Understanding and Supporting Students

With Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties

A Practical Guide for Staff in Schools

Paul Cooper and Carmel Cefai

First Monograph in Resilience and Health
European Centre for Educational Resilience and Socio-Emotional Health
University of Malta
Understanding and Supporting Students
with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
A Practical Guide for Staff in Schools

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Resilience and Health Monograph Series
Series Editors: Carmel Cefai & Paul Cooper

We are pleased to publish the first monograph in the Resilience and Health series by the EuroCentre for Educational Resilience and Socio-Emotional Health at the University of Malta. The series aims to provide an open access platform for the dissemination of knowledge and research in educational resilience and social and emotional health. We plan to have one e-publication per year in such areas as social and emotional development, health, resilience and wellbeing in children and young people, social and emotional learning, mental health in schools and professionals’ health and wellbeing.

The publication of the Resilience and Health Monograph Series is based on the philosophy of the EuroCentre for Educational Resilience and Socio-Emotional Health, which is develop and promote the science and evidence-based practice of social and emotional health and resilience in children and young people.

We welcome contributions from colleagues who would like to share their work with others in the field.
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Introduction

It has never been more important than it is in the modern world for children and young people to possess not only the fundamental skills of self-expression, rational thinking, as well as certain types of technical and scientific understanding, but they must now be equipped with the mind-set and skills necessary for continual adaptation to a challenging world where technological and social change are rapid and unpredictable. Thriving in this modern world depends upon the ability to learn new ways of thinking and skills quickly, and to be resilient in the face of uncertainties that the people of their parents' and grandparents' generations could not have imagined. It is, therefore, a potentially troubling time for young people setting out to establish self-sustaining lives. As a consequence a key part of the job of education is to help children and young people to develop the orientations and skills necessary for the management of their own emotional responses to these challenges, along with the skills of self-regulation in social relationships.

This short book sets out to summarize in straightforward language some of key approaches for preventing and dealing with challenging behaviour and social and emotional problems in classrooms in ways which go beyond the suppression and extinction of unwanted behaviour. The approaches described in this book are intended to support schools and teachers to foster those essential social-emotional orientations and skills that our children and young people need.

The approaches described have been selected because they are supported by sound research evidence. However, because the book has been designed with the practical needs of classroom teachers in mind, we have focused on the messages from research for teachers, and engaged in only limited reporting of research evidence. For readers who are interested in following the research trail, we have provided information in the final section of the book which will enable them to explore the evidence-base that was drawn on in the writing of the book.

We hope that you will find this book useful and that it will contribute to promoting positive approaches to engaging students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.
Chapter 1. Understanding Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties

1.1 The Challenge of SEBD

This booklet is concerned with the practical measures that staff in schools can take to respond constructively to students who present with Social-Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD). The term, SEBD, refers to a those students who present with disturbing and/or disruptive behaviour that interferes with their own and others’ social functioning and academic engagement. Their behaviour may be termed ‘acting-out’ (disruptive) or ‘acting-in’ (showing withdrawal and/or avoidance). Although not always the case, many students with SEBD come from socially deprived or disrupted family backgrounds. Emotional difficulties are often an associated feature of both ‘acting-in’ and ‘acting-out’ types as either an underlying or outcome factor. SEBD include:

- difficulties in sustaining attention
- serious and persistent impulsiveness
- difficulties regulating physical movement
- verbal and/or physical aggression towards other people
- violent and destructive behavior
- oppositionality and unco-operativeness
- extreme fearfulness
- avoidant behaviour
- withdrawn behaviour
- feelings of low self-worth and hopelessness

In the school setting these might manifest, for example, as:

- defiance of staff
- persistent rule breaking
- bullying others
- being a victim of bullying
- disruptive behavior in lessons
- truancy
• social isolation
• refusal to engage in learning tasks
• failure to complete learning tasks
• disaffection

SEBD can be characterized by their intensity and persistence over time, thereby distinguishing them from what might be termed routine and mild misbehaviours. It is important, however, to understand the ways in which mild problems of routine misbehaviour can escalate into more serious SEBD that can in turn develop into serious psychiatric problems. SEBD, therefore, are perhaps best understood as dynamic and changing phenomena which are often characterized by disturbed and/or disturbing patterns of behaviour in individuals that are often extremely sensitive to social context and other environmental influences. Importantly, the term SEBD is usually taken to refer to the student within his or her social context. In this sense the term relates to a now outmoded term: ‘maladjustment’ which referred to individuals who were poorly adjusted to their environments. The difference between these terms is that SEBD acknowledges that the problem may reside in the environment rather than the individual. It follows from this that SEBD is appropriately seen as a form of Individual Educational Need (IEN) whereby presenting problems (such as persistent disruptive behaviour) are viewed as being likely to emanate from a mismatch between the educational (including social-emotional) needs of the individual student and the educational environment. The IEN approach requires educational staff to implement appropriate adjustment to the environment, for example in terms of the social climate of the classroom, motivational techniques and/or pedagogy.

12 Individual educational needs and SEBD in Malta

The vast majority of students in Malta attend mainstream schools, with only 0.3% of the total school population attending special schools, now called resource centres. Most of the students with individual education needs (5.87%) attend mainstream schools supported by Learning Support Assistants (LSAs), with a ratio of 1:1.6. Inclusion Coordinators seek to ensure adequate assessment of needs and provision of school and multidisciplinary support. Only a small percentage of the 10% of students with SEBD in Malta receive their education in special schools. Students with more complex SEBD needs in the mainstream, such as those presenting ADHD, Autism and Oppositional Defiance Disorder are usually supported by a LSA in the classroom, either on a shared
or one to one basis. Young pupils experiencing SEBD are also supported in Nurture Group classes, an early intervention provision in primary schools providing social and emotional learning within a safe and secure context with the aim of reintegrating the pupils back in their mainstream class. They run on a part time basis and provide both social and emotional learning and academic learning. Nurture Group staff also provides support to other classes and teachers, such as organizing Circle Time for emotional literacy sessions and individual support to other pupils. At the secondary school level, Learning Support Zones provide a similar safe base for students with SEBD for short periods of time where students are provided with training in emotional literacy by school based behaviour support teachers.

1.3 Meeting Everyone’s Needs: Students, Teachers and Parents

Undoubtedly, in their long history schools in Malta have probably never been so well supported as they are today by the current support framework for individual education needs. On the other hand, the high social, educational and economic aspirations that modern European countries have for all their people, coupled with the social and economic challenges that face all western nations in the 21st century, mean that the challenges involved in facilitating the effective educational engagement of all students remain enormous. Among these challenges students presenting with SEBD loom large.

