame children for their behaviours. It recognises that “the problem is the problem” – the child is never the problem. However, that does not mean that adults tolerate aggressive, abusive or unsafe behaviours. In fact, part of the adults’ role in the New Authority is to provide an **anchoring function** for children and young people. This means setting limits that help children feel safe and protected. When a young person feels that adults are in charge and in control, they know they can also turn to them for support when needed. This sometimes involves “stepping back into our role” as teachers.



There are two formal ways to set expectations/limits within the New Authority:

- The Announcement
- Establishing a Gradient of Support

The Announcement

The Announcement at Three Levels

The Announcement is a key aspect of the New Authority. It is a non-blaming statement, usually written, that states the new position the whole school team are taking relating to certain behaviours. It makes it clear to the students which behaviours the team is unwilling to accept. It often represents a turning point, not only for the students but also for the teachers: from now on, everyone is committed to working together to resist the named behaviours. The meaning of the Announcement is: from now on, the school team and your parents will act determinedly to resist certain (named) behaviours, despite any attempts by students to continue these behaviours. It is important to note that the Announcement does not mean starting a war – alongside a message of clear resistance to specific behaviours, a message of care and concern for all students in the class should be stated.



The Announcement for schools can happen at three levels – the Whole School Level, the Whole Class Level and the Individual Student Level. It is important that the Announcement happens **first** at the whole school level, as **the New Authority can only work when teachers are supported in their classrooms by a whole-school approach**. This whole-school approach starts with **School Leadership** and weaves its way throughout the school community.

Linked ideas

- Network of Support – adults supporting adults
- Teacher Presence
- Resist and Persist

The Announcement – Whole School



The Announcement is written on paper and should be read, ideally by the School Leadership team, in front of the whole school, alongside several educators and possibly parents, if appropriate. (A whole school assembly might be a good opportunity to do this.) During the Announcement, only one person talks, usually the principal. The other adults should support silently. It is recommended that they read it in a non-threatening, calm and decisive manner. Afterwards they hang the Announcement on the wall, give a sign and conclude the assembly. The Announcement can then be published on the school website or social media pages.

After the Announcement, usually we don't expect improvement of the specific behaviours mentioned, but from this moment on the teachers (and parents) will start working collaboratively, with determination and perseverance against the behaviours defined in it. When a behaviour defined in the Announcement re-occurs, each teacher will delay their immediate response, but will follow up with an Act of Resistance (Amiel & Maimon, 2019).

Sample announcement:

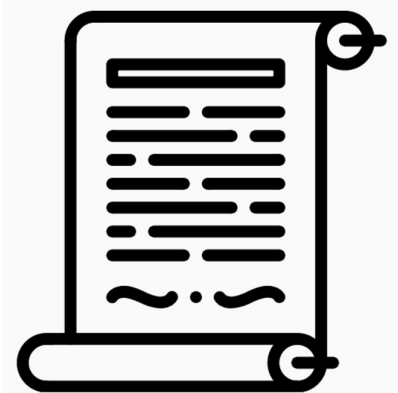
"Dear students, we are gathered here, staff members of this school and some parents from our supporting team, to express our care and concern for all of you. We are here together to form a circle of support around you. We want you to have the best possible experience of school life and to get the most from your education. We are also here to show our resistance to certain current behaviours in this school. From now on, we will resist [_____] (e.g., physical violence and verbal abuse against teachers and students, etc.).....]. We will also resist [_____] e.g., walking around and talking without permission during class/ non-submission of homework/ etc.]. We will do, whatever it takes, to stop these behaviours and involve others as necessary. We are not going to give in, nor give up on you as individual students and as a school! We will do, whatever it takes, to stop the disturbances in your classrooms and ensure our school is a safe place for people to live and learn.

Signed, your teachers and parents"

(Adapted from Omer, 2011)

The Announcement – Whole Class

The start of the year is a good time for each teacher to make an Announcement in their own classrooms, which follows the same pattern as the Whole School Announcement. Each teacher may outline their own behavioural expectations. Examples might be: "Respectful language only"; "Mobile phones in schoolbags"; "full attention on the class"; etc. Each teacher's priorities will depend on them and their context. Similar to the Whole School Announcement, it is important to note that the Announcement does not mean starting a war – alongside a message of clear resistance to specific behaviours, a message of care and concern for all students in the class should be stated.



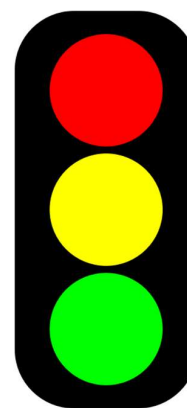
When a behaviour defined in the Announcement re-occurs, each teacher will delay their immediate response, but will follow up with an Act of Resistance (Amiel & Maimon, 2019). Remember that your authority comes from your persistent resistance, along with the support you receive from the other adults around you. Make sure to take your time to plan your responses and recruit support from your colleagues, school leadership and parents as appropriate.

The Announcement – Individual Students

- For serious behaviours, the Announcement can also be completed with an individual student, when parents and teachers come together to plan and deliver a clear statement of support, presence, collaboration, determined resistance to certain behaviours, and a commitment to do all they can to support the child.
- Announcements should be shared with all supporters in the child’s network of support, including people who were not present during the announcement. It may be for the parents to share copies of the announcement with people in the child’s wider circle, such as extended family, or people they are close to in the community. The intention is not to shame the child, but to increase a network of support around them.

Notes on the Announcement:

- You need to decide in advance which behaviours to target in the Announcement. Announcements are usually reserved for “Red Light” or “Amber Light” behaviours. “Red Light behaviours” are the 1-2 serious behaviours you have agreed to prioritise. “Amber Light behaviours”, if you have not “parked them”, are also suitable for an announcement, and may people find it easier to start with targeting some “Amber Light behaviours”.
- “Green Light behaviours” – the ‘minor but irritating’ behaviours you have chosen to tactically ignore, are not targeted in the announcement.
- It is helpful to stick to no more than 3 key behaviours to target, and if possible, keep visual reminders of these in your classroom. That way, a quick reminder can be given to students as necessary by silently pointing at the visual for the rule.
- The Announcement should always contain a mixture of “connecting comments” and “resisting comments”. The words must be carefully chosen so as to avoid escalatory language. The Announcement should always end on a connecting note.



After the Announcement

- Let the Announcement do the work. There is no need to mention it again or refer to it afterwards.
- There is usually a positive change following an announcement, often following an initial push-back from the student(s).
- Reminder announcements can be given every few days, if there has been no positive change – they are not one-off events.
- Different announcements can be made to target different behaviours.

Linked ideas

- Teacher Presence
- Circles of Support
- Transparency
- Resist and Persist

Establishing a Gradient of Support

A school needs a planned system in place for responding to when students continue to engage in behaviours named in the Announcement. The circles of support and the presence team in the school can be used to plan for a gradient of responses to behaviours. For example:

Response level 1: A meeting is held between the teacher, the student and one adult supporter

Response level 2 (if level 1 response has not been satisfactory, or if the behaviour warrants a higher level response): A meeting is held between the student, two school team members and a parent

Response level 3: A meeting is held involving the student and a number of supporters, possibly including members of the school team, school leadership, the parents and other supporters.

Every team member in the school should be familiar with these procedures, and ideally it would be included in the school's behaviour/relationships policy.

Linked ideas

- Circles of Support
- Delay your response
- Resist and Persist



Section 2: Responding in the Moment



Responding in the New Authority: Core Ideas

Responding in the New Authority may look different to how you may be used to responding to behavioural incidents in your classroom. The New Authority is almost counter-intuitive – the more we focus on the outcomes, the less likely we are to achieve them. We are more likely to achieve them by creating an environment that is supportive and conducive to change (Aylmer, 2022). The core ideas behind New Authority responding are:

- Presence
- Influence, Not Control (A New Position)
- Self Control
 - De-escalate and Delay (Strike While the Iron is Cold)
 - You Don't Have to Win, Just to Persist (Stepping Out of the Boxing Ring)
 - Mistakes are inevitable but they can be corrected
- Support
- Persistence



Presence

Core idea: Presence

According to Omer (2021) in his book “Courageous Teachers”, he states that “the teacher’s presence is manifest when the child experiences the teacher as close and interested, but also as determined in the face of problematic behaviours. The greater the teacher’s presence, the less the possibility to disregard or ignore the teacher” (p. 11). Presence is a key core idea in the New Authority, and underlies and envelops all other practices in the New Authority.



Influence, Not Control – A New Position

Core idea: Influence, Not Control



- The New Authority recognises that we cannot control children and young people. We can only change our own behaviour and responses to them, and create supportive environments that invite their positive voice to join the conversation
- The New Authority teaches adults new and effective ways to react to children/young people, by creating a safe, calm, authoritative presence. As adults change their reactions to children/young people's behaviours, so children/young people's behaviours change in response.
- In moving from control to influence, we move away from rewards and consequences, which some children find difficult to cope with.
- This means **taking a new position**. We accept that we cannot make children and young people do what we want them to do. For example, we cannot *make* them study for a test. We cannot *make* them do homework. We cannot *make* them behave in certain ways. What we can do, is create the conditions for their positive voice to emerge, and for them to make positive choices for themselves.
- An environment high in conflict, correction and tension is not conducive to flourishing. So even if that means letting some of our own goals slide, we prioritise reducing conflict, and trust that the young person will make the positive choices that they can, in order to reach their own goals. We hand over responsibility for management of the young person, and in doing so, allow them the opportunities to grow (Aylmer, 2022).
- In this **new position**, teachers and parents take a step back. They do what they can to support the young person, but they allow the young person to “step back into their role”. This may mean providing a reminder about something that has to be done – but only once. According to Tony Meehan, an NVR practitioner and former head teacher, this allows the child or young person to develop their own agency, and allows them the space to do this (Aylmer, 2022).
- The challenge here is for adults to sit with their own anxiety about the situation. We as adults don't need to do everything we can to try and control young people's lives. The New Authority is about being in control of yourself, which is something over which you do have control. It is more important for us as teachers to focus on the connections we are building with children and young people throughout the school (Aylmer, 2022).
- This can be a liberating stance for teachers to take, as their authority and status is no longer dependent on being able to control children, and is not contingent on a child's obedience.
- This doesn't mean allowing all sorts of behaviour – it rather means focusing less on what the child is doing and more on increasing your presence, accessing your networks of support, building relationships and calmly following up with planned acts of resistance.
- If we shift our focus from “the child must pass this exam/complete homework/sit quietly” to “the child must feel safe and happy in school and at home”, our approach becomes much more conducive to change. The child MIGHT not study; they MIGHT fail an exam – but there is a more contented young person (Aylmer, 2022). Happier children and young people do in general step up to the mark. Remember, children do well if they can (Greene, 2008).



