

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

**ASSISTING A
STUDENT WITH
POOR HYGIENE**

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One of the more sensitive issues that you may face as a teacher is dealing with a student with poor hygiene. This is not an issue that you can easily ignore, especially if it is giving rise to ridicule and rejection from peers. If the child does not learn good hygiene by the time he leaves elementary school, he is likely in for a rough time in middle school. Poor hygiene can take various forms, such as having disheveled hair, wearing dirty clothes and having body odor. Because of the potentially significant impact, you cannot sidestep hygiene issues with your students. Rather you must deal with them with honesty and directness, but also with sensitivity and concern for the student's emotional well-being.

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What Can You Do?

1. Make hygiene a regular part of your health curriculum. Teaching materials on hygiene are available, including curricula, videos and books. You might check with the kindergarten teacher, who is used to dealing with these issues and may have some tips on teaching hygiene. The following are some potential behaviors you want to promote with your students: taking a shower or bath, washing their hair, brushing their teeth, wearing clean clothes, washing their hands after using the bathroom, covering their mouth when they cough, and using a tissue to wipe their nose.

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What Can You Do?

2. Talk with the student privately. Help him understand that poor hygiene can cause him to get sick and lead other children to avoid him. Talk with him about the basics of good hygiene and then zero in on his particular areas of need. You may need to give him very specific instructions in hygiene behaviors that we take for granted in most children. If you are uncomfortable talking with the student about these issues, ask the nurse to meet with him.

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What Can You Do?

3. Monitor the student's hygiene. Provide the student with a checklist of hygiene activities that he needs to do on a daily basis and have him put it in his notebook. The list might include taking a shower or bath, washing his hair, brushing his teeth, combing his hair and putting on clean clothes. Tell him that these tasks are part of his homework assignment. For the first couple of weeks meet with him in private for a few minutes every morning to review how well he did his homework, praising him for any evidence of good hygiene.

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What Can You Do?

4. Have some hygiene items handy. In talking with a student with hygiene problems, you may find that he does not have some hygiene items at home. For occasions like these, keep some of these items in your desk, such as the following: brushes, combs, packs of tissue, soap, shampoo, deodorant, toothbrushes, and toothpaste. Let the student know that he can take what he needs from your drawer as long as he assures you that he will make use of them. Check to make sure he knows how to use them.

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What Can You Do?

5. Work out a private signal to cue a student who is picking his nose. Few behaviors turn off peers more quickly than a student who picks his nose. If you have a child who is a frequent nose picker, meet with him privately and tell him that he needs to use a tissue instead. Give him a pack of tissues to keep in his desk. Let him know that other children will find this behavior unpleasant and may avoid him as a result. Work out with him a subtle non-verbal signal to alert him when he is picking his nose.

- Adapted from:

Shore, K. (2020, September 17). *Assisting a Student With Poor Hygiene*. Ken Shore.

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