Not only do students with SEBD challenge teachers pedagogically, they also often challenge teachers directly at the emotional level, for example, through mockery, verbal and sometimes physically abuse. This means that without appropriate understanding and emotional support from colleagues, teachers may find themselves becoming anxious and depressed and, as a consequence, increasingly unable to cope with the stress of such conflictual relationships with students. Many a good teacher has been lost to the profession through ‘burnout’ that is sometimes directly associated with such experiences.

Furthermore, the understandable tendency in some schools to seek respite from challenging students by suspending or excluding them, whilst it may bring temporary release from difficulties, often masks underlying problems that need to be addressed for the sake of the wider community of staff and students, as well as those who present with serious challenges. The tendency to opt too easily for exclusion is also often associated with negative attitudes towards the parents/carers of students who are deemed ‘difficult’. Unfortunately, an emphasis on such student background explanations for student
problems is almost always counter-productive, especially if the explanation takes the place of direct action at the school level.

On the other hand, often the most useful way of approaching SEBD is as a set of problems for all who are involved, and at the very least for the student, parent, teacher and often the target student's peers. Whilst it may be true to say that a student's difficult behaviour may be itself a short-term solution to problems, if that solution is causing distress and upset to those around him or her, then it is a solution that needs to be modified. The best approach, therefore, is always to try to find a way of identifying the trigger(s) that might lead individuals into behaving in ways that create problems for themselves and others, and then removing those triggers and/or helping individuals to modify their responses to those triggers. For example, if a student's misbehavior is characterized by repeatedly running out of school during lesson time and is found to be triggered by his/her being bullied by another pupil, then our priority will be to stop the bullying, as well as giving the pupil a coping strategy, other than leaving the school premises, that ensure his/her safety.

Helping to identify the trigger to unwanted behaviour often involves a great deal of listening to the student (and his or her peers), observing the student in action, and reflecting on the teacher's own role, or potential role, in fixing the problem. The more that these reflections are shared with colleagues, and (where appropriate) other students, and the more the student and his/her parent/carer(s) are included in this process, the greater the likelihood of a positive outcome. Nowhere is the proverb 'a problem shared is a problem halved' more appropriate than in the case of SEBD.

The rest of this booklet is devoted to some tried and tested approaches that teachers and other education workers might consider using in helping cope with the challenge of SEBD.

Further reading


Cefai, C., Cooper, P. & Camilleri, L (2008) *Engagement Time: A national study of students with social, emotional and behaviour problems in Maltese schools.* Malta: University of Malta


Chapter 2. Adults and Students Working Together

John: Mr. Borg pushed me, so I pushed him back.

Maria: When Moira took a pencil from the box Mrs. Camilleri did nothing. When I done the same, she shouted at me. That’s why I called her a big cow.

Tony: All I says was: “I can’t see the board, sir, cos I’m blinded by the sun shining off your bald head, sir.” It was only a joke. Everybody else thought it was funny. But not him. He’s got no sense of humour.

2.1 Teacher Qualities

Students who display significant behavioural problems often refer to inappropriate or provocative behaviour on the part of teachers as triggers for their behaviour. They sometimes claim that teachers provoke them by

- being disrespectful or insulting
- being unfair or inconsistent in the ways in which they apply rules
- lacking a sense of humour/failing to see the joke

As a result, students sometimes portray their behaviour as a form of reciprocation or as a way of punishing the teacher for such perceived ‘offences’.

This is not to say that students are always correct in their perceptions or honest in their explanations. Tony’s ‘joke’ (see above), for example, is at least inappropriate in the setting, and probably a calculated insult against the teacher. However, when students use explanations such as these for their misbehaviour they are revealing that they at least want you to believe that they have some commitment to fairness and justice. Underlying this is the unspoken claim that ‘if teachers treat me with respect, then I’ll treat them with respect.’

From a behaviour management perspective the important point here is that students who use these kinds of explanations are indicating that they are likely to be susceptible to such arguments. This opens the door to a discourse about (assuming for the moment that the student is telling the truth) what was right and what was wrong in the behaviour of both parties. In each of the cases cited above there would appear to be
faults on both sides, and before taking the matter further (for instance to investigate the facts of the matter) a discussion of the rights and wrongs on both sides provides a useful opportunity to reinforce the importance of social justice and fairness, and the student's right to be treated justly, as well as his/her responsibility to be just and fair in his/her treatment of others.

Now of course, scenarios such as these are never as simple and straightforward as they appear. The three scenarios at the head of this chapter are simply verbatim accounts delivered to a third person. Staff with responsibility for behavioural matters in schools will be familiar with these kinds of situations, which usually arise after a student has been referred by a classroom teacher. In the calm of the senior teacher's office, and in the face of the non-threatening stance of the adult now dealing with the problem, the student's demeanor may well become co-operative and reasonable, and lead to an admission of fault and a willingness to apologize to the teacher concerned. And then, only a matter of weeks, days, or even hours later the student is back again with a similar charge against him/her. Nothing has changed for the better, and the impact of repeated failures to solve the core problem is an accumulation of increasing negativity that may manifest itself in cynicism from both student and the classroom staff involved in these incidents.

It is important to realize that the consequences of such repeated ineffectiveness are not neutral. The fact that nothing effective is being done to prevent the recurrence of these problems is being witnessed over and over again by classrooms full of students whose educational engagement is being disrupted by these events. This may lead a culture of cynicism to develop, and for students to begin to talk about the school as a place where some or all staff 'just can't handle those kids who just get away with murder everyday'. Similarly, teachers in staffrooms in schools such as this may also develop a sense of hopelessness that may also morph into cynicism. This underlines the important point that a failure to deal with obvious problems, either through not acknowledging them or through repeatedly responding in ways that clearly do not have any lasting positive effect, actually makes the problems worse, because such failures undermine belief in the possibility of change. This can lead to further negative consequences which might take the form of some students (and staff) deciding that the best strategy for survival is to 'turn a blind eye' to problems, or even to collude more actively with those at the centre of seriously negative behaviour. At one level this can lead, for example, to a situation whereby witnesses to bullying remain silent and passive. At another level, some students may find themselves more likely to emulate the negative behaviours they observe in order to gain some degree of status in the informal student
hierarchy. Teachers, on the other hand, may enter into alliances with students of the type characterized by the phrase: ‘so long as you don’t mess around in my lessons you can do what you like elsewhere.’ This is perhaps the most negative and, ultimately, destructive response of all, because such alliances are often doomed to failure because they expose the vulnerability of a divided staff and emphasise the power of the challenging student.

This draws attention to the importance of individual staff ‘seeing through to the end’ problems that arise with individual students. Problems such as those cited at the head of the chapter are best seen as breakdowns in relationships where normally secure boundaries are crossed. As in any enduring relationship, when this happens it is important the parties involved reach a resolution. Where problems such as these persist over time, then it may be necessary to bring in another member of staff as mediator, but ultimately the teacher and the student need to reach a point where they both feel that the situation has been dealt with effectively.