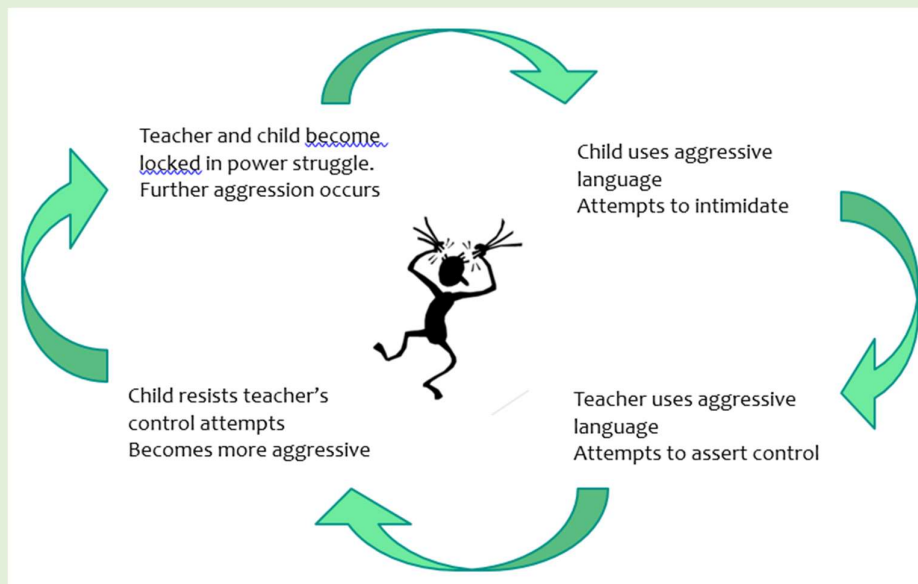
Self-Control

The concept of adult self-control is key to the new authority. Self-control commands respect and appreciation. Developing the skills of self control help teachers avoid falling into the traps of futile power struggles. There are three key phrases that support teacher self-control: (1) Strike while the iron is cold; (2) You don't have to win, just persist; and (3) Mistakes are inevitable but they can be corrected (Omer, 2021).

Self-Control – Core idea (1): De-escalate and Delay – Strike while the Iron is Cold

This idea de-escalates conflict and reduces the duration of it in the classroom, while also ensuring a carefully planned response. The old authority is based on the idea of immediate punishment and retaliation, which was thought to be the best way to maintain the adult's authority and status. However, as we all know, reacting in the moment is often emotion-fuelled and leads to poor decisions. It can easily lead to entering into a battle with the student which escalates and prolongs the conflict. As any teacher who has gone head-to-head with a defiant student will agree, the results rarely lead to desired outcomes, particularly in the long-term. One battle only seems to lead to another, and all at the cost of your teaching time, your own wellbeing and that of your students.

A typical **cycle of escalation** can look like this:



De-escalation means that teachers maintain a calm front and do not step into the boxing ring, even if they feel highly triggered on the inside. They exercise **self-control** by “**pressing pause**” and deciding to “**strike when the iron is cold**”. They can do this by staying silent, or by stating simply that they are not happy with this particular behaviour, and will come back to the student about it.

“**Strike while the iron is cold**” is based on new assumptions:

- Immediate disciplinary responses bring a high risk of escalation
- A delayed response allows the teacher to take the heat out of the immediate situation and enlist support
- A delayed response conveys the message that the teacher is continuously there and concerned with the student, even during the silent interim
- A delayed response allows teachers to determine when an incident is over
- Adult authority is maintained through remembering, gathering support, and coming back to the incident with planned acts of resistance and persistence.



Self- Control – Core idea (2): You Don't Have to Win

Many of us have at some point or other ended up in head-on confrontation, where our response options were limited. When this happens, any outcome apart from the student's complete surrender seems insufficient. A student is likely to find such a situation extremely threatening, and will do all within their power to defy the teacher (Omer, 2021), driving the cycle of escalation.



The idea that “you don't have to win” opposes the idea that authority needs to be based on intimidating outbursts, where the child is “shown who's boss”, or “put in their place”. Instead, the New Authority suggests that self-control is actually power. The teacher uses their self-control to calmly **press pause** in the moment and “**step out of the boxing ring**”. A delayed response can be even more impactful, and less humiliating and harmful for the student. It frees the teacher from the spirit of confrontation and decreases the likelihood of ending up in fruitless power struggles.

You may however ask yourself, “*but aren't I letting them get away with it?*” If we are honest, there is also a part of most of us that wants students to pay for the difficulty they have caused us. This drive towards “fairness” is a very human part of us, and is deeply ingrained within most humans. It has been called the “tit for tat” mentality (Haidt, 2006), and consists of a strong drive to return to a state of so-called equality. However, most authors will argue that we need to reconsider this “tit for tat” mentality, which is usually based on misguided assumptions about equality, deserving and fairness.

Consider this:

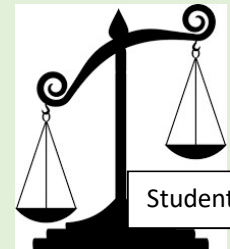


Teacher

Student

Starting out at the beginning of each class, we may imagine ourselves and the students to be on a reasonably equal footing. There have been no incidents, and there is equilibrium in the classroom

However, a student disturbs the equilibrium, by shouting out, making a cheeky comment or in some way defying the teacher. As a teacher, we perceive that the student has now risen higher on the scale, and we feel a strong urge to punish or subdue the student, in order to regain equilibrium. That is what feels fair and natural to us.



Student

Teacher



Teacher

Student

HOWEVER:

We may have forgotten that our starting assumption was never correct. Due to natural power imbalances in the teacher/student relationship, we are always coming from a starting point where the teacher has more power than students. Let us add to that a student coming from a background of social disadvantage, a household of chronic stress or trauma, a student who is a member of a minority group, a student who is neurodivergent, or faces other unseen challenges. The balance starts to tip very far in favour of the teacher. Although a student may indeed disrupt our equilibrium, by responding in kind, we simply serve to maintain a power imbalance, which in the long run, leads to unhealthy battles for dominance and control.

Our goal instead should be to support the student in all ways that we can, to bring them closer to a place of equality, where they are valued and respected as humans, regardless of their challenges with regulating their behaviour. Remaining calm and respectful, delaying our response and prioritising relationships can all help us to truly “equalise”.



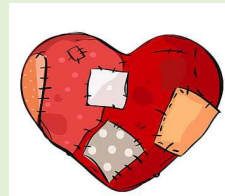
Self Control – Core idea (3): Mistakes are inevitable but they can be corrected

In the old authority, adults (particularly teachers) were often seen as infallible. They were “always right” and could not be challenged. However, maintaining this façade meant keeping a safe distance and never being willing to show their humanity. In the New Authority, we embrace our humanity, which helps us move closer to our students.



It is likely that at some point or other, we will forget to “press pause”. We will step into the boxing ring and we will react rashly. We may issue punishments or sanctions that we later regret. The New Authority allows for this – we accept that we make mistakes, but we also believe that we can come back from them. Adults are prepared to offer an apology and offer a repair and an alternative path. This is another way of “stepping out of the boxing ring”. It ensures that neither the teacher nor the student gets trapped by insisting on following through on threats made in the heat of the moment. We accept that mistakes will be made, but we commit to being open about our mistakes and trying to fix them.

Not only does this give the teacher an alternative path to follow, it also models self-compassion and forgiveness to students. When students see that it is okay for teachers to admit fault and attempt to make amends, it makes it more likely that they will feel safe and supported in doing so when needed.



Support

Core idea: Support



In the New Authority, teachers move from “I” to “we”. As teachers develop an understanding that their authority comes not from them alone, but from the support and legitimacy they receive from others, they start to speak from a place of “we”. “WE are resisting this behaviour”; “WE will consider our response and come back to you”. This reduces teacher isolation and bolsters true authority (Omer, 2021).

Persistence

Core idea: Persistence

Rather than responding instantly to problem behaviours, the New Authority is based on persistence and patience (Omer, 2021). According to Omer (2021, p. 12), “liberated from the duty of reacting immediately, the teacher can calm down, prepare, plan and recruit support.” The events are not erased, but are “bookmarked” until the teacher is ready to come back and address them. This develops a sense of continuity and conveys a message of quiet strength.



Responding in the Moment: Steps to Take



When responding in the New Authority, the only goal in the moment is de-escalating the situation and returning calm and peace to your classroom. This preserves relationships and ensures that you can return to teaching. We can think of de-escalation as a two-step process – de-escalation in the moment, followed by an act of resistance (Embeita, 2023).

