

When a Child Gets Under Your

SKIN



As the school year progresses, your class will settle into a wonderful rhythm. Some days will hum like a well-running car. Others will sputter and stop, causing you consternation. Often, a cause of such sputtering is linked to one student. It's that child who, despite your best efforts and willpower, gets under your skin.

Every teacher has one of these children at some point. So, how do you stay cool? First, accept the fact that this student bothers you, and then recognize that the child's behavior, not the child him- or herself, is what irritates you. The behavior may be as simple as keeping a messy desk or not waiting to be called upon, or perhaps something more serious such as acting aggressively. Whatever the behavior, pinpoint it exactly. If the child has more than one annoying or bad behavior, list each and choose the one that bothers you most. Focus on that behavior first, ignoring other trying habits unless a safety issue arises.

Madeline Kovarik, a former elementary teacher, guidance counselor, primary specialist, and school administrator, is now an assistant professor of education at Rollins College in Winter Park, FL. She is a member of KDP's Lambda Kappa Chapter.

Cyndee Price was an elementary school counselor at Brevard County Schools in Titusville, FL. During her career, she taught diverse populations and frequently presented at educational conferences, including one of KDP's I Teach regional conferences. Sadly, she passed away last winter.

Concentrate on that behavior, using baby steps of corrective actions. For a messy desk, work first to get items off the floor. When a clean floor is accomplished routinely, begin tackling desktop items. Then move on to organizing the inside of the desk.

Be prepared for and tolerate lapses—a clean desk three out of five days is better than a constant mess! Change occurs slowly, no matter how immediate you wish it could happen. Remain positive and patient throughout this process. Think of your own habits you've been working to change. Don't take small successes for granted. Praise even minimal steps to ensure that the student receives attention for making progress.

Nurture your relationship with the child to encourage a willingness to please you. Strengthen the relationship by viewing the student wholly and looking for positive actions on which you can focus, such as the child's enthusiasm for science or a classroom activity.

At times, your positive focus may fly out the window. When that happens, step back and regroup. Give yourself—and the student—a breather. One of these strategies might work for you:

In-school field trip. If suitable to your school environment, send the child on an in-school field trip or errand that has been prearranged with another teacher in the building. When your end-of-the-rope is near, send the child to that teacher with an "important note" and tell him to wait for a response. These quick trips give you just enough time to gain perspective.

Job. Assign the student a task that requires her to move away from her desk. A small task offers the student purposeful movement and you a few minutes of reprieve. Possible jobs include Official Pencil Sharpener or Chief Eliminator (blackboard eraser).

Movement. Design lessons to include movement. Children who exhibit behavior problems usually need increased movement. If touching others during activities is an issue, assign personal carpet squares to specify boundaries. Stress balls, small tornado tubes, and wave bottles provide in-seat movement activities.

Wave Bottle Mini-Lesson



http://faculty.dbcc.cc.fl.us/swansoj/The_Wave_Bottle.htm

This lesson, geared to older students, includes a chemistry discussion.

www.teachervision.fen.com/science/lesson-plan/2545.html

Teachervision.com provides a wealth of information, including this K-2 lesson for the wave bottle.

Rewards. Often, a child who is having classroom difficulty is not favored by other students in the class. If this is the case, reward the class when the student is caught being good. This whole-class reward system assists the student in being held in higher esteem by classmates. Do not, however, point out incorrect behaviors and punish the class. "We could have had an extra five minutes of recess if Sue had cleaned up her desk area," for example, is inappropriate and nonproductive. Stay focused on positive outcomes.

The Quiet Hat. Tell students you need a break—without even speaking. Establish a quiet hat (or jacket or sweater). When you wear it, students may not interrupt you, unless it is an emergency. This technique works especially well during small-group instruction when the remainder of the class is working on a task. While wearing the hat, students needing help can refer to the Ask Me helper. This position can be rotated throughout the year and identified on any given day by a desk tent placed on the helper's desk. You'll stay more focused, students still will accomplish their work, and the student serving in the Ask Me role will gain a sense of contributing to the classroom community.

Again, remember that change isn't overnight. Fuel the change with praise for even small attempts. Congratulate successes and commend yourself for keeping your cool. Teachers need praise, too! 🍎

NYUSteinhardt
DEPARTMENT OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

> **Innovate**
> **Change**
> **Inspire**

Professional
Certification Programs

Practicing teachers come to the NYU Steinhardt School of Education for **professional growth, fresh ideas, and new knowledge**. They leave ready to motivate their students and transform their classrooms and schools.

- Art Education
- Bilingual Education
- Childhood Education
- Dance Education
- Early Childhood Education
- Educational Theatre
- English Education
- Literacy Education
- Mathematics Education
- Music Education
- Science Education
- Social Studies Education
- Special Education
- TESOL

Special scholarships for educators studying full or part time.
ALSO: Summer on-campus courses and graduate study abroad.

To learn more: **212-998-5030** or
visit www.steinhardt.nyu.edu/ed-grad



NEW YORK UNIVERSITY
A private university in the public service