People who are good at resolving these kinds of problems are often able to combine the following attributes when talking to the student about the problem:

- **clarity and honesty about the concerns they have about the problem behaviour and its effect** (e.g. ‘I thought your behavior towards me was very disrespectful and rude, for these reasons ...’). This often creates an opportunity for the other party to empathise and show remorse.

- **empathy with why the other person might have been motivated to behave as they did** (e.g. ‘whilst I don’t condone what you did, I can see why you did it.’) Empathy can help to defuse conflictual situations by highlighting points of agreement. It is hard to argue with someone when they are sharing your point of view. Furthermore, it is easier to influence another person when conveying the impression that you think they are a reasonable person (no matter how offensive you believe their behavior to have been).

- **positive attitude towards the person, as a human being** (e.g. ’I know you’re a good person and this behaviour is not representative of the real you...’). In striving to maintain a positive attitude towards an individual, in this way, we naturally moderate our tone of voice and make it difficult for the other person to challenge us. Again, this promotes co-operation over conflict. This also combines with a non-blaming attitude which can create the basis for reconciliation.

The key point is that socially skilled individuals seek to defuse social conflict and work hard to restore harmony. The more calm and reasonable the management of the situation, the greater the likelihood that all parties will recognize what they need to do in order to contribute to the restoration of harmony. It follows that these qualities are also
strongly associated with the prevention of the development classroom behaviour problems when they are evident in teachers’ routine dealings with all students.

In addition, the school situation, in order to be successful, requires collegiality. This involves teachers and other school staff in deploying their skills and abilities not only for their personal purposes, but for the benefit of the school community as a whole and, in particular, their colleagues. For example, successful teachers with a long period of service in the same school may sometimes find it easier to win the confidence, respect and cooperation of new students to the school than their less well established colleagues. Such long serving staff are sometimes aided in this process, not only by their experience, but also by their reputations as someone known to current and former students who are the older siblings of new pupils, as well as the parents of these new students. In any event, it easy for the more experienced staff in a school to observe the difficulties experienced by young and inexperienced staff without empathy or sympathy. In good schools experienced staff mentor their less experienced colleagues, not only through the formal mentoring programmes that are ubiquitous in the management and staff development structures of modern schools, but through their informal contacts with less experienced staff. They help their less experienced colleagues by empathizing with them when they experience difficulties, and by offering supportive advice.

Such collegiality also extends to the ways in which all staff portray to students their own views of and attitudes towards their colleagues. Not that it is usually considered desirable for teachers to talk about their colleagues to students. In fact, this may often be seen to be undesirable. However, within the course of a school day it is not unusual for students to initiate with staff conversations in which colleagues are mentioned. Clearly, in the interests of child protection, it is essential that students are encouraged to feel free to disclose important information to the adults who are responsible for them. However, it is also important for staff members to be careful to distinguish between conversations about colleagues which are pertinent to child protection and serious professional matters, and those which are better categorized as mere gossip. The conventions of collegiality require that serious concerns are dealt with in a professional manner, and that gossip is discouraged.

2.2 Teacher Skills

The qualities described in the previous section are vital to effective teaching and the promotion of positive relationships which, in turn, help to foster students’ emotional
well-being and educational engagement. These qualities need to be used in conjunction with sound pedagogical and specific behaviour management skills, examples of which are described in this section.

**Pedagogical Skills**

Effective teachers plan their lessons in detail, taking particular care to cater for specific group and individual learning needs. They communicate clearly and economically, using both auditory and visual modes, and encourage students to participate orally and ask questions. They use previewing and reviewing strategies to link explicitly different learning experiences. They employ a wide range of teaching strategies, including whole class teaching, group, pair and individual work, according to the demands of the topic being studied, student characteristics and relevant setting circumstances (e.g. nature of teaching space, ambient conditions, time of day/week). They constantly monitor group and individual student engagement and intervene and make adjustments to achieve and maintain a desirable state of engagement. Effective teachers are committed to challenging their students academically, but recognize the importance of building students’ confidence to accept challenges. This means that good lessons are designed to build on and reinforce students’ existing competencies and knowledge, and structured to extend competencies and knowledge incrementally. This will almost always require a degree of individualization in the teaching in order to accommodate students with different levels of achievement and needs for development. Importantly, regardless of students’ relative performance levels, effective teachers ensure that all students are acknowledged and encouraged when they make individual progress in learning tasks, however minimal that progress is, and however far below the highest standard in the class it falls.

**Managing the Physical Environment of the Classroom**

The management of the physical environment of the classroom is an important aspect of the teaching and learning experience, which, if neglected, can lead to negative outcomes for teachers and students. The following is a brief list of some of the common features of the ways in which successful teachers organize and manage their classrooms:

- Teachers clearly define spaces within the classroom for specific purposes and to ensure students know how to behave in each of these areas;
- Seating students in rows facilitates individual academic engagement, whereas more open arrangements (e.g. groups or semi-circles) facilitate social exchanges among students more suited to tasks requiring student interaction with one another;
Classrooms are arranged to limit student contact in 'high-traffic' areas such as the space surround the pencil sharpener and wastebasket, and instructional areas; and to seat easily-distracted students farther away from 'high-traffic' areas;

Students with individual learning needs or behaviour problems are easier to manage if placed in situations which the teacher can access with minimal disruption to other students;

As far as possible all students have a clear view of the teacher and vice versa at all times;

Visual and auditory stimulation which may distract students with attention and/or self regulation problems are kept to a minimum;

The classroom is orderly and well-organised. For example, the classroom is safe, clean, free of distracting physical features; the furnishings are flexible and fit the people who use them; media equipment are available and operable; lighting, windows and blinds are operable; and there is adequate control over ventilation and temperature.

**Dealing with Disruption**

When disruptive student behavior occurs, skilled teachers minimize its effects by maintaining a focus on lesson content. For example, non-verbal strategies such as gaining eye contact with the disruptive individual or moving physically close to the scene of the disruption without comment on it, are often sufficient to encourage a return to on-task behaviour, without breaking the concentration of the rest of the class. Where the students concerned seem oblivious to these subtle signals, the teacher stimulates their attention by modulating his or her voice, still without referring directly to the behaviour of concern, or, to emphasize proximity, place a hand on, or lightly tap the table in front of the disruptive student(s). Only when these low key signals are not heeded, is it necessary to speak directly to the student(s) concerned. Again, however, this should be done in a quiet manner, for the benefit of the target student(s) only, so as to have minimal impact on the rest of the class. Such low key approaches usually have the effect of preventing an escalation of the disruptive behaviour, and minimizing the chance of a public confrontation.

