

Children calling out during discussions, showing petty meanness to classmates, staring off into space during lessons—often, it’s these little day-to-day misbehaviors that can make teaching difficult and sometimes even prompt us teachers to question our career choice. It’s easy to feel as if there’s nothing we can do about students’ behavior. But with the proper strategies, patience, and caring, we can guide children to succeed in school.

In fact, it was when I realized this truth and came to see children’s behavior as something I *could* influence—and that doing so was an essential part of my role, not just an annoying distraction—that I truly began to love teaching. I wrote this book to help you embrace this same idea and find ever more fulfillment from teaching children. In this book, I’ll show you how to use a proven approach to discipline that will enable you to deal positively and successfully with ten common classroom behaviors that can get in the way of learning:

- Listening & attention challenges
- Disengagement & lack of motivation
- Teasing & name calling
- Silliness & showing off
- Cliques & exclusion
- Too much physical contact
- Tattling
- Dishonesty
- Defiance
- Frustration & meltdowns

Discipline is like any other subject—something to be taught. Just as we teach children *how* to read before *expecting* them to read, we also need to set behavior expectations and teach children how to meet those expectations. And when children make a behavior mistake, we need to respond with learning in mind—not shame or punishment—just as we would if they made a mistake in reading.

When we approach discipline this way, children do better in school. Their behavior improves, which in turn enables them to do better socially and academically. As they see these positive results, they become even more engaged in learning and deepen their relationships with us and their classmates—resulting in further improvements and growth.

I hope this book serves as your go-to guide for common behavior challenges and inspires you in helping students.



Why Do Children Misbehave?



In the classic picture book *Curious George Visits the Library*, George is waiting for story hour. He’s excited and ready to listen. At first, George is quite attentive as the librarian reads a book about bunnies. However, George notices that she has a book about dinosaurs in her line-up and he becomes anxious for her to read that one.

When she instead reads a book about trains next, his patience fails him: “George tried to sit quietly and wait for the dinosaur book to be read. But sometimes it is hard for a little monkey to be patient.” George grabs the dinosaur book and runs off.

Whenever I read this book, I’m reminded that all of us, children and adults, are striving to behave the best we can, but sometimes circumstances conspire against us. At school, children want to behave and learn, but they may have unmet needs or not yet have developed the necessary skills—academically or socially—to succeed.

Perhaps, like *Curious George*, a student’s patience and self-control are not yet strong enough to enable her to resist temptation. Or a child may not know how to take turns and share materials so he “misbehaves” during work times. A student who feels disconnected from her classmates may try to remedy the situation by socializing when she’s supposed to be listening.



A student who finds an assignment too challenging may disrupt the class or refuse to do the work to avoid failing. Even physical needs can come into play: A child who's hungry or tired will have a much harder time exercising the willpower it takes to maintain positive behavior.

Throughout this book, I encourage you to look at children's behavior through two lenses: first, children want to and can learn to behave positively, and second, when they make mistakes with their behavior it's because, like Curious George, certain factors have gotten in their way.

By understanding these factors, we can tailor our instruction so that children can better develop the willpower, self-discipline, and other key skills they need to meet expectations and focus on learning. Understanding the possible reasons for children's misbehavior doesn't mean excusing it. Rather, it means having empathy for children when they misstep and holding firm to expectations for behavior at school.

The reasons behind any human behavior are complex, but we can think of children's misbehavior as generally arising from these main influences:

- 1 * **basic needs**
- 2 * **social-emotional needs**
- 3 * **lack of social-emotional skills**
- 4 * **lack of academic skills**
- 5 * **developmental factors**

I discuss these five influences in greater detail in Chapters 1 through 10.