

Keeping Body Movements in Control

Proactive Steps to Take

A few simple actions can go a long way toward helping students who need a lot of physical activity succeed academically and socially. It's especially important to help them find appropriate physical outlets and teach them limits for movement and contact in school spaces.

Discuss how classroom rules govern physical actions

As teachers, we need to have a clear idea of the line between acceptable and unacceptable physical contact—and teach that distinction to children. For instance, if you decide that friendly jostling is OK, but full-out wrestling is not, teach students that expectation rather than assuming they'll know.

You might start this discussion by saying, “Our rules say that we will be kind to each other. Sometimes, we show kindness by being physical with our friends—for instance, by giving a hug or a high five. How can we be kind to each other and still take care of each other’s bodies?” Creating a chart with students like the one shown, using students’ own words as much as possible, can be especially helpful to this teaching.

Also, try to remind students of the class rules before a potentially tricky situation, such as having to sit still during a closing circle sharing at the end of the day.

Taking Care of Each Other and Our Bodies			
	Looks like	Sounds like	Feels like
In the classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Watching out for other people• Staying in your rug space or at your desk• Gentle high fives, hugs, fist bumps, chest bumps	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Apologizing if you bump into someone• Stopping if someone asks you to stop• Using kind words with any bumps, high fives, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Friendly• Happy• Gentle• Safe
At recess	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Using monkey bars or the slide one person at a time• Watching where you run• Avoiding rough play during soccer, basketball, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Loud but friendly sounds• “Watch out, here I come!”• Apologizing if you smack into a person	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Friendly• Competitive but not in a mean way• Happy• Safe for all

Provide plenty of physical outlets

Because so much wrestling and roughhousing results from pent-up energy, the best antidote is to give students chances throughout the day to release that energy in positive ways. Here are a few ideas:

- ▶ **Have recess every day, if possible.** Make sure students have a chance to enjoy a physically active daily recess. If some students need more physical activity, consider extending recess if possible, scheduling a second, briefer recess, or taking the class for a quick walk around the building.
- ▶ **Include games and energizers.** Plan short activities and movement breaks (one to three minutes each) throughout the day. Make sure at least some involve gross motor movements, and model and teach what these movements should look and feel like.
- ▶ **Energize academic tasks.** When possible, provide opportunities for students to act out stories, stand up during partner chats, or do jumping jacks or chant as they practice math facts. Try to choose themes that lend themselves to physical activity, such as action stories and dramatic historical events.
- ▶ **Individualize.** Some students may need even more physical activity. When you see signs of restlessness, send the student on an errand, invite her to do push-ups against the wall, or even allow her to take a supervised walk around the building.

Teach impulse control

Teach what it looks like to resist an impulse, and give students plenty of practice in exercising this self-control. For instance, use Interactive Modeling with a think-aloud to show having an impulse to reach over and nudge a friend and then deciding to rub your hands vigorously together instead. Make practicing impulse control fun by playing games requiring fast starting and stopping—try a freeze dance or Simon Says.

Promote perspective-taking

Students who are too rough often don't understand how their actions affect others. They may not yet be able to grasp that others see things differently from the way they do. Have conversations in class about the different ways people might respond to overly vigorous gestures and play. These types of discussions help children hear what others have to say and get a chance to explain themselves as well.

Reevaluate classroom space

Sometimes jostling and horseplay ensue when students sit too close together or don't have room to move freely. In a crowded space, a bump can quickly escalate into

roughhousing. Try to arrange the instructional space, circle area, and children's desks so that all students have sufficient personal space.

Although increasing class sizes make this a challenge for many of us, think creatively about the space you have. For example, perhaps the table where you meet with small groups can also serve as the art or science area.

Reinforce students' efforts at body control

Students who struggle to manage their physical energy need encouragement, so look for small moments of self-control that you can reinforce (in private). This helps children recognize their progress and gives them something positive to build on for the future. See the table on the next page for some examples of reinforcing language.