Of course, prevention is always better than cure, and teachers who pre-plan for behavioural eventualities often save themselves a great deal time and trouble. Knowledge of the class and the individuals in it can be used to make decisions about where and with whom different students sit and work. This applies to both the placement of students who may be deemed problematic as well as those who might be seen as having a positive influence on the problematic student. Similarly, when the teacher knows that there are students prone to restlessness, it is often important to make
sure that they have legitimate opportunities get up and move around the classroom in between more sedentary activities. Such students might, for example, be encouraged to take leading roles in the collection and distribution of lesson materials and student work. Students who have a tendency to be overly talkative can be given roles where talking is required, whilst students who display a preference for being quiet and solitary, should be given opportunities to punctuate group and pair work with solitary activities.

It is also important to recognize that students who have difficulties with particular common basic educational tasks, such as reading and writing, may need respite from these activities, in order to avoid a build-up of stress that may lead to disengagement and/or disruptive behaviour. This makes it important for teachers to consider whether or not activities which cause such stress are educationally necessary, and where possible, to find legitimate alternative activities for such students. The basic principle here is that in planning lessons teachers should, as far as possible, ensure that all pupils are given opportunities to achieve successful outcomes in at least part of the lesson.

A crucial part of the planning for behaviour process is the clear expression of behavioural requirements and expectations which should always be feasible, reasonable and expressed briefly and in simple terms. These expectations should also be stated in positive terms: i.e. explaining to students the positive behaviours that are required rather than those which are not. This can be done at the whole class level, or privately with individual students who may have displayed persistent problems with compliance. Experience of success helps to build the confidence necessary for students to engage in challenges which are outside their comfort zones, and where there is a risk of failure.

Table 2.1 offers examples of common, widely used strategies for reinforcing positive student behaviour. These strategies highlight the importance of letting students know what behavior is required and providing clear reinforcement to students when they comply with requirements, as well as appropriate consequences when they do not. This draws attention to the important point that ‘positive behaviour’ is context specific (i.e. what is appropriate and desirable in one context may not be so in another). This means that positive behaviour has to be taught and learned, and that learning, if it is to be maintained, has to be reinforced.
Understanding and supporting students with SEBD

Analyzing Problematic Situations

Where problems persist it is important for school staff to have sound methods for analyzing the situation in order to identify possible solutions. Where problems are recurrent, then it is likely that they are also triggered by recurring factors relating to time, place, activity or other situational circumstances. By assembling a list of the various factors surrounding recurrent problems it is often then possible to identify a link between one or more of the factors and the problem. These may be triggering events, which precede and/or accompany the behaviour (i.e. Antecedents), or events which

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Table 2.1: Common Strategies for Reinforcing Positive Behaviour

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response cost</th>
<th>Verbal praise</th>
<th>Beat the timer</th>
<th>Mystery motivators</th>
<th>Team competition</th>
<th>Time out</th>
<th>Premack principle</th>
<th>Low emotion private reprimands</th>
<th>Traffic light system</th>
<th>Non-verbal transition cues</th>
<th>Meaningful roles</th>
<th>Praise notes from peers</th>
<th>Positive school - to-home notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This can be oral or written, and encourages cooperative acts between individuals. It encourages positive teacher-student relations, and reduces aggressive and disruptive behaviour</td>
<td>This is a strategy in which children are set a task to be completed in a given time, and are rewarded in some way if they succeed.</td>
<td>Students are invited to select from a jar or bowl a mystery prize for achieving a target.</td>
<td>In which groups compete on a task, performance or game against each other.</td>
<td>Using a timer, withdraw child from the current environment, into another place, for one minute, plus one minute for each year of his/her age. The best results are obtained from shorter (5 minutes) than longer (15 minutes) time out.</td>
<td>This principle is that children will adopt a behaviour which they may be resisting if they believe it will lead to something they want. This is the principle of 'work now, play later'</td>
<td>Corrective feedback given without threats or emotion. Short reprimands work better than long reprimands. Reprimands work better than encouragement on off-task behaviour</td>
<td>Using the traffic light colour system to indicate when a behaviour is becoming disruptive (red) or when the behaviour is desirable and safe (green)</td>
<td>This could be the playing of music, or the switching of lights on and off, the ringing of a bell, the change of tone of voice, or some other cue, to signal the end of one activity and the start of another</td>
<td>Providing meaningful roles to children to encourage responsibility</td>
<td>Peer approval notes, posted in a book, displayed on a wall, or read out loud, in which children are praised for their behaviour, strengths, achievements or cooperation by other children.</td>
<td>Sending notes home to the family when behaviour has been particularly desirable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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follow the behaviour (i.e. Consequences), and may be seen as possible reinforcers and/or objectives of the behaviour. Once identified the appropriate event can be isolated and measures taken to avoid it impacting on the unwanted behaviour in the future.

Helping Students to Develop Coping Skills
Sometimes particular students may have problems with exerting control over their own behaviour. This can take the form of difficulties with:

- **Self-evaluation and self-regulation**: difficulties in recognizing internal states and controlling how one reacts to these and situational factors. This may also include problems with directing and sustaining attention/concentration; a proneness to distractibility and impulsiveness.
- **Anxiety**: difficulties in coping with recurrent fears of certain situations. This may take the form of test anxiety; fear of academic failure; fears relating to certain activities (e.g. particular subject lessons); fear of particular locations.
- **Depression**: feelings of low self-worth; sadness; low motivation.
- **Social problem solving**: difficulties in addressing and resolving conflicts with others in pro-social ways.
- **Anger management**: difficulties in controlling feelings and expressions of anger; tantrum behaviour; aggressiveness.

Teachers and other school based workers can help students who have difficulties such as these in various ways. It is important to stress that what follows is based on the assumption that school personnel who attempt these types of interventions have the personal qualities outlined above, and have positive relationships with their students, or are in the process of working towards the development of such relationships. Also, these interventions are based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), which is the province of properly qualified psychologists. What is being recommended here is not full-blown CBT, it is, however, a set of useful tool for gaining insight into pupils' difficulties and helping to resolve them. The core issue here is that of self-control, which can be fostered in the following ways:

- Through a long-term positive relationship with a dependable person who communicates the value of self-control (see 'teacher qualities' above);
- By working at self-control challenges that are carefully selected to be within the student's skill range;
- By exposing the student to a wide range of positive models of other students (and adults) demonstrating the successful exercise of self-control;
The importance of intensive practice coupled with rewards for effort (see behaviour management skills, above);

Using role play and simulations of situations requiring the deployment of self-control challenges;

By developing a personal vocabulary in relation to self-control, thus promoting a sense of ownership.

These approaches are intended to help the individual to:

- understand why their behaviour is problematic
- recognize the feeling states associated with the problematic behaviour
- recognize the circumstances which trigger the problem behaviour
- identify and adopt simple strategies for preventing the problem behaviour from developing.