The following sequence of steps is effective when responding in the New Authority. Always start with the first option, only moving to the next if the behaviour continues:

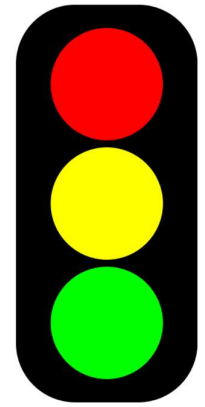
1. Ignore what can be ignored
2. **Redirect disruptive behaviours** – have a menu of ‘distraction’/ ‘redirection’ tasks/jobs/suggestions/items/activities at the ready. Remember that reconciliation gestures can act as the ultimate re-direct.
3. **Reminders of expectations.** In a discreet and general way, the teacher can remind the student of their expectations, without taking them on directly.
4. **Delay your response.** “Bookmark” behaviours for a later response. Tell the student that you need to think about your response, but will come back to them once you have decided how to respond.
5. **De-escalate conflict** – press pause, check in with yourself, empathise and validate the student’s emotions. Do whatever is needed to restore calm, without getting into arguments/power struggles. You don’t have to win.
6. Call for the **support** of additional adults if needed. Ensure safety and support calming down.
7. Debrief: Link with your own **support network** afterwards.



Step 1: Ignore what can be ignored

A basic premise of the New Authority is to target only “Red Light behaviours”, the most serious behaviours that you have decided to prioritise. You temporarily “park” “Amber Light behaviours”, those that are less serious, until such a time as the highest priority behaviours have been dealt with. In the New Authority, we simply ignore “Green Light behaviours”, the ‘minor but irritating (MBI)’ behaviours that might otherwise take up a great deal of our time and energy.

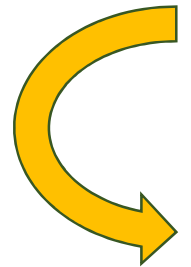
Wherever possible, the teacher does not take the bait from the student when the student “invites them into the boxing ring” with minor but irritating behaviours. The less attention given to these behaviours, the better.



Step 2: Redirect disruptive behaviours

There are certain Minor but Irritating behaviours that can be difficult to ignore, particularly when they disrupt the smooth running of your classroom. The best way to deal with these behaviours is to redirect the student to a different task, thus shifting their attention away from the goal of causing conflict. The friendlier your tone during a re-direct, the more likely you are to successfully redirect the interaction in a more positive direction.

With target students, it is helpful to have a menu of ‘distraction’/ ‘redirection’ ideas prepared in advance. These may include giving the student a job (either within or outside of the classroom), assigning them a special task as part of group work, allowing them to engage in a preferred activity, or simply engaging them in a pro-active and positive way. While it might seem counter-intuitive, re-directing a student’s attention with a treat is considered a reconciliation gesture, and can act as the ultimate re-direct. Remember that your only goal is to avoid and redirect conflict. The more time you spend in positive interaction with your student, the better your relationship with them, and the smoother your classroom runs.



Step 3: Reminder of Expectations

(a) General reminders:

In a discreet and general way, the teacher can remind the student of their expectations, without taking them on directly. This can be done in the following ways:

- Proximity praise – praising a student or students nearby for meeting the expectation, stating exactly what they are doing. E.g., “And I see that Diana and Paul already have their books out, that’s wonderful.”
- A general reminder to the class – “I am waiting for everyone to sit quietly before we move on.”
- Wait in silence for the students to comply. Silence can be a powerful tool!
- Non-verbal reminders – use a gesture or point to a visual on the wall reminding students of the rule. It may be helpful to make eye contact with students who are not yet complying at this time.
- Verbal reminder – “remember, in this class, we have a rule about _____.”



(b) Student-specific reminders:

If general reminders have not worked, take the following steps:



- When a student crosses a line, the teacher stops teaching, turns in the student’s direction and calls their name.
- Stand facing the student without speaking, until the student returns to task. Body language should convey “I am here and will stay here as long as it takes”. **Core idea: Presence**
- After 20 seconds, return attention to the class and continue teaching
- Next stage if necessary: Move closer to the student and stand about 1 – 2 meters away from him/her with a sealed expression. Remain in position for another 20 seconds. Maintain a quiet and persistent stance, refusing to be drawn into any argument. Return attention to the class_ and continue teaching. **Core idea: Calm, persistent resistance**

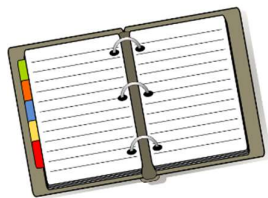
Research shows that “teachers who are willing to stop teaching in order to show full presence to a disruptive student use a higher percentage of class time teaching compared with teachers who try to address disturbances incidentally, without stopping their teaching” (Omer, 2011, pp. 166-167).

Remember:

- A reminder is not an isolated disciplinary technique, but part of a comprehensive plan to reinforce the teacher’s presence.

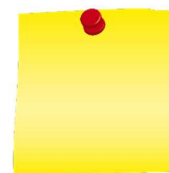
Step 4: Delay your response

If a behaviour continues or is repeated, despite ignoring, redirecting, general reminders and student-specific reminders, choose from the following options for delaying your response:



- Take out a notebook and write the student's name in it. Advise the student that you will ask them to stay back after class. A few seconds before the end of class, the teacher stands at the doorway and tells the student to stay in the class. A conversation with the student at such times is a follow up act of resistance, and its goal is to convey to the student that you are resisting this kind of behaviour. You may invite solutions and find a repair, or you may advise the student that the matter is not closed and you will come back to them. If the student leaves before the teacher can stop him/her: Open the next period with the request that the student stay in class at the end of the lesson.

- Pull out a card file containing the student's personal information, write out the student's parents' names and numbers on a sticker, and place it on the student's work surface. Quietly add, *"At the end of class, I will decide whether we should continue this process and involve your parents."*



- If the process does not produce the desired responses, inform the student: *"This is against X rule. I will think about what to do about this and get back to you when I am ready."*
- Sometimes in a major incident, you may simply say *"This is against our rules. I will come back to you about this."* **NOTE:** For younger children, children who may be distressed about having lost control or children who are worried about what will happen to them now as a result (which can escalate things further), it can be helpful to convey to them that this is not acceptable, but that together you are going to fix this.

- **The Bookmark:** The bookmark is a 'de-escalation & delay' tool for teachers – it's a short sentence which the teacher says to the student during an argument or confrontation: "We are both getting angry right now, we're going to pause that, and we'll talk about it at the end of the lesson/day/week. For now let's get back to what we were doing." We call this a "bookmark" because firstly, it "closes" the argument. The student may continue to argue, but as long as the teacher doesn't respond, there is no argument – the teacher remains silent and still at this point. But a bookmark has another use - to re-open the book at the exact point later. The response during the follow up meeting is up to the teacher, but the important point is that the teacher did not respond in the heat of the moment – the response was delayed (Amiel & Maimon, 2019).

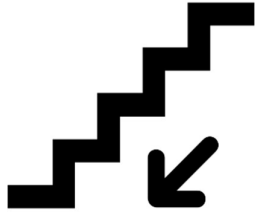


- **The Team Bookmark:** The "team bookmark" is a simple variation of the basic bookmark. Under certain conditions, in response to escalating behaviour by a student, the teacher may respond with a short sentence: "We do not accept _____ in our school". The teacher closes the argument but does not invite the student for discussion at the end of class. Instead they inform another teacher about the incident. That's why we call this a team bookmark – one teacher places the bookmark and the other teacher re-opens the incident later. The word "We" trickles down to students but mostly grows strength among the teaching staff (Amiel & Maimon, 2019).



Step 5: De-escalate Conflict and Delay

De-escalation goes with Delay, and is a key aspect of the New Authority. De-escalation means that teachers maintain a calm front, even if they feel highly triggered on the inside. They exercise **self-control** by “**pressing pause**” and deciding to “**strike when the iron is cold**”.



Provocation from a child or young person can be seen as an invitation to “get on the escalator” into conflict. In the New Authority, the adult chooses “**not to get on the escalator**” with the child – instead, they remain “grounded”, and on the “ground floor”. This de-escalates the situation and quickly restores a sense of calm.

De-escalation can be seen as a two-part process: de-escalation in the moment, followed by a planned act of resistance (Embeita, 2023). Although not responding in the moment may seem like “letting the child get away with it”, in fact, this is not the case. When students get used to the idea that acts of resistance are delayed, there is no further sense of “getting away with it”. In fact, there is a stronger sense that the adults around them are strong authority figures, who will respond calmly but persistently to certain behaviours.



The first obstacle towards successful de-escalation is the widespread assumption that the adult has to “**win**” or **subdue the defiant student** – to show them who is boss. In a typical situation, a child’s behaviour escalates to a high conflict level. Then one of two things happens – either the adult feels they must react angrily in the moment and “fight fire with fire”, or the adult gives up and allows the behaviour. The new position in the New Authority means that the adult refuses the child’s invitation into the boxing ring. They can do this by staying silent, or by stating simply that they are not happy with this particular behaviour, and will come

back to the student about it. In both cases, they do not *pursue* and *extend* power exchanges by verbal battles, or sarcasm, or pointless threats. Remember, once the teacher has stepped into the boxing ring, the student has already won the fight. Staying silent, exercising self-control and delaying your response is usually sufficient to take the heat out of a situation, and you can return to teaching the class.

Helpful tips and reminders:

- Remember that consequences do not work for some children who do not have the skill set to engage with them, and are likely to serve only to further damage fraught relationships.
- Avoid pushing for apologies, admissions of fault or overtly taking accountability – many children are unable to tolerate “losing face” in this way and it is likely to lead to further escalations and relationship breakdown.