If a child is overly sensitive to other children's physicality . . .

Sometimes children overreact to any physical contact. After a small accidental bump in line, for example, a child may complain, "Jason smacked into me!" If you have a child who takes offense at the slightest touch, help him recognize that some physical contact is unavoidable and appropriate in a group setting.

Guide him in sorting out examples of incidental touching from actual rough contact, and reinforce his progress at making that distinction. Reinforce his progress when he bounces back despite having some small contact with a classmate. Before situations that might involve some jostling, such as transitions, remind the student of that possibility.

Stopping the Rough Stuff

How to Respond Effectively in the Moment

Despite all our proactive teaching, children may still act too roughly. Keep in mind that most of these children aren't deliberately trying to disrupt our lessons or cause harm to others. Nevertheless, the main goal of our response is the same as for most other misbehaviors: stop the problem behavior and get the lesson back on track as quickly as possible. Here are some tips.

Respond early

The sooner you respond when children are becoming too physical, the easier it will be for them to regain control of their bodies. When a child has just begun tapping a neighbor, it takes much less effort for her to stop and put her hands down than if her tapping has already turned into roughhousing.

Use clear redirecting language

Students who are being too rough generally respond best to a clear, public redirection. (Responding publicly lets all the other children know that this behavior is unacceptable.) In a matter-of-fact tone, tell them exactly what to do, especially with the body parts that are getting them into trouble.

When responding, resist having the student immediately reflect on how others might feel. In the heat of the moment, they can't access the logical parts of mind. Allow some time to pass before asking them to reflect on their

TEACHING TIP

Watch for Power Differences

Some children may use their physical advantages to intimidate others. Even a seemingly minor act, such as tripping or jostling in line, could be a sign of bullying behavior, especially if one child is bigger or stronger than the other.

If you think that power differences exist, take immediate action to stop the behavior. To learn more, read *How to Bullyproof Your Classroom* by Caltha Crowe (Center for Responsive Schools, 2012) and search "bullyproofing" at www.responsiveclassroom.org.

Redirecting Language in Action

If a situation like this happens	Try this
A child who struggles with personal boundaries hugs a classmate, who looks uncomfortable.	"Janelle, move back to your space and put your hands in your lap."
A student who gets very animated during discussions grabs a classmate's shoulders and shakes her slightly as he makes his point.	"Elliott, take your hands off Maria. Now, try to convince her of your point with your hands touching only the air."
While you are discussing something with a colleague, you see two boys who often wrestle begin to poke each other.	"Armand, Alec, move apart." (Pause to watch to make sure they do.)

Use appropriate logical consequences

Sometimes, the most effective way to help students who are having difficulty keeping their hands and bodies off others is to use a well-chosen logical consequence. Such consequences can remove them from a tempting situation and give them a chance to bring their energy level back down. As always, use a respectful tone and save the discussion about the incident for later.

When using time-out for these students, consider modifying it so that it involves doing something physical in the time-out spot—for example, push-ups against the wall or squats behind a chair. Requiring students who have lots of energy to sit still in one spot may set them up for failure.

Logical Consequences in Action	
If a situation like this happens	Try this
During writing time, a child who struggles with personal boundaries leans over and rests her head on a classmate's arm. The classmate asks her to move and she does, but she soon resumes leaning against her classmate.	Loss of privilege: "Janelle, you need to work in our private area for now." Follow up later: "What was going on for you? Why might that behavior be a problem for Dawn? What will help you follow the rules next time?"
A student who gets very animated while working knocks over another student's project.	Break it, fix it: "Elliott, see if Reyna wants your help getting her display back in order."
The principal comes to the door to discuss an administrative issue. When you turn back to your class, you see that two boys are fully engaged in wrestling.	Time-out: "Armand, Alec. Both of you take a break." Follow up later: "Why do you think I sent you to time-out? Why might that behavior be a problem for our class? What will help you follow the rules next time?"