There are various stop-and-think strategies, which require the individual, once they have recognized that they are in a situation where problems are likely to occur, to focus on positive strategies, such as pausing before acting and using a pre-determined behavioural formula which enables them to remove themselves from the situation, or provides them with a repertoire of positive responses. The details of these strategies will be individualized to the student and generated, primarily, by him or her with the teacher acting as facilitator. For example, the student who is prone to anxious, excitable and/or impulsive behaviour may be encouraged to identify a situation or setting which they associate with being calm and then be helped to visualize this, and draw on it when confronted by problematic situations.

2.3 Involving Students

The student peer group performs a powerful role influencing the quality of student behaviour in schools that if not harnessed effectively can be a negative force. There are various ways of exploiting the positive power of the student peer group to improve behaviour and academic performance. These include:

- **Buddying**: This is where students are paired up, with one student acting as a guide and support to the other. Teachers in many countries routinely use this approach when a new student arrives in class as part of an orientation programme. This approach, however, has valuable applications for students with individual educational needs of various kinds. It is crucial that the assigned ‘buddy’ is a positive role model, with good social skills and an awareness of the difference between helping and patronizing.
• **Positive peer reporting:** This involves the teacher creating a reward system for students who report on each other's positive behaviour, such acts of academic and social support, kindness, consideration and courtesy. This can involve rewards for both the reporters and the nominees, with group rewards being appropriate for the reporters. This approach has the advantage of encouraging reflection and exploration of what positive behaviour means and its consequences.

• **Peer Tutoring:** Peer tutoring can take various forms: one to one with a nominated tutor and tutee; peer tutor groups, with all group members being seen as potential tutors and tutees, and/or groups being tutored by a designated peer tutor. Sometimes older students are encouraged to work with younger students as designated tutors. In peer group tutoring evenly balanced groups within the same class may be incentivized by the promise of rewards for different levels of achievements on outcomes associated with peer learning tasks. Although peer tutoring is often seen primarily as an academic intervention it often has positive consequences for social-emotional/behavioural functioning, because it brings together students who might otherwise not interact with one another in a cooperative venture from which all can benefit.

The important thing to bear in mind about these various peer support strategies is that students performing the support roles gain as much from the experience as those who are receiving the support. As all teachers know, we sometimes develop greater insight into a topic when we have to think about how might teach it. Furthermore, students who may appear to be in need of help sometimes bring unexpected perspectives to topics which are illuminating for others, including the apparently more 'gifted' students.

**Further reading**


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Chapter 3. Whole School Approaches and Support Systems

Mr Borg: The trouble with the Administration of this school is that they are out of touch. They have forgotten what it is like to be in a classroom.

Mrs Camilleri: Yes, I’d like to see one of them take my bottom-set Form 2’s every Friday afternoon, like I have to.

... 

Maria (Form 2): If you’re not brainy you’re nobody in this school. Teachers don’t want you here really. All the Head cares about is exam results and winning football matches.

John (Form 2): Yeah. They only take any notice of you when you do something wrong. I hate this school.

3.1 Leadership and management

The main focus of this short document is on the individual class teacher and what s/he can do to develop positive relationships with students and help promote emotional well-being and positive behaviour among students. This is by far the single most important factor in teaching for positive educational engagement. However, teaching and learning take place in complex settings which are subject to a wide variety of influences. With this in mind it is important to make reference to the contribution that management and leadership can make to the effective deployment and co-ordination of human and other resources in this area. With this in mind there are a number of basic issues that school leaders and managers need to address to maximize effectiveness in relation to SEBD:

- **Values**: This involves the formulation and statement of a commitment to meeting the social-emotional well-being of all students and staff. This needs to go well beyond the ubiquitous ‘mission statement’ and must amount to a coherent and realistic vision of the nature of social-emotional needs and role that schools can realistically play in meeting those needs. At the core of this is this the primacy of positive, nurturing relationships between all members of the school community.
• **Daily practices coherent with espoused values:** It is important that managers and leaders provide models of positive interpersonal relationships, with one another, with staff, students and their carers/parents. This means, as much as anything, being willing to listen to and empathize with all of these different stakeholders.

• **Joined-up whole school policies:** It is important that the different domains of school life are not in conflict with one another. For example, academic, sporting and artistic achievement are highly valued in our culture and should be celebrated, but valuing an individual’s achievement must never be confused with valuing the person. All persons are of value and all persons deserve acknowledgement. School policies must reflect this in consistent and coherent ways, so that, for example, high achieving students are not privileged above lower performing students, and contributions to the social harmony of the school community are valued equally with other areas of achievement. It is the duty of the school leadership to lead the way in identifying and celebrating the contributions that all students make to the school community.

Schools do not exist in a vacuum and sometimes they perceive pressure from powerful sources to prioritize instrumental outcomes (such as academic achievement) above social-emotional issues. One of the ways in which schools can help to redress this imbalance is by adopting whole school strategies for promoting social-emotional well-being.

### 3.2 Universal Approaches

‘Universal’ approaches refer to specific interventions for SEBD which are applied to the entire student population of a school. Ideally, schools would be well advised to develop their own strategies in consultation with educational psychologists, behaviour management specialists and mental health professionals. This is because each school is unique, and the complex combination of the particular challenges faced by a school will tend to require a tailored response. However, there are several widely used intervention ‘packages’, which, in some cases, are well supported by positive research evidence (see Further Readings section for further details). Brief accounts of a selection of such interventions are provided here.

See Cooper and Jacobs (2011) in Further Readings section.

**The Good Behaviour Game (GBG)**

The Good Behaviour Game (GBG) is played between teams of students and involves each member being rewarded for the aggregate behavioural performance of their team.
This means that each group member must try to regulate his or her own behaviour and help fellow team members do the same in order to gain the reinforcing reward. Usually, the game involves the teacher and pupils establishing a small set of classroom rules which deal with desired behaviour. These might include on-seat behaviour, and/or quiet working. These rules are then posted so that the students can then familiarise themselves with them. In the following weeks, the class is divided into two or three teams at various times in the day. Initially, the game is played over short periods, usually ten minutes, although these sessions are increased in time and frequency. A tick is placed on the blackboard if a team member breaks an agreed rule. Teams with four or fewer ticks at the end of the game are awarded token reinforcements (small gifts such as stickers or an activity choice). You can see an example of the Good Behaviour game in action at:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jqrug7afH7A

**Circle Time**

Circle Time (CT) is intended to promote positive relations and empathy among students. At the heart of CT is the CT meeting which involves children sitting in a circle with the facilitator (usually a teacher). Each person then takes a turn in speaking without interruption or judgement from others, for a maximum specified period of time, whilst the rest of the group listens attentively and respectfully. The focus of the circle can be pre-determined (e.g. bullying), or be completely open (e.g. each student chooses his/her own topic to talk about). CT fosters the development of students’ skills and confidence in identifying, understanding and expressing their emotions, and in giving and receiving validation of each others’ rights to their emotions. In addition, the formal procedures associated with CT are claimed to encourage social skills such as turn-taking, conflict resolution, improved listening and speaking, and can increase self-esteem, and tolerance. It is important to stress that the circle meeting is only one aspect of CT. The intention of CT is to promote habits of active listening, empathy and respect for others’ feelings at all times. This means that the CT rules should be observed by everyone (students and staff) at all times, and therefore, be embedded in the ethos of the school as a whole.