De-escalating Dysregulation

There are situations where teachers need to know the key steps for de-escalating a situation that has become unsafe, when a student has become completely overwhelmed and dysregulated. It is vital to




remember that when a student has become overwhelmed or is in a conflict situation, they are unable to learn. There is too much of the stress hormone, cortisol, going around in their brain to facilitate learning. Conflict situations are never teaching moments. No matter what you do in this situation, nothing will be learned about how to behave in the future. At this point, all you are doing is firefighting.

In a conflict situation, you have only 1 goal:



Quench the Fire

 **When I see that a student is becoming agitated, what do I do to prevent a situation from escalating further?**

- Calmly get the student's attention –use non verbal as well as verbal communication
- Send cues of safety – friendly facial expression, tone, posture
- Validate the student's emotions – e.g., "John, I can see that you're finding this hard. Maths can be really tough sometimes."
- Avoid questions such as "what's wrong?" (Questions can add to a student's stress, as being asked to figure out an answer is an additional demand when they are already overwhelmed)
- Offer help e.g. "let's see if I can help you with this"
- If that doesn't work, offer a movement break e.g., "let's go out and get some air to help you clear your head"



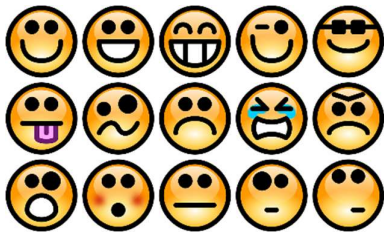
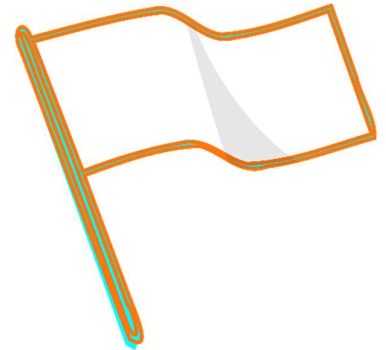


When a situation has gotten to full escalation, what do I do to de-escalate?

- ▶ **Press pause** and take a few deep breaths. Recognise your own feelings. Remind yourself of your commitment to self-control and to strike while the iron is cold. This will help you to remain calm.



- ▶ Think to yourself about how the young person might be experiencing the situation
- ▶ Send “cues of safety” with your tone of voice, facial expression and posture – remember, this person’s autonomic nervous system is likely feeling extremely unsafe and dysregulated, and you are trying to co-regulate them back to safety.
- ▶ Avoid arguing with the student
- ▶ AVOID QUESTIONS – especially “why” questions. Every question, even friendly, social questions, are an additional demand that may overwhelm the student further.
- ▶ Avoid eye contact if the student finds this stressful
- ▶ Take a nonthreatening stance with your body at an angle to the student and your empty hands at your sides in plain sight
- ▶ Support the student to save face. This may mean facilitating a private/semi private conversation instead of speaking to them in front of the class.



- ▶ **Verbally validate the young person’s emotions***. Remember, you can validate emotions without condoning them. E.g., “John, I can see that you’re very upset about this. Jason threw some paper at you, and that has really annoyed you”, or, “You seem a bit agitated right now. I’m guessing you really don’t want to have to do this work. It seems like too much work and you’re sick of it. I get that. I wouldn’t like it either, if I was asked to do something that was too hard for me. That’s a pain.”

- ▶ **Validate the emotions even more!!! You cannot spend long enough on this step. If you skip this step, your interventions will fail. NB: avoid problem solving at this stage**

- ▶ Send non-verbal reminders of calm-down strategies. **Modelling deep breathing** or simply drawing an arm up and down in time with deep breaths, within the student’s peripheral vision, can be very calming and is completely non-confrontational. You are offering a suggestion rather than giving an instruction, which is less threatening to a young person in distress.

- ▶ **Reduce demands** for the rest of the lesson. It may be a good idea to let other teachers know what has happened, so that they can also prepare to reduce demands on the student for the remainder of the school day. This allows the student the space for their nervous system to recover.



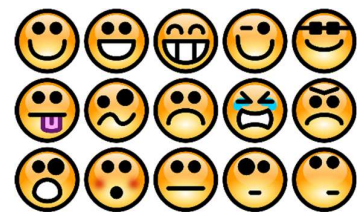
Usually, following the above steps will prevent a conflict from escalating further, and will support the young person to return to a state of calm.

Step 6: Call for Support

If you have followed the steps for de-escalation, but the student has still not calmed sufficiently, you need to **access your network of supports** and call on a colleague for support. Their role is to stand with you in resisting the behaviour, but also to increase adult presence and supervision/vigilant care. Additional adults may be needed to supervise the student if they need to leave the classroom. The more serious the behaviour, the more adult presence that is needed.



- If a student is not yet calm, call on a supporting adult who can facilitate the student to get themselves some space e.g., “let’s go and get some air”. If a student is too overwhelmed to process language, use non-verbal cues instead, such as an open hand gesture and body movements guiding the path to the door.
 - With a supervising adult or adults, the student can take a silent walk around the school grounds, or go to a previously designated calm area. This room should previously have been cleared of any stimulus that may be dangerous in such situations. Any materials they may need for this should be available in the calm space or brought by a supervising adult. Visual reminders for calming techniques would ideally be in place in the calm down space.
- If the student refuses to leave or is too dysregulated, you may need to remove other students and adults from the classroom, if this is in the interest of safety
 - Once the student is in a room on their own, or supervised by adults, use rhythmic gestures, sounds and movements to send more cues of safety to the child. Adults can help by modelling deep breathing, or even using the sound of rhythmic footsteps to create a calming and steady sound.
 - If the student has any physical supports that they have been previously taught to use to calm down, make sure they are available (safety permitting). This may include sensory regulation aids, such as fidget toys, squeeze balls, ear defenders, calming music, weighted blankets, pillows, or anything that can provide safety, regulation and comfort for the student.
 - If the student has not been able to respond to having their emotions directly validated, the adults can, from a safe distance, start to label possible emotions for them in a non-direct manner. For example, narrating what may be happening for the student – “John looks as if he feels very upset at the moment. He was doing fine and then Jamie threw a ball of paper with him. He must have felt so angry and annoyed. I would be really annoyed too if that happened to me. He must be really mad, he’s having to work so hard at calming down again. He’s doing great....” Simply narrating what is happening can be another alternative. “Wow, John is trying his best to calm back down. He is walking up and down the room and breathing really heavily. He must be so angry, I can see his fists are clenched really tightly. He’s really having a tough time today.”



- Keep using your tone of voice, facial expression and posture to send cues of safety. Ensure that your tone and facial expression is friendly and supportive, and conveys to the student that you are a support and not a threat.
- Allow the student a number of minutes, monitoring their physical state from a distance – ideally outside the door. Do not attempt to communicate with the student until:



- Their movement is calm (e.g., seated or still as opposed to pacing)
- Their breathing rate appears normal (as opposed to fast, stress breathing)
- They are able to speak calmly (not shouting)
- If any of the conflict behaviours continue, it is still too soon.

- When you feel the student is ready, let them know that you will check on them soon – e.g., “I see you’re working hard at calming down, I’ll be in to see how you are in one minute”
- After one minute, suggest returning to the classroom, using language that shows your positive expectation –e.g., “come on, let’s go and join the others/ let’s get settled back in class”
- When the student comes back to class, place fewer demands on them for the remainder of the day
- Avoid triggers – for example, if reminders about homework are often a trigger for the student, avoid mentioning it
- Continue to avoid questions and keep your language as brief as possible.
- Do not attempt to discuss consequences or to teach any “lessons” from the incident – this will re-escalate the situation. Follow up acts of resistance can only be discussed well after there has been sufficient time for the student to calm down and for the teachers to plan their response.
- Avoid the temptation to use phrases such as “I’m glad to see you’ve finally calmed down”, or “if only you were always as calm as this”
- On very rare occasions, it may be the case that the student cannot calm themselves down. At this point, it is time to enlist the help of more staff members to help you, and in the most difficult (very rare) instances, a student’s parents may have to be called to take them home.

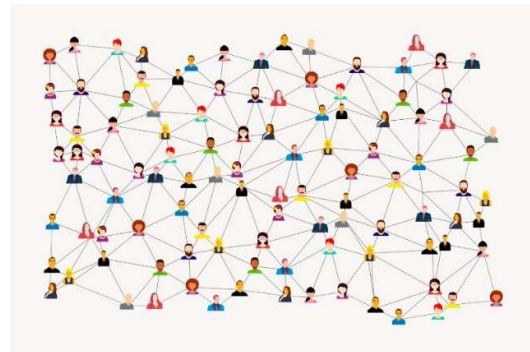


The entire school team needs to be aware of these procedures, which should be supported by School Leadership and written into the relevant school policies.

**Similar approaches include “emotion coaching”, “the low arousal approach”, or “regulate, relate and reason”*

Step 7: Debrief: Link with your Network of Support

It is crucial to recognise that dealing with conflict, escalations and challenging behaviour is extremely stressful and difficult for teachers. We need to access our network of support after behavioural incidents to debrief and offer each other support. It is important to access your own network of support to find someone who will listen to you and be supportive of your feelings. Our network of support will remind us that “mistakes will be made, but they can be corrected” – nobody is perfect and we are never likely to come away from a conflict situation feeling that we handled it perfectly. They will also remind us to be kind and compassionate to ourselves, and to take extra care of ourselves after a tough day.



