

**CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES**  
**DEALING WITH A**  
**CHILD THAT**  
**BOTHERS HIS**  
**PEERS**

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# DEALING WITH A CHILD THAT BOTHERS HIS PEERS

- Students may bother their classmates in a variety of ways. They may poke them, pull their hair, grab something from them, trip them, push them, play with their food at lunch, interrupt them, call them names, spread rumors about them or ridicule them. Whatever means they choose, the incidents frequently come to your attention.
- The most efficient way of dealing with this problem is to get the complaining student to stand up for himself and tell his classmate to stop. If that does not work, you may need to become involved so that this small problem does not become a larger problem. Be careful about assuming that the student being complained about is necessarily the culprit. Rather the complaining student may be motivated by a desire to get another student in trouble or the complaint may reflect a conflict between two students, neither of whom is blame-free. Also be careful about punishing a student if you have not observed him misbehaving.

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## What Can You Do?

1. Screen a student's concern before dismissing it. Be especially attentive to reports suggesting that a student is being bullied, especially if you are hearing similar complaints from other students. If you are not sure whether you need to get involved, tell the student you will get back to him and then keep a watchful eye on the students to observe their interactions.

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## What Can You Do?

2. Encourage the complaining student to assert himself. If a student tells you that another student is annoying him, encourage him to tell his classmate to stop. Suggest what he might say (for example, “You’re really bothering me and I’d like you to stop”) and role-play with him if necessary. Tell him that if the classmate continues after he tells him to stop that he should see you. If he comes back to you and says he told the classmate to stop but the behavior continued, give the offending student a consequence if you have observed him bothering the student (see below).

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## What Can You Do?

3. Provide the student with a consequence. If you have observed him bothering a classmate without seeming provocation and he has continued despite your request that he stop, give him a consequence, but let him know in advance that you will do this. This consequence might be loss of part or all of recess, an after-school detention or loss of a privilege. Or you might have the student call his parents in your presence to inform them of his behavior. Be matter of fact and to the point in letting him know the consequence.

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## What Can You Do?

4. Have a one-on-one talk with the student. If you observe him annoying a classmate, take him aside and ask him in a calm, emotionally neutral manner why he is acting that way. Let his comments guide your response, which might include a simple appeal for cooperation or a conflict-resolution meeting with you and the two students. Whatever his response, help him understand that his behavior may cause other children to avoid him and also interfere with your teaching of a lesson.

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## What Can You Do?

5. Figure out what is motivating the student. In trying to answer this question, find time to observe the student's behavior closely. Note the circumstances of his behavior, including what happens right before and after the incidents, when they usually occur, where the student is when he engages in the behavior, and whether he targets a particular student. It may be that he is trying to get your attention or the attention of other students, or to get back at a student, or to divert attention from his academic problems. If you can identify the underlying reason for his behavior, you've got a better chance of eliminating it.

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## What Can You Do?

6. Move the student's desk. If the student continues to bother his neighbors despite your requests that he stop, consider moving his desk away from other students. Another option is to put him in a study carrel that is placed on the side of the class. Tell him that if he is cooperative in his new location for a designated period that he can return to his regular seat.



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## What Can You Do?

7. Restrict the student's physical contact with classmates. If he is bothering students as he roams around the room, limit his movement by designating a work area for him that he cannot leave without your permission. Place masking tape around his desk to make a square or rectangle, putting the tape about a foot or so beyond his desk on all four sides. Tell him that this is his "office" but that he must stay within the boundaries marked by the tape. Make sure that he cannot make physical contact with students from his work area.

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## What Can You Do?

8. Find ways to give the student positive attention. If you conclude that he is bothering other students as a way of gaining your attention, look for opportunities to attend to him when he displays positive behavior. In particular, acknowledge him when you see him acting in a kind, respectful or helpful manner to his classmates, even if only a small gesture. If you are successful in doing this, he may feel less compelled to seek attention in inappropriate ways.

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## What Can You Do?

9. Assign the student a homework partner. This classmate can help make sure the student has recorded the assignments correctly and packed the right materials at the end of the day. If his homework buddy is willing, encourage the student to call his partner at home if he needs to check on the homework assignment.

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## What Can You Do?

10. Adapt the homework to the student's needs. If the assignment appears overwhelming for him, consider shortening it. For example, you might have him do only the odd numbered problems, or have him write a two-paragraph rather than a four-paragraph composition. As his confidence and skills improve, you can increase the length of the assignment. If the student's skills are well below the level of his classmates, consider giving him a different assignment altogether. If motivation is a factor in the student's homework resistance, design the assignment to reflect his interests and strengths.

- Adapted from:

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