See Mosley (1993) in Further Reading section.

**School-Wide Positive Behavioural Support (SWPBS)**

School-Wide Positive Behavioural Support (SWPBS) is a whole school approach which
aims to replace undesired behaviour with positive behaviours and/or skills by altering environmental factors that promote and maintain undesired behaviour, and rewarding appropriate behaviour. At the core of SWPBS are a small number of simple rules usually five in number), positively expressed, which emphasise positive aspects of behaviour. Typically, these are: 'I am respectful, I am responsible, I am safe.'

There are nine steps towards implementing school-wide positive behavioural skills:

1. Defining three to five school-wide expectations.
2. Providing a 'defining rule' for each expectation.
3. Building a culture of competence by teaching the school-wide skills to all students.
4. Teaching specific social behaviours that are examples of the behavioural expectations.
5. Teaching behavioural expectations with 'negative' examples.
6. Giving students the opportunity to practice appropriate behaviours.
7. Rewarding appropriate behaviour.
8. Acknowledging appropriate behaviour regularly after the skill is learned.

For the approach to work effectively it is essential that all staff comply fully with all nine steps, and that data is gathered on patterns of behavioral problems and student progress, both at group and individual level. Data on the nature and frequency of continuing problems can be used to identify potential triggers and solutions.

See Walker and Walker (1991) in Further Reading section

**Restorative Practices (RP)**

Restorative Practices (RP) is an approach which is informed by principles of restorative justice, whereby conflicts are resolved through dialogue and the acting out of rights and responsibilities resolution, with the emphasis being on face to engagement between perpetrator and victim. In practical terms, the intervention consists of eliciting responses to several questions from participants involved in aggressive or disruptive behaviour:

- *What has happened?*
- *Who has been affected?*
- *How can we involve everyone who has been affected in finding a way forward?*
- *How can everyone do things differently in the future?*

The dialogue can take place informally in 'corridor conferences', or more formally in mini-conferences, sometimes adopting problem-solving circles similar to those used in Circle Time. Teachers are encouraged to employ restorative pedagogy in
which teachers themselves model the skills and values of RP ethos, and create opportunities for their development throughout all interactions with students (both in and out of the classroom).
See McCluskey et al. (2008) in Further Reading section.

3.3 The Nurturing School

The nurturing school is one where staff is devoted to promoting the positive social-emotional and cognitive development of all students. This endeavour rests on the following principles:

- Emotional security is a fundamental need
- Healthy social and psychological development depend on feelings of emotional security
- The main vehicles for nurture are interpersonal and social relationships
- Central to these relationships are qualities of acceptance and empathy coupled with high expectations
- Only when emotional dependency needs are met can individuals move on to genuine independence and self-determination

These principles are made concrete through:

- A student centered school organization
- An emphasis on the exercise of authority through personal rather than impersonal authority based relationships
- An emphasis on achieving a balance between cognitive performance and social-emotional development.

Nurturing schools offer students the following experiences:

- **Respite** from negative influences that exist in their lives outside of school
- **Relationships** with staff which are caring, trusting and nurturing
- **Re-Signification** – which is the process of swapping negative labels which become attached to some students based on perceived deficiencies, for positive labels based on positive attributes and achievements

The measures described in this and the preceding chapters of this booklet can all play valuable roles in creating and marinating a nurturing school.
See Cooper and Tiknaz (2006) in Further Reading section.
Further Reading


Chapter 4. Working With Parents

Mrs Camilleri: No wonder John is so badly behaved. Look at the home background he comes from. What do you expect?

The role of the family in both the generation and remediation of SEBD is well known. Families and carers provide role models as well as reinforcement for ways of feeling, acting and responding. As a result the incorporation of families and carers into intervention programmes for SEBD has been shown to be of enormous value. There follows an outline of some the ways in which parents and carers can be incorporated into intervention programmes for school students with SEBD.

4.1 Parents Face Challenges Too

It is undoubtedly the case that family background factors can sometimes have a very negative influence on students’ attitudes towards and behaviour in school. It is important, however, to avoid the assumption that this is always the case, and even where it is the case it should never be seen as a reason for absolving the school of its responsibilities in relation to students’ behaviour in school. Whilst it is beyond the scope of school staff responsibilities (or capabilities) to intervene in family affairs, it is always important for school staff to try to forge positive relations with students’ parents, and treat them as allies in seeking the best for their offspring, as opposed to being seen as an impediment. A useful starting point for this can sometimes involve offering recognition of the difficulties that some parents face in becoming the kinds of parents that we (and they) might think they ought to be. For example low income, unemployment, marital conflict and unsuitable living circumstances make a challenge out of aspects of day to day, living (such as feeding and clothing the family and/or creating a comfortable family home) that other more fortunate parents, take for granted. Add to this the intergenerational perpetuation of problems, and it sometimes becomes very clear that the parents themselves have had little or no exposure to positive parenting. In any event, regardless of the family’s circumstances, the realisation that one of the children is having problems at school will often be a source of family stress in
itself. With this in mind families should be approached sympathetically and assumed to be a potential part of the solution to the problem, at least until it is proven otherwise.

Where it transpires that the parents/carers appear to have difficulties in managing their children at home, the school can help by offering some basic advice on behaviour management, such as the setting of behavioural rules and the use of rewards for compliance and sanctions for non-compliance. When this kind of partnership approach is effective an opportunity is created to establish continuity and consistency between the behavioral regimes at home and school which have a positive effect on both settings. Again, however, the parent/carers' willingness to accept advice will be very dependent on the manner in which it is offered. Similarly, if the family's difficulties are such that they would benefit from specialist intervention (such as a parent training programme offered by a therapist) they are more likely to cooperate with this if the offer is made in a sympathetic, as opposed to judgmental, manner.