It is vital that school leadership provides support for this step, as teachers who are unsupported are likely to succumb to feelings of isolation and burn out. Building a strong network of supports within the school, from the top down, is one of the key components of the New Authority.

Should any staff member need additional support, Spectrum Life is now providing Employee Assistance Support for school staff, including wellbeing advice. Where appropriate, short-term counselling is also available to school staff and their family members. This service provides a dedicated free-phone confidential helpline 1800 411 057 and is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

- Website: www.spectrum.life
- Freephone: 1800 411 057
- Email: eap@spectrum.life
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Wellbeing Together

Section 3:

Following up

Acts of Resistance



Following Up in the New Authority

When there has been a behavioural incident, one of the key aspects of the New Authority is that the adults in a child's life delay their immediate response and follow up afterwards with a carefully planned act of resistance.



The usual steps for following up are:

Step 1: Access your networks of support to plan for follow up. Connect with colleagues and/or the parents/others and support each other to make a plan together.

Step 2: Follow up with your chosen "**Act of Resistance**"

- i. Resisting comments
- ii. Tightening vigilant care
- iii. Using the gradient of support
- iv. The check-in
- v. Time In
- vi. Present suspension
- vii. Public opinion
- viii. The sit-in



Step 3: Persist

Step 4: Reparation

Step 5: Link with colleagues to debrief

Access your Network of Support to Plan for Follow Up

The New Authority is built on the strength we draw from the people around us. This means that confronting discipline problems and aggressive behaviour is never the responsibility of the lone teacher but of all the adults surrounding and supporting the child. The basic premise is that a teacher confronting negative behaviour gets help from at least one other adult. When there has been a behavioural incident, we link with colleagues, parents and people from the wider community to stand with us and strengthen our authority – to give us “wider shoulders”.

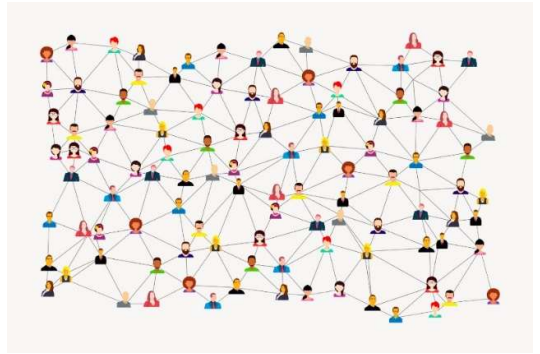


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For minor behavioural incidents, you may be happy to follow up on your own with a student, and carry out a more minor act of resistance. However, for most incidents, it is best to seek the support of the other adults in the child’s life. Your acts of resistance only carry weight and authority when they are supported by others – when you have been given wider shoulders by those around you. Having other adults with you increases adult presence in the child’s life and sends the message that there is a community of adults around them both supporting them and keeping them safe, through resisting certain behaviours.

Your first port of call is to determine how many and which people from your support network you would like involved. The more serious the issue, the more supporters that are warranted. Supporters will usually be other staff members and parents, and may also come from the wider community. This network of support is ideally built in advance on strong positive foundations and a message of care for the child.

Contact with supporters is made, where you discuss what has happened in a matter-of-fact, non-blaming way, and discuss which act or acts of resistance are most appropriate. You may also discuss possible reparation acts at this time.



Careful planning at this stage is vital. It can take several days to plan your next move, as it may involve coordinating several people’s schedules to have a meeting or to meet with the student. In the New Authority, this is perfectly legitimate, as it is okay to delay your response, even by several days. The most important thing is that follow up happens.

Acts of Resistance

Acts of Resistance, also called “Active Resistance” is a key part of the New Authority. When we consider the concept “**Connection before Correction**”, we see that once we have made efforts to connect with the child and de-escalated the situation in the moment, we then must follow up with the “correction” aspect. In the New Authority, we use the word “resistance” rather than correction. Actively resisting certain behaviours provides an anchoring function for the child and reinforces the limits that protect them and help them feel safe.



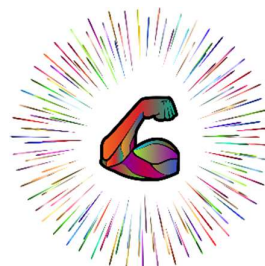
Brown (2020) explains that “all acts of resistance ‘resist’ against the child/young person’s **disconnection**”. This includes disconnecting in ways that withdraw (e.g., school refusal, truancy, disengagement) and ways that lash out (e.g., aggressive language or physical violence, destruction of property, defiance of adult requests, etc.).

Acts of resistance involve getting closer to the child, and ensuring we are not facilitating the retreat or disconnect. We increase vigilant care, or supervision, when young people are engaging in damaging behaviours – whether the behaviours are damaging to themselves or to others.



Teachers may decide to come up with their own Acts of Resistance, which may need to be tailored to the context. Remember, De-escalation is a two part process, consisting of de-escalating in the moment, followed by an act of resistance. Here are some common types of Acts of Resistance used in the New Authority:

- i. Resisting comments
- ii. Tightening vigilant care
- iii. Using the gradient of support
- iv. The check-in
- v. Time in
- vi. Present suspension
- vii. Public opinion
- viii. The sit-in

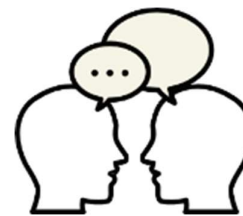


Remember to expect push-back from the student in response to acts of resistance. Brown (2020) advises that “cooperation with a bad attitude usually comes before cooperation with a good attitude”. Teachers should “remain silent with the former and praise the latter” (Brown, 2020). In any case, the student’s cooperation is not our measure of success in the New Authority – it is our persistence and resistance. Even if the student does not immediately change their behaviour, we are maintaining our authority and continue to create safe conditions in which to draw out their positive voice.

Resisting Comments

These are pre-planned, resisting statements that help show resistance and persistence, using the three Ts (Brown, 2020):

1. Timing (when to talk): Choose a neutral time, after the behaviour has calmed
2. Tone (how to talk): Use a neutral, calm voice and a neutral body posture
3. Talk (what to say): Choose words carefully using pre-planned, short comments



Resisting comments are an important part of the New Authority, but it is important to prevent the discussion from descending into an argument. That is why it is important to plan what you will say in advance.



When planning your resisting comments, it is important to use “I” statements, rather than “you” statements. E.g., rather than “you never do what I ask you”, you switch the focus to yourself – e.g., “I feel worried and stressed when you don’t complete your work, because I worry that you won’t pass your exam.” Or, rather than “your shouting and commenting ruined the class today”, say “I felt very frustrated today when I couldn’t teach the class, because I kept hearing your voice”. While a child may be able to deny what they have done, they cannot deny your feelings about it.

Another important tip is to separate the person from the problem. Remember, **the problem is the problem, not the child**. For example, rather than saying “you’re impossible to have in my class”, try saying “running the class is difficult when you continue calling out/throwing things/etc.”, or “we need to work together to find a way to make the class run better.” We are trying to point out the problem and help the child see that it needs addressing, rather than blaming or shaming the child about their behaviour.



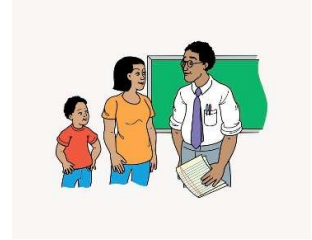
Brown (2020) has developed a system for delivering resisting comments, which we have adapted slightly here:

1. Warm up sentence	This is a sentence that introduces the idea that we are about to have a difficult conversation. For example, “You may not like this, but I need to talk to you about something difficult.”
2. Appointment system	The appointment system can be used if necessary after the warm-up sentence, and is a way to give the child the option to discuss this at a later appointed time if they prefer. It is very helpful to offer a delayed appointment, particularly if you are concerned the student may become defensive if asked to have the conversation immediately.
3. Talk-through sentence	This is where you use “I statements” and problem-focus language to explain exactly what the issue is. Plan your talk-through sentence in advance, and keep it as short as possible.
4. Teacher “duty” statements	Explain that while you know this may not be easy for the student, it is your job as their teacher to bring this up with them.
5. Finish with a connecting comment	Finish with a message of support, to let the student know that even though you are resisting certain behaviours, you are still on their side and want to work together with them to find solutions.

Tightening Vigilant Care

Increasing adult presence in a young person's life is an extremely effective way of preventing all kinds of risky behaviour (Omer, 2021). When particularly difficult behaviours arise, we increase presence through greatly increasing adult supervision, or "vigilant care" in the places that the behaviours occur.

In practice, tightening vigilant care may mean that we increase adult presence and physical supervision in the corridors, in the school yard and recreation areas, and particularly in any areas causing frequent problems. It may also mean making the extra effort to check in with a student on a regular basis. It may mean a joint reporting system with parents. Many of the acts of resistance in the New Authority involve tightening vigilant care.



Adults can sometimes believe that young people's privacy needs to be respected, and there is almost a taboo around intruding on their privacy. However, such privacy can pave the way for secrecy, and can allow unsafe behaviours to continue. Transparency and increasing presence are key ideas in the New Authority. We can certainly allow for more trust and more privacy when things are going well. However, when there are problems, we need to get closer.

According to Omer (2021), "when teachers send the message that they are following the student closely and staying informed, they reduce the problem behaviour and strengthen their authority at the same time." The message from teachers when they tighten vigilant care is not a message of punishment, but is "I care about you, and I need to watch you closely, as it is my job to keep you and everyone safe". Although the student may not like the tightening of vigilant care, they experience it as supervision and constant support.



Using the gradient of support

The school's procedures should highlight a "Gradient of Support" – a set of steps teachers can follow when they need to follow up on a behavioural incident.

