

# Implementing positive discipline in the classroom

There are many practices that can help principals, educators and caregivers to implement positive discipline effectively. These include:

- **Focusing on the positives.**  
Build children's self-confidence by recognising and supporting positive behaviour.
- **Showing interest and pay attention.**  
Create opportunities to talk and listen, so that you get to know each child. Asking children about their personal interests and hobbies can also build self-esteem and a sense of belonging.
- **Setting a good example.**  
Children learn by observing the adults around them. Model the positive behaviour that is expected from children such as kindness, patience and tolerance.
- **Shared decision-making.**  
Involve children in drawing up a classroom code of conduct. When children are involved in making the rules, they are more likely to follow them and to take responsibility for their actions.
- **Listening before judging.**  
Ask questions to find out why children misbehaved or did not complete their homework. Listen to children's explanations; they may have good reasons for not doing their homework, such as conditions at home.
- **Being consistent.**  
Be fair and consistent and avoid showing any favouritism. Apply the same rules to everyone.
- **Separating the behaviour from the child.**  
If a child does something wrong or makes a mistake, don't judge them. Focus on the behaviour and what needs to be done to make it right. Children often make poor decisions and they must be given the chance to learn from their mistakes.
- **Respecting diversity.**  
Create opportunities to discuss, acknowledge and value the differences among learners including their culture, language, religion, gender and age. Encourage them to listen to and respect other points of view.
- **Cultivating mutual respect for rights.**  
Children are more likely to respect the rights of others if their own rights are being respected. Schools should always respect the human dignity and physical integrity of both adults and children.

Providing structured information on how learners should behave can help to prevent problem-behaviour. Establishing classroom rules or a classroom code of conduct is helpful as it establishes what is expected of both learners and educators (see the *School Safety Framework* module on Classroom Management for more information on creating a classroom code of conduct). Illustrating and reinforcing the positive behaviour is also important. For example:

# Dealing with misbehaviour

The first challenge involved in addressing misbehaviour is to understand the reasons for the child's behaviour and to evaluate whether it deserves a disciplinary response.

Often poor behaviour results from factors outside a child's control and will not eliminate the behaviour. Punishing a child for being late because they experienced transport problems, for example, is inappropriate.

Poor choices, based on attitudes, beliefs or knowledge, are more amenable to discipline. For example, sometimes children make no effort to arrive on time for school because they do not believe that being on time is important. These beliefs can and should be corrected.

## Understanding children's behaviour

Behaviour is understandable and purposeful. Learners do what they do for a reason, even if we don't understand what it is. It is important to try and see the world through their eyes, and to understand the issues that may be affecting how they act in class.

### A behaviour checklist:

- Is there a problem with the subject material or approach?
- Is the child trying to get attention or are they otherwise emotionally motivated?
- Does the behaviour reflect difficulties at school?
- Does the behaviour reflect personal problems or problems at home?
- Does the behaviour reflect socio-economic issues?
- Could it reflect medical or biological issues?

It is important to talk to learners to understand their backgrounds and the issues and challenges they face; it is important to get to the bottom of what is behind the behaviour rather than focusing on only what someone has done wrong. Understanding the context and circumstances that shape learners' behaviour will not only point to solutions, it can also prevent unfair punishments, which often feeds an on-going cycle of anger, resentment and disruptive behaviour.



### If learners are talking or messing around:

- Stand near them to let them know that you are aware of their behaviour, give them a stern look or tap them on the shoulder
- Say the student's name in a natural way and get their attention; for example "as you can see John, much of the Earth is covered by oceans."
- Ask them if they have something to share with the class
- Separate them
- Give them a job to do, such as handing out materials or stationery



## TIPS

### Dealing with parent-child conflicts

**Tip 1: Cool off before dealing with a conflict.** Conflicts are harder to solve when you are emotional.

**Tip 2: Communicate.** Explain calmly what the problem is for you and ask your child to do the same.

**Tip 3: Do not dig up the past.** Focus on what is making you angry right now. Once something has been dealt with previously, leave it and move on.