4.2 Parents are Welcome

In order for all parents to be made to feel welcome in a school it is often important to make a special effort to nurture relations with parents who, for one reason or another, are less forthcoming than some others. For example, all schools tend to have parent-teacher consultation meetings during which students' progress is discussed. These can be experienced as ordeals by some parents/carers especially if they are aware that their child is having problems in school. For some parents the prospect of attending such events may stir their own unhappy memories of being at school and cause feelings of anxiety or even anger. There are various measures that schools can take to help with these kinds of difficulties:

- All school behaviour policies should contain reference to the importance of acknowledging and rewarding positive student behaviour. One of the ways this can be done is through the sending of messages to parents informing them of their child's achievement. This can be done in written form, by phone, email or text. Where students are particularly problematic it is very important to report on their good days and good deeds. This approach is highly valued by both parents and students.
- Parent-teacher consultations and written reports should always contain references to students' strengths and qualities as well as their difficulties.
- It is often helpful to have a parents' room in the school where they can come and meet with staff and one another and discuss school related issues. It is important that this
room is well kept and welcoming.

- When schools organize staff-parent social events it sometimes helpful to choose a neutral venue, such as the local community centre rather than school premises.
- Parent open days are employed by some schools to help parents gain greater insight into the daily school life. These are most successful when parents are invited to attend specific days in small groups (of say 10-12) during which they can observe in classrooms (though not necessarily their own children's), and mix with staff. Staff may also make presentations to the group on issues of concern to parents and the school.
- Schools should operate a policy whereby a parent can be seen by a senior member of staff within a minimum specified period (at least within one week of lodging the request), and earlier in extreme circumstances.
- In consultation with psychologists and/or social workers schools can host behaviour management training programmes for parents, such the Incredible Years Programme, Triple P and Parent Management Training. These programmes are practical in focus and emphasize preventive and remedial strategies such as those discussed in chapter 2 (above). Some programmes have versions specifically designed for teachers.
- Many teachers are of course, themselves parents also who can benefit from attending parent training programmes alongside the parents of their students. The more opportunities that parents and teachers have for interacting with one another on equal terms the better in terms of consequences for the development of productive and harmonious relationships between them.

### 4.3 Parents are Partners

From the school’s point of view the worst situation is where the parent and child form an alliance against the school. The most desirable situation is where the child perceives his/her teachers and parents to be in an alliance that ultimately serves his or her best interests.

### Further Reading


Understanding and supporting students with SEBD


Chapter 5. Working with Other Professionals

5.1 Schools In Context

As has been noted throughout this document, schools do not operate in a vacuum. This is not to say that schools are powerless in the face of external influences. On the contrary, as has been shown, there are many measures that schools can take to promote the positive behaviour, emotional well-being and educational engagement of students. The educational sphere is a major site frequently implicated in the development, remediation and prevention of SEBD. Academic success is an important protective factor and delivering psycho-social interventions in schools rather than clinics often enhances their effectiveness, particularly if they are appropriately embedded in the curriculum. It is also the case that certain psychological interventions are most effective when delivered by teachers rather than other professionals. There is a limit, however, to the level of knowledge and expertise that can be reasonably expected of teachers. Psycho-medical professionals – psychologists and various medical practitioners – therefore have two important roles in school interventions. One is a training role and the other is a provider of intervention, both as a consultant to school staff and in direct intervention with students.

Furthermore, the important role that social and economic disadvantage plays in development of SEBD means that community-based social welfare initiatives, such as those which currently function under the DEIS umbrella (the home/school/community liaison scheme) must be seen to work in harmony with the education and health services.

5.2 Sources of Help and Support

In relation to SEBD direct support for students can be obtained from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, who can offer therapy to students and their families. Furthermore, medical general practitioners, speech and language therapists, social workers, specialist counselors and careers advisors are representative of the wide range of invaluable sources of multi-professional support available.
5.3 Effective Multi-Professional Working

It is the responsibility of educational, health and social welfare agencies to reflect on how they can combine their efforts and go beyond multi-professional approaches to embrace trans-professionalism. SEBD in school students is, arguably, one of the most fruitful targets for such an approach. Trans-professionalism requires professionals to absorb rather than simply engage with the knowledge and understandings of representatives from other sectors. As it stands, educational professionals have demonstrated conspicuous success in adopting and applying psychological approaches to SEBD that are informed by understandings of the underpinnings of social, emotional and behavioural dysfunction. The success of such endeavours often depends on the support of medical and mental health professionals who supply expert support to educational staff as well as direct support to children and families where necessary. Similarly, initiatives such as the home/school/community liaison scheme show great promise in enabling at-risk students to remain in school. The greater the unity of effort between different agencies the greater will be their shared success.

This unity of effort will be advanced if medical and social welfare professionals learn more about the positive potential that effective educational intervention has for helping to remediate and prevent SEBD and in contributing to the amelioration of the negative effects of social disadvantage. Similarly, the more that educational professionals can learn about how biological, psychological and social factors interact to influence social and educational engagement, the more they will value and pursue co-operation with their health and social welfare counterparts.

This endeavour requires staff in schools to be willing to share their professional insights and expertise with other professional and be prepared to educate them about the ways in which schools function and the nature of teaching and learning. At the same time, school personnel must be willing to learn from other professionals and to respect the contributions that they are able to make to dealing with SEBD.

Further Reading


Chapter 6. Other Important Issues

6.1 Knowledge of Specific Conditions

This section deals briefly with some common medical diagnoses associated with SEBD which school personnel are likely to encounter.

- **Attention deficit/hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)**
  Attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (also sometimes referred to as Hyperkinetic Disorder) is a chronic, pervasive and debilitating problems in controlling attention and/or impulsivity and motor activity (hyperactivity).

- **Conduct Disorder (CD)**
  Conduct disorder is characterized by aggression towards others, destruction of property; deceitfulness or theft; serious violation of rules.

- **Oppositional defiant Disorder (ODD)**
  Oppositional defiant Disorder (ODD) refers to a repeated pattern of negativistic, hostile and defiant behaviour, including frequent loss of temper, arguing with adults, active defiance or refusal to comply with adult rules and requests, annoying others apparently deliberately; often blaming of others; being touchy and easily annoyed by others; being often angry and resentful; being often spiteful and vindictive; this may include tantrum behaviour.

- **Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD)**
  Autistic spectrum disorders (including autism and Asperger's syndrome) refer to debilitating impairments in the quality of the child's social interactions when compared to others of same developmental stage (for example, fails to make effective social relationships, shows lack of understanding of feelings of others; does not seek to share others' company spontaneously); communication problems; restricted and repetitive, and stereotypical behaviours.

- **Anxiety Disorders (AD)**
  Anxiety Disorders refer to problems associated with particular fears and may be associated with with panic attacks and agoraphobia (for example, fear of crowds) leading to problems of educational participation and progress; this can include various phobias, post traumatic stress disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder.
• **Depressive Disorders (DD)**

Depressive Disorders (DD) involves serious problems associated with frequent (often daily) episodes of: depressed or irritable mood; marked diminished interest or pleasures in all or most activities; insomnia or hypersomnia; observable psychological and physical agitation; constant experience/appearance of being fatigued; delusional guilt; diminished ability to think and concentrate; preoccupation with death, suicide; suicidal behaviour.