Response level 1: A meeting is held between the teacher, the student and one adult supporter

Response level 2 (if level 1 response has not been satisfactory, or if the behaviour warrants a higher level response): A meeting is held between the student, two school team members and a parent

Response level 3: A meeting is held involving the student and a number of supporters, possibly including members of the school team, school leadership, the parents and other supporters.

Teachers are asked to address every serious or recurring problem to a member of their network of support that day. (The members of the support network take a supportive and strictly non-critical approach to the teacher.) Together, they make a plan.

Example: A girl walked into the classroom in the middle of class, completely ignoring the teacher, picked up her bag, and turned back to leave. The teacher called out to her and asked her to come back. The girl responded with a gesture of contempt and left. The teacher went to the response team. The team suggested that one of the teachers on the team sit with the teacher while she called the girl's parents to report the incident and come up with a joint solution. The parents were invited to a meeting in which a reparation act was planned with their support.

The key messages to be conveyed in the meetings with the student are as follows:

- We are here for you, we care about you and we value you as a person.
 - However, we are resisting this behaviour (name the behaviour explicitly) because it is our job to keep you and everyone around you safe.
 - We are inviting you to come up with a solution that may repair the damage that was done.
 - If a solution is not offered, the meeting is concluded by stating "we have still not found a solution. We will consider this and come back to you."
- The requirement to make reparation is one of the preferred responses of the new authority to negative behaviour
 - The authority figure uses all the means at their disposal – asserting presence, enlisting help and appealing to the positive voices of the child to motivate them to do so.



Although planning and conducting such meetings may appear time consuming, most teachers report that they end up doing far fewer of these meetings than they had anticipated. Few need to complete the full three meetings before they see a change.

Follow up meetings need to be compassionate, but state clearly what behaviour is being resisted. For example, meetings should take a format such as the following:

1. Empathise with the child and validate how they might have been feeling during the class/incident. (E.g., “Tuesday was a tough day for you. It seemed like you were finding it really hard to be in school and to listen to the teachers. That must have been tough for you. I know it’s not always easy to have to keep trying to work.”) Continue with this step until the child feels calm. You may have to guess at what the child might be feeling, and it is okay to guess. Remember, validating emotions does not mean that you agree with the behaviour.
2. Try and elicit empathy for the teacher or the other students during the incident/class. (E.g., “You know, I think that Mr. _____ might have found it a very tough day too. He was trying to teach the class, and he was feeling worried and stressed because he knew he couldn’t cover the topics he needed to get done. That meant that nobody was able to get their work done”.)
3. State the expectation. (E.g., “You know that we are here to make sure everyone can learn. It’s our job to make sure everyone has a place that makes it easy to learn. So it’s our job to resist it when X behaviour happens, and when we can’t teach because of it. We are going to keep coming back to you to help you get on top of this, because we want the best for you and for everyone.”)
4. Invite a repair. (E.g., “how do you think we might make it up to Mr. _____? Is there anything we could do to make it better?”)
5. If the child does not come up with a possible solution/repair, inform them that the repair will be going ahead anyway. For example, you may decide to write an apology on the child’s behalf to the teacher(s)/other student(s) concerned, or do something nice for that person. This should be done in a way that is not threatening or humiliating to the child.
6. State your commitment to getting back on track. (E.g., “We can leave it at that for now. We will give you whatever help we can to make sure school goes better for you.”)



Check Ins

- Following a behavioral incident, the student is informed that they should connect with a few (identified) teachers throughout the day following an incident.
- These teachers will be advised to sign a form that the student brings - in the morning, at break and return the form to the teacher that requested the check-in (who also witnessed/ experienced the problematic behaviour) at the end of the day.



- Each contact with designated teachers is an opportunity for the student and teachers to reflect on what happened and how it could have been different or a chance to give positive encouragement (*solution-focused discussion*).
- The immediate goal is not a change in behaviour.
- The goal is show **teacher team/ group unity and presence**

During check-ins, remember to:

- Externalise the problem – the problem is the problem, not the child
- Use de-escalation and delay skills
- And solution focused/ strengths-based approaches that help repair the relationship between teachers and the students.

Time In

Time In is a concept similar to the one with which we are familiar, “Time Out”. However, the key difference is that rather than withdrawing adult attention for certain behaviours, we increase adult presence.



A follow up action to a behavioural incident may be that the student spends break time with a key supportive adult in a designated area, away from other students. This could be a teacher, an SNA or even a parent.



During the time-in, the student is not required to do work or engage in sanctions. The adult does not tell the student off for their behaviour – they should maintain a firm but supportive attitude. Depending on the student’s presentation, it may be an opportunity for the student and teachers to reflect on what happened and how it could have been different or a chance to give positive encouragement. However, any hint that the conversation is starting to descend into an argument is a cue for the adult to press pause and divert the conversation to safer ground.

The goal of the Time In is not that the student apologises or changes their behaviour immediately, it is simply a show of **teacher team/ group unity and presence**. It demonstrates resistance and persistence.

Present Suspension

With very severe behaviours, suspension of the child from school may be required. In the New Authority, active suspension involves a series of contacts between the school, parents & the child before the suspension begins and throughout the suspension period.

Key points for “Present” Suspension:

- Parents are regarded as partners, informed of the incident and decision to suspend the child before the suspension takes place.
- It is made clear that a member of school staff will be in contact with parents and the student during the period of active suspension.
- The importance of the parent as a partner in the suspension should be highlighted.
- The student is expected to complete tasks during the suspension period – it is not time off!
- A parent/ responsible adult needs to be present at home with the child during the period of suspension.



The Process:

- Meeting with student before suspension begins:
 - Parent(s), year tutor/ head, another school representative and student attends.
 - If a parent cannot attend, they can phone in to the meeting.
 - The incident is described in detail and it is explained to the student there is no option but suspension.
 - It is made clear that parents are partners in suspension and the school will be in contact with the parent(s) and the student during the suspension.
 - The student’s duties during suspension are explained.
- During suspension period, a member of school staff contacts the student and talks about the material that was covered in class. This is done to let the student know what was missed and to continue school presence while suspended. There is **no** need to remind the student of reasons for suspension.
- Parents are encouraged to discuss reparation acts with the student during the suspension.



- A parent is asked to come into the school at the end of the period of suspension (to help with student’s reintegration into school).
- A meeting is held involving those present at the pre-suspension meeting.
- Reparation can be discussed during this meeting.

Public Opinion

Public Opinion is a powerful tool within the New Authority. Following an act of aggression or defiance, everyone involved with the child should be informed of the incident, as well as the immediate responses and the delayed responses as they emerge. This includes people in the wider circle of the student's home life. Publicity can happen through parent letters, addresses to students/parents or through other forms of publication.



Every act of aggression or defiance, even if carried out secretly, conveys the message “I don't care about your rules”. It undermines the foundations of the school community, which must be restored. A key idea in the New Authority is that we need to overcome the ingrained habit of protecting the individual's privacy while confronting all problems (Omer, 2021).

Using Public Opinion is generally advised for more serious behaviours. Even with students who claim not to care what you do, Omer (2021, p. 122) claims “we have never seen a student who is immune to public opinion”. Public Opinion is used as a tool at the individual student and at the whole class/whole school level.

Using Public Opinion at the Individual Student Level

The first step is to document written evidence of what has happened. This must be very specific – for example, rather than writing “used rude language in class”, write down exactly what was said.



This documentation is then circulated to the student's other teachers and to the family. This sends the message that it is not one teacher acting alone, but a community of support around the child. Key supporters are selected, as there is likely to be one or two staff members in the school with whom the child has a better relationship. If they tend not to listen to their parents, but might listen to an uncle or a grandparent, so that person should also be given information and be invited into the circle of support. Usually, teachers are surprised by the willingness of other people to get involved and help out in such situations.

Two or three teachers approach the student to let them know that the details of the incident have been shared with their teachers and parents. The parents are also asked to follow up by letting the child know that they have been informed about what happened. It is vital that communication from both parents and teachers to the child remains respectful and does not take the tone of rebuke. The message from parents should be that they are interested in working with the school to find a solution.



The next phase is to use your network of support to organise a follow up meeting with the student. It is vitally important that this meeting is supportive of the student, and does not back them into a corner. The purpose of the meeting is to let the child know that you are all aware of the behaviour and all coming together to resist it, but that you are there to support them to find their way back, in a way that does not humiliate them. The child is “given the option of stopping their actions in a dignified way, without an entire community cheering its victory” (Omer, 2021, p. 78).

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There is sometimes concern about potentially shaming the child through the use of public opinion. Teachers may feel that the child would not be able to tolerate the shame of having their behaviour known about. However, there are instances in which it is necessary and helpful for a student to feel remorse for their actions. As long as the student is supported and approached with respect and a commitment to finding solutions, they should experience it as support. While they may not like the feeling of the public eye being on them and their behaviour, the results may be valuable. Remember that it is important to give the child a “way back in” without requiring them to lose face, which is likely to cause further defiance. Giving them a face-saving path back into connection and back to their school community following an incident is crucial to the success of the approach.



Case study (adapted from Omer, 2021)

Thomas was known as a negative leader who managed to persuade others to embarrass the teachers. One of his favourite victims was the grammar teacher. When the teacher turned around to write on the board, some of the students in the classroom would start to croak. When the teacher turned around, the croaking would stop instantly. Thomas knew how to hide behind the group so that it was hard to ascertain that he was the driving force. The teacher checked with other teachers whether similar things happened to them too, and sure enough, it turned out that the croaking gimmick was happening in other classes.