**Tip 4: Listen.** Be careful not to excuse the child's feelings or explain them away. Try to see things from their perspective.

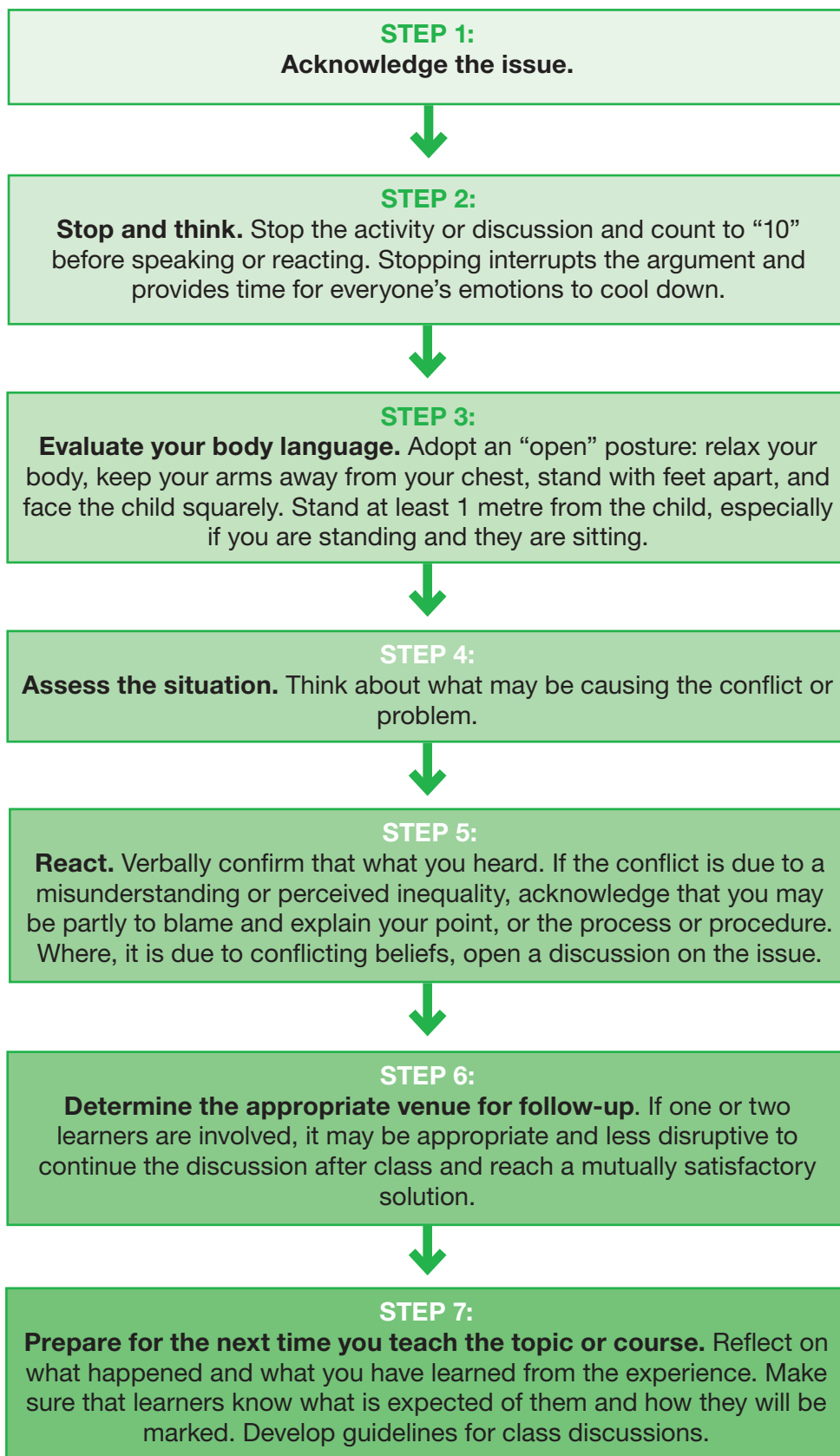
**Tip 5: Ensure you understand each other.** Restate what you heard them say and get them to do the same.