**Biopsychosocial interactions.** It is important to note that many of these diagnoses are believed to have biological aspects to them in the form of genetic predispositions which affect the development of the brain and, through this, cause problems with mental functions. However, it is very important to stress that the presence of biological factors should not be taken as an indication of a simple biological cause for the associated difficulty or disorder. Biology always interacts with the environment, so that even when there is a biological element present, the ways in which this biological element affects behaviour is often mediated by experience of the environment. This is known as the biopsychosocial approach, and it means that the ways in which school personnel manage a student’s behaviour (regardless of the presence of biological factors) is crucial in determining the effects of the student’s condition on their behaviour and educational engagement. Basic knowledge of medical conditions, such as those referred to above, can help school personnel to select appropriate forms of intervention.

### 6.2 Physical Restraint

From an educational perspective, use of physical force in managing challenging behaviour is complex. Some educational staff working with potentially violent students may well, and understandably, express an interest in learning physical restraint techniques.

Physical restraint involves the imposition of physical force to control the behaviour of the restrained individual. This means the person applying the restraint procedure is engaging in behaviour that in other circumstances might be construed as an illegal physical assault. This problem is exacerbated when the person applying the restraint is an adult and the restrained person is not. In these circumstances the assault may be claimed to be a form of child abuse. We believe the only ethical defence against such an accusation is the argument that the restraint was rendered necessary as a result of the failure of the competent application of appropriate educational interventions to
promote the positive social, emotional and academic engagement of the student concerned.

This guide is concerned with educational interventions that promote the positive social, emotional and academic engagement of students who may have serious social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Only when the highest levels of competence in this area are evident can it be reasonable to encourage the development of physical restraint skills.

6.3 Medication

Significant numbers of school students globally are prescribed with various medications, particularly to regulate attention and behaviour. Regardless of the extent of such use, educational staff working with medicated students must have accurate information on reactions specific to these medications that are likely to be significant in the educational context. For example, the most commonly used drug for ADHD (generic name methylphenidate (MPH), brand name Ritalin, has been shown to have a significant positive effect on hyperactivity and inattentiveness and to aid self-regulation. But it can produce what is known as the 'rebound effect' where its effect wears off three to four hours after being administered and the problems of hyperactivity, inattentiveness and poor impulse control may appear heightened. This is important information for staff working with students taking MPH.

It is also important to stress that while medication may be of value to the student taking it, it is never an adequate substitute for effective teaching and appropriate school organisation, behaviour management and other features of the educational context to maximise a student's social, emotional and academic engagement. These educational issues lie at the heart of this book.

A key point here is that advice on medication matters must be delivered directly to educational staff by medical professionals.

6.4 Nutrition and Sleep

We note the importance of adequate nutrition and sleep in providing one important fundamental components for optimal emotional and cognitive functioning. It is important that schools make a conscious effort to promote students' understandings of the importance of positive sleep- and nutrition-related behaviours. We are also aware of the
commitment to 'breakfast clubs' in some schools and acknowledge that such provision can play an important role in creating the circumstances necessary for some students to engage in an active and appropriate way in the learning environment. To put it another way, there are circumstances in which SEBD may be directly related to poor nutrition.

### 6.5 Exclusion

Exclusion from school is a widely practised disciplinary sanction used by schools in many countries. It can be permanent or temporary and has two main manifestations: formal and informal. Formal exclusion (often referred to as expulsion or suspension) involves restricting or denying a student access to school premises and related educational activities. Permanent exclusion and temporary suspension mean the student is denied access to school premises. Other forms of formal exclusion might involve timetable restrictions or the refusal of access to particular activities. This is a public procedure and rule governed, often supported in civil law and therefore open to appeal procedures. Informal exclusion, on the other hand, involves similar restrictions and/or denial of access but is not declared formally. It may take the form of school 'turning a blind eye' to truancy or advising parents/carers to choose a different school for their offspring.

Exclusion is not a constructive, educational intervention. Rather it is an unambiguous statement of the school’s failure to accommodate the excluded student. Furthermore, it reinforces and provokes negative attitudes towards schools and schooling among those excluded. This is not to say that it is ever likely to cease to be a feature of the educational landscape. Human institutions by the very nature of their reliance on human judgment always run the risk of failing. The main emphasis of this short book, therefore, has been on the promotion of positive alternatives to exclusion.

### Further Reading


Chapter 7. The Importance of Maintaining a Positive Attitude

7.1 Keeping a Solution Focus

Anyone who has carried out training in schools on the topic of SEBD is familiar with the skepticism that teachers, who are struggling with unruly students on a daily basis, sometimes show to such training and its providers. Such skepticism is important and valuable if it forces the trainer to explain why and how particular interventions work, and to deliver what evidence there is of the effectiveness of what they are recommending. However, when skepticism is used as a mask for defeatism and an excuse for inaction it is harmful and becomes part of the problem of SEBD as opposed to part of the solution. The main point here is that the advice provided in this booklet is based on an extensive exploration and evaluation of research evidence (see Reference section). Each one of the approaches described here has been shown to work well at some time or other. Some (for example, the Good Behaviour Game) have been conspicuously successful in many different settings and over many years. This is not to say that any one of the many approaches described here is guaranteed to succeed in every or any school. It is suggested that there are reasons to see these approaches as offering potential solutions. We would go as far as to argue that the more that we commit ourselves to the idea that there must be a solution to the SEBD we encounter in schools the greater the likelihood that we will find a solution. The absence of a solution focus can only result in failure.

7.2 Teamwork and Consistency

As has been noted throughout this book, individual school personnel can make a positive difference in relation to SEBD when they exercise the appropriate skills. Their efforts, however, will be rewarded in multiples when they work in co-operation with others in consistent ways. This is not to say that teamwork and consistency are easy to achieve. They require a lot of hard work and a willingness to persist in the face of setbacks. One of the key features of effective teamwork is the need for individual team members to be supportive of one another, and to recognize the fact that when we help a colleague out of a difficult situation in relation to SEBD we are helping to create and
maintain a better working environment for everyone, including ourselves. On the other hand, when we undermine colleagues and/or take pleasure in their failures we are contributing to dysfunctional aspects of our own working environment.

7.3 Students as Partners

Nobody wants to be considered a problem to others, and students with SEBD are no exception. Like everyone else they want to be acknowledged and liked. The problem is that they often do not know how to get others to like them and have ways of engaging with others which are alienating. This means that ultimately teachers and students with SEBD actually share the same goals – whether they realize this or not. As the approaches discussed in this book suggest there are many ways of harnessing this commonality and working alongside students in the development of nurturing school communities that are rewarding for everyone.

Further Reading

Further Reading

Research evidence underpinning the approaches discussed in this book:


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