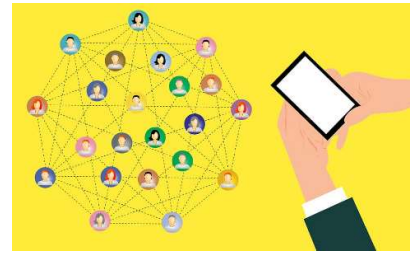
A group of six teachers showed up in each classroom (in groups of three or four at a time) to demonstrate joint resistance to this behaviour. The teachers announced that the school staff had decided to act together on this issue. They announced that certain students would occasionally be sent to sit for a few hours in different classes. They added that talks would be held with the parents of some of the students in the classes where the behaviour occurred. In the conversations with the parents the teachers said that the school was following their children closely, partly to make sure they were not drawn into problematic initiatives by negative leaders. That way, the parents were brought into the teachers’ initiative without their children being directly blamed. If parents asked why their children were singled out, the teachers said in a positive and supportive tone of voice: “We’re paying close attention. It will guarantee that your child is not accused of something they didn’t do. We’re sure they can stay away from negative influences, especially if they know that you and we are cooperating with each other”.

Thomas’s parents received the same message as the other parents. The initiative put an end to the phenomenon and greatly reduced Thomas’s negative leadership within the class group.

(paraphrased from Omer, 2021, pp. 63-64).

Using Public Opinion at the Whole Class/Whole School Level

The second phase of using Public Opinion works at the whole class and school level. According to Omer (2021, p. 65), “any event of violence, humiliation, ostracism or systematic harassment is an event that concerns everyone”. When there have been serious incidents, it is important for the class and the wider school community to know that the teachers are aware of it and that action is being taken.

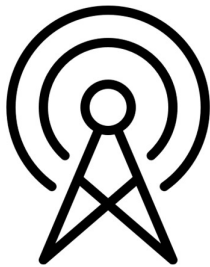


When there are problematic behaviours going on, teachers may (in groups of 3 or 4) visit each classroom and let them know that they are aware of the behaviours. They advise that they will be contacting the parents of the relevant students. They also explain the details of the follow up actions that will be taken. For example, certain students or class groups will be supervised more closely to make sure they are not drawn into negative behaviours, or perhaps will be removed from certain activities until safety can be restored. The individual students are not named, although often the class will be aware of who they are.

Parents as a group are then informed of the behaviours that have occurred in the class, and are advised of the steps being taken to find solutions. If parents ask about why their particular child is being singled out, teachers can advise that they are keeping a close eye on the child to make sure that they will not be drawn into negative behaviours. However, all parents in the class group receive the same message. Parents are asked for their support in resisting the negative behaviours, as the teachers advise that they have a better chance of success when the students know that the teachers and parents are working together.



When the teachers feel confident that the behaviours have reduced, they may be able to loosen their supervision arrangements and allow more freedom again to the students.



Some schools publish details of behavioural incidents on their website or in their school newsletter, without naming individual students. The details include the steps the school are taking to remedy the situations. Many schools may be concerned that publishing behavioural incidents may damage the reputation of the school. However, the opposite is true, as the published responses reassure the students, parents and the wider community that the school take resolute action in the face of problem behaviours. Indeed, it builds trust in the school over time within the community.

Core Idea:

Transparency: Publicity and Transparency are key parts of the New Authority. Although a challenge when starting out, schools generally reap the rewards of open conversations about what is doing on, as isolation goes down and support increases. A first step in transparency can be the idea of going to colleagues/parents and saying “I’m/we are having this problem, and I’m/we are struggling with it”/ “I/we need your support with this”.

The Sit In

The Sit-In is an act of resistance with the New Authority. The Sit-In is a demonstration of silence, presence and a firm stance, to show the student your determined and united decision not to accept a certain repeating behaviour.



The Sit-In is a simple act, however, it requires a great deal of organisation and is time consuming, and ideally should be coordinated beforehand with parents. A Sit-In can be carried out with an individual student, with a small group of students or with an entire class group.

Sit-In Instructions – Whole Class Group

A Sit-In may be performed with a class group when the whole class or a significant proportion of the class have been engaging in problematic behaviours. The purpose of the Sit-In is to convey to the class the team's determined decision to resist these behaviours. The team may be made up of a number of teachers and possibly parents. Parental presence at such times is particularly powerful.

Instructions:

- The team enters the class at a time pre-determined by staff members. They enter the room together, close the door and sit in front of the class silently on chairs, that are brought in for this purpose.
- During the Sit-In, only one staff member talks, and the rest supports them silently.
- After everyone is seated, the teacher leading the Sit-In describes examples of the behaviours that are causing problems and asks the students to find a way to stop these behaviours. The leading teacher considers the solutions and decides whether the solutions are acceptable.
- If a solution is accepted, the lead teacher gives the other team members a sign to leave the classroom quietly, after telling the students that they will give the suggested idea an opportunity to work.
- If no solutions are found, the team wait for fifteen minutes in silence. Before leaving, the leading teacher says: 'We still have not found a proper solution'.

It is important to keep in mind that the Sit-In is not an act of retribution, but a statement. Do not think of it in terms of 'winning' or 'losing'. The initiative of the educational team, the surprise to the class, the duration of the stay in the classroom and the silence are the elements, which pass on the message: 'We are determined to stop this behaviour'. The initiative, the silence and the determination are the aspects that rebuild the adults' authority through presence, wider shoulders, resistance and persistence. It is also important to remember that the Sit-In is not about finding solutions! Students often change their behaviour over time, without proposing any 'solutions'.

**Silence is a
source of great
strength.**

Adapted from The New Authority Center – The Sit In: Instructions - newauthority.net

Sit-In Instructions – Individual Student or a Targeted Group of Students

Adapted from *The New Authority Center – The Sit In: Instructions - newauthority.net*



1. Contact parents:



On the day a behaviour that requires a “Sit-In” occurs, phone the parents and introduce the process. E.g., “Lately, as you know, we have been having challenges with _____” (the “Sit-In” should be done in response to repeated behaviours that parents are already aware of). Then explain that the behaviour is still going on (describe what happened that day). Then you could say, “In order to help your child see that _____ is not acceptable in our school, I plan to remain with the child after school tomorrow, for twenty minutes after school has ended to follow up. I am planning to do what is called a “Sit-In”. I wanted to invite you to join me in this meeting; your presence is extremely valuable in my opinion. The purpose of your presence is to send a caring, unified message to the child.”

Silence is a source of great strength.

If the parents are willing to participate, you may need to remind them of the plan for a “Sit-In” (you can send them these instructions as well). Emphasize that their role is to sit and be silent (it is a good idea to mention how difficult it can be to remain silent, as well as how important it is during the process). On the day they get the call, parents are welcome to speak neutrally with the child about the behaviour that happened that day, and let the child know that a follow up meeting will be held tomorrow. In addition, you must remind the parents not to threaten their child with the “Sit-In”. Threats greatly weaken the message we wish to convey.

If the parents are not willing to participate, you can tell them you would like to consider conducting the “Sit-In” with another staff member present, in accordance with the school policy. In case of a significant resistance to the “Sit-In” from parents, you can discuss this with the principal and decide on an appropriate next step.

2. Perform the Sit-In

The “Sit-In” is performed by the teacher and at least one other adult; the child is invited to the classroom or another room at a time convenient to you.

It is extremely important that you do not have a time limit, that there will be no other issues to attend to and that you will not use your mobile phone during this time. You sit down (on a chair or even on the floor), preferably in a way that will discourage the child from leaving – for instance, the parent or another adult will sit by the door. Once you are seated, say to the child: “Yesterday _____ (specifically describe the unaccepted behaviour). We all care about you and we want you to have a really good school experience. But we can’t have _____ behaviour in our school, so we are here to find a way to resolve this problem. We will sit here and wait for you to come up with a solution for how to stop this behaviour”.



After that, sit quietly and wait for suggestions from the student. If the student answers with accusations, demands or threats, do not take the bait! Simply tell them you cannot accept this offer and remain quietly

seated. You must avoid any attempt to persuade, accuse, preach, threaten or argue. Wait patiently and quietly and do not get drawn into an argument. If the child makes a positive suggestion, the "Sit-In" will end on a positive note by you saying you believe this suggestion deserves a chance. Do not threaten that if they do not keep their promise you will do another "Sit-In". If the child makes no offer, remain in the room for 20 minutes and then leave, while saying: "we haven't found a solution yet; we will finish at this stage". The "Sit-In" has ended.

A decision concerning an additional Sit-In should be made depending on the intensity of the undesired behaviour after the Sit-In. If you sense a decrease in the problematic behaviour, there is no need for another Sit-In. However, if the undesired behaviour persists, you should perform the Sit-In again. Usually, several Sit-Ins are required in order to get the message across and to lead to change.

The rationale behind the "Sit-In":



It is important to emphasize that the Sit-In is not a punishment, but a message. There is no "winning" or "losing" and it is unhelpful to think of it in this way. The adults aim to convey a message of strength and resistance, and not to "win". The teacher's initiation, the surprise to the child, the length of time spent in the room and the decisive silence are the factors that deliver the message. The message is united and strong: "we are determined to stop this behaviour". Initiation, silence and decisiveness show the adults' presence, care, persistence and resistance.

The goal is not to make the student behave nicely during the Sit-In. The Sit-In's success will be measured by any change in behaviour after the Sit-In, often in the weeks that follow, and not in the course of the Sit-In. It has been noted that often children change their behaviour without raising a single suggestion in the room.