**Tip 6: Take responsibility.** It is important to acknowledge where you may have contributed to the conflict. This helps your child to feel listened to and serves as a basis for finding solutions.

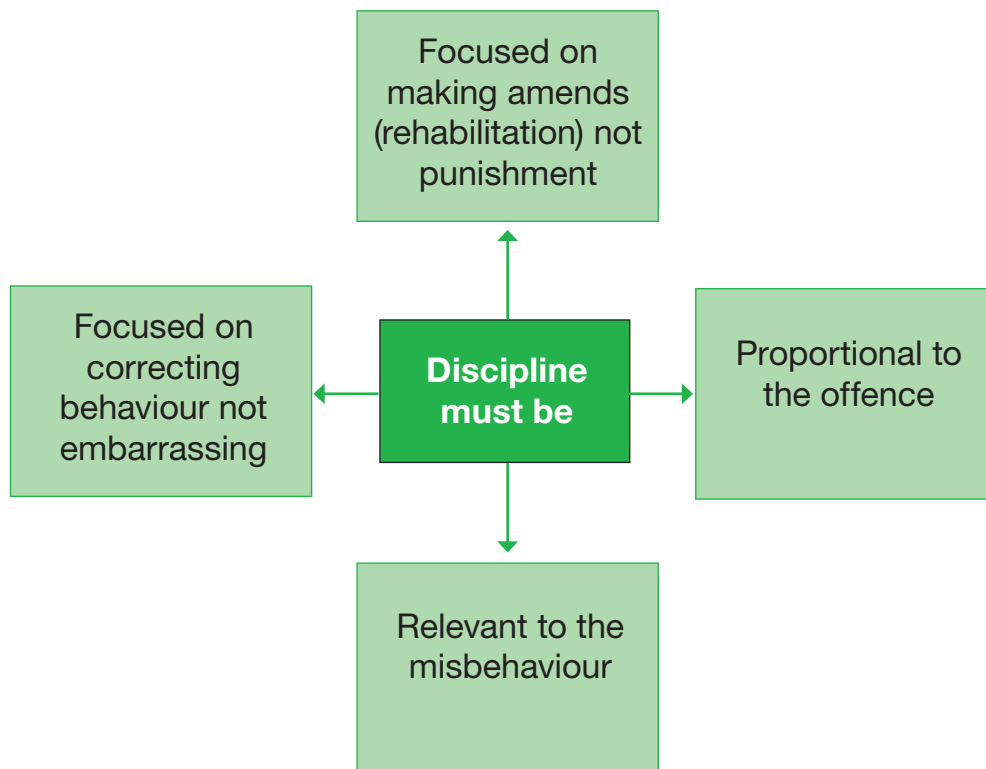
**Tip 7: Be consistent and follow through.** Find consistent consequences and make sure that they are implemented every time and equally for all children.

## Dealing with conflict in the classroom

Preventing and dealing with conflict is an important skill. The following process can help educators deal with conflict:



# Disciplining learners



There are many kinds of **misconduct**, some more serious than others. The South African Education Department identifies five levels of misconduct, ranging from minor misbehaviour to serious, criminal behaviour.



## TIPS

### Resolving conflicts between learners

**Step 1: Listen To Both Sides.** Calm down the learners to avoid any more flair-ups. Once things have settled down, ask them, one at a time, to give their version of the events that led up to the conflict.

**Step 2: Remain Neutral.** Repeat each learner's version of the events. Ask those involved if you are correctly telling their viewpoint.

**Step 3: Find Ways to Resolve the Conflict.** After everyone has had a chance to speak, move forward to determine how to resolve the conflict. If learners are still angry or refuse to see another's viewpoint, you may have to offer ideas of your own to get them to join in the conversation of coming up with solutions.

**Step 4: Follow Up.** Follow up to make sure that learners carry out the ideas that were agreed upon. The experience can also be used as a lesson for the entire class on how to handle conflicts.