Tips for a Successful Sit-In

- The teacher should plan in advance when the Sit-In will take place. It is important not to attempt the Sit-In when emotions are high, but at a quiet time and after proper planning and coordination. The Sit-In is, indeed, a surprise to the child, but the teacher must plan it carefully.
- Specifically define the undesired behaviour. Instead of using general messages, such as "you behaved badly yesterday", be specific – e.g., "yesterday you had a fight in the playground and told the teacher that..."
- Following a Sit-In, the student should be welcomed back to their classes as normal. There is no reminder of what happened, not even a hint. Any threat to repeat a Sit-In, any rationalising or explanations, weaken the message you would like to deliver. The impact of the Sit-In lies in the act itself and not in threats or explanations. You may, if you wish, carry out small relationship gestures such as including the child in an preferred exercise or task, commend them on good behaviour and so on. Again, it is important that these gestures are done without implying they have anything to do with the Sit-In.



Troubleshooting a Sit-In:

The student may respond in different ways. Here are some possible student behaviours, and suggested responses:



The student denies the behaviour: in this situation do not answer immediately, but wait in silence. If the child repeats their denial, you may say, “We are waiting for a suggestion for how to stop this behaviour”.

The child raises demands and conditions: The child may try to stop the Sit-In by raising demands, such as “I will do what you ask only if you...” In this case you should answer patiently that you cannot accept this offer and resume silence. If the child suggests that the parents buy them something and they will then stop the behaviour, the parents should decline (speak with the parents about his possibility beforehand).

The child ignores you: this is a way for the child to convey that they are not affected by what you are doing. They may try not to respond, walk around the room or even pretend to be asleep. In each of these cases, you must stay in the room in silence.

The student tries to start a fight or an argument: if the child swears, shouts, insults etc., you must remain silent; it is important not to get dragged into a confrontation, and to abstain from preaching or threatening the child. In general, it is wise to remember that unexpected acts from the child may be addressed during the next Sit-In if necessary. *Remember- there is no need to take drastic measures during the Sit-In and it is important not to escalate the situation.*

The child becomes violent: in any case where there is a chance that the child will respond violently, the Sit-In should only be done in collaboration with the parents. Parents may wish to invite additional supporters (such as a favourite aunt/uncle, neighbour or a grandparent) who would make it less likely for violence to occur. If the child acts violently during the “Sit-In” and the parents are unable to calm them, you must stop the “Sit-In”.

The child makes a positive suggestion: in this case, the Sit-In is declared over. There is no need to worry that the child is only saying this to get out of the situation, as you can repeat the Sit-In at any time if the behaviour does not improve.



Core Idea:

Persist

A core idea in the New Authority is Resistance and Persistence. With particularly entrenched behaviours, we do not expect to see improvements overnight. However, through resistance and persistence, we can send the message to the student: “We are here for you, we care about you and it is our job to continue to resist these behaviours. We want to keep you and everyone around you safe. We are not going to give up on you. We are here for as long as it takes.”

Reparation in the New Authority

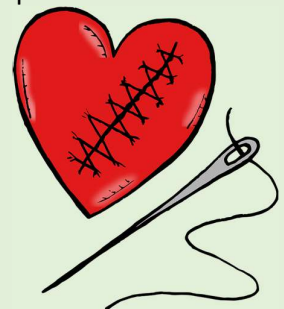
In the old authority, an adult must retaliate to any misbehaviour and subdue the child. From this perspective, the child must admit guilt, show remorse, and apologise. More often than not, this approach leads to a fruitless confrontation in which the student denies any guilt, blames others, and **refuses to engage in a dialogue**. From the point of view of the student, fulfilling the adult's expectations would be an unbearable affront to their dignity. In the New Authority, we focus on overcoming the "compulsion to retaliate", by focusing on reparation instead.



When follow up meetings or acts of resistance are completed with a student, a focus is always to find solutions. Making a repair for damage done (either to property or to relationships with others) is the preferred follow up in the New Authority. Many schools engaging in restorative practice will be very familiar with the concept of restorative conversations with students. However, in the New Authority, the reparation goes ahead regardless of whether the child is able to access their empathy and agree to take part.

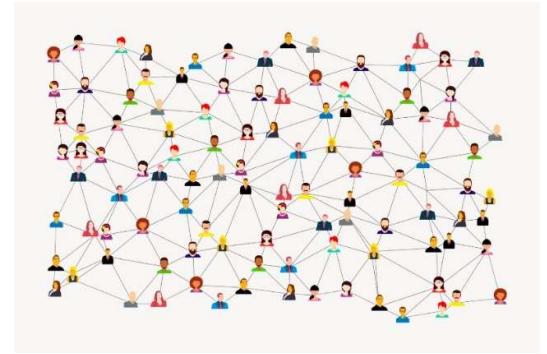
Reparation in the New Authority:

- In follow up conversations between young people and adult supporters, students are invited to come up with a possible way to repair the damage done. This creates opportunities for the young person to re-establish themselves as part of the school community. Circles of Support members/ parents can also encourage the young person who has used destructive behaviour to take steps to make amends, and support the student in doing so.
- If the young person does not come up with any solutions, acts of reparation are suggested to the young person as ways of repairing the damage that was done by their behaviour. The young person does not have to admit fault, confess guilt or apologise, although the repair must go ahead.
- This means that reparation acts can go ahead, with or without without the child's cooperation. The child is given the opportunity to participate in a repair, but all is not lost if the child does not take up on this opportunity.
- A repair act can be completed by the parents, on behalf of the student. The adults state their position, regardless of the child's cooperation. *"We cannot force you to take responsibility... But we know that you did damage and that there has to be reparation."* For example, if damage was done to school property, parents may take money from a child's allowance to pay for the repairs. Another example might be a student who has been bullying another student, or has been rude to a teacher – even if the child resists the reparation, the child's parents may write a letter of apology on their behalf. The student is first given the opportunity to make reparations, but if they don't, the process continues.
- This is particularly helpful for young people whose empathy or positive voice may have been dormant for a long time.
- Offence = reparation is taken as a given. The child does not have to agree, but sees that the adult and the community are committed to this principle.



Debrief: Draw on your Network of Support

It is crucial to recognise that dealing with conflict, escalations and challenging behaviour is extremely stressful and difficult for teachers. We need to access our network of support after behavioural incidents to debrief and offer each other support. It is important to access your own network of support to find someone who will listen to you and be supportive of your feelings. Our network of support will remind us that “mistakes will be made, but they can be corrected” – nobody is perfect and we are never likely to come away from a conflict situation feeling that we handled it perfectly. They will also remind us to be kind and compassionate to ourselves, and to take extra care of ourselves after a tough day.



It is vital that school leadership provides support for this step, as teachers who are unsupported are likely to succumb to feelings of isolation and burn out. Building a strong network of supports within the school, from the top down, is one of the key components of the New Authority.

Should any staff member need additional support, Spectrum Life is now providing Employee Assistance Support for school staff, including wellbeing advice. Where appropriate, short-term counselling is also available to school staff and their family members. This service provides a dedicated free-phone confidential helpline 1800 411 057 and is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

- Website: www.spectrum.life
- Freephone: 1800 411 057
- Email: eap@spectrum.life
- WhatsApp/SMS: text 'hi' to 0873690010



Folláine le Chéile
Wellbeing Together

Concluding Comments

As you will hopefully see by now, the New Authority involves taking a new position in relation to young people's behaviour. This new position recognises that we cannot control young people, but we can do all in our power to influence them. We assume that every young person, even the toughest and most disengaged, has a positive voice somewhere within them, and it is our job to create the conditions for that voice to emerge. Our strength as teachers comes not from our ability to get young people to do as we say, but from the fact that we stand together with each other and with the adults around us. When there are problems, we don't allow a child to disconnect and disengage – in fact, we get closer. We take a respectful and supportive approach, which gives the young person a way back. However, we resist behaviours that are unsafe for our students and those around them, because it is our job as their teachers to protect them. We never engage in head-to-head confrontation, which only serves to escalate a situation and damage relationships. Rather, we de-escalate and delay. We step out of the boxing ring and we don't fight every battle – we ignore what can be ignored. We accept that we don't have to win, and that we are best to strike when the iron is cold. We do whatever we can to build and nurture the relationship with the young people presenting with the most behavioural issues, as we recognise that what they need most is support. We accept that mistakes are inevitable, but we know that they can be corrected. We learn that there is strength in numbers. When we stand together, we have wider shoulders. Together, we persist and resist.

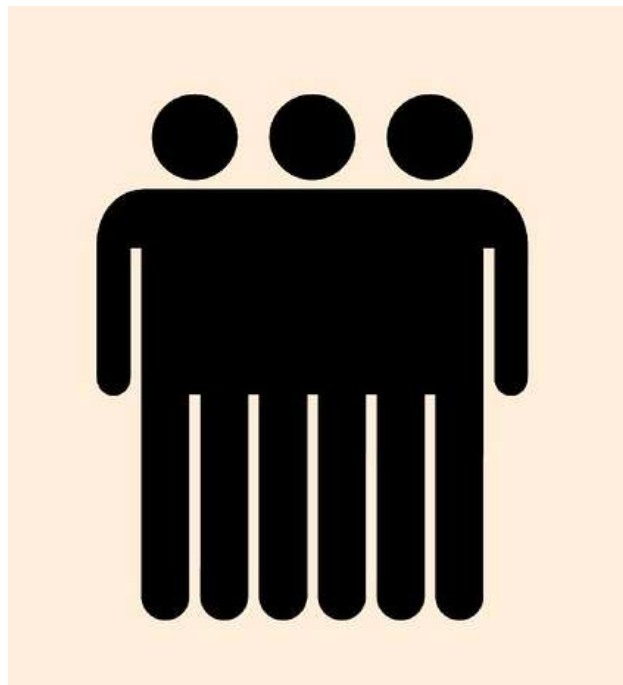


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