Learning to Behave

This book:

- aims to facilitate behaviour change through focusing on expectations, attitudes and other cognitive processes that can lead to challenging behaviours
- encourages and assists students to view current processes from different perspectives and to reflect on the consequences of these perspectives
- can work well as a stand-alone programme or fit neatly within a broader behaviour or work programme
- offers a diversity of problem-solving activities for individuals, small groups and/or the whole class.

Where there is an imbalance between a student’s perspective and a school’s, misunderstandings and conflict can arise. Learning to Behave offers a programme of support to help achieve an equilibrium in which students learn to see other viewpoints and engage constructively in learning opportunities. Grounded in a cognitive approach, it essentially offers a type of training in problem-solving skills as students identify problems, generate alternatives, think about consequences and find solutions. This highly adaptable resource will be useful in a wide range of contexts, such as in teaching life or learning skills (including key competencies), running an individual behaviour programme and working with small groups.
Learning to Behave

A cognitive approach to behaviour modification

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## Contents

**Introduction** 4  
From imbalance to equilibrium 4  
A cognitive approach 4  
Curriculum links 5  
Some ways to use this book 5  

**Topic One: Showing respect** 6  
Billy Bad Manners 6  
Thinking about the story … 7  
Being polite 8  
Classroom etiquette 9  
Apologising 10  
*How we say it* 12  
Swearing 14  
Greetings 15  
Farewells 16  
Personal reflection 17  
Quotes to consider 18  

**Topic Two: Following instructions and school rules** 19  
Mrs Norules 19  
Thinking about the story … 19  
Your school’s rules 20  
A school behaviour management plan 21  
Rules about school uniform 23  
Being punctual 25  
Lena Dawdle 25  
Respecting authority 26  
Changing or challenging rules appropriately 28  
Quotes to consider 28  

**Topic Three: Being responsible** 29  
Bella Blameless 29  
Thinking about the story … 29  
Learning how to be responsible 32  
Leading by example 33  
Doing the right thing 35  
Being honest 37  
Quotes to consider 38  

**Topic Four: Using self control** 39  
Harry Hothead 39  
Thinking about the story … 39  
Feeling anger 41  
Reacting to challenging situations 43  
Reflecting on anger 45  
Role plays 47  
Quotes to consider 48  

**Topic Five: Managing distractions** 49  
Robert Restless 49  
Thinking about the story … 50  
Distracted or focused? 52  
Completing tasks 53  
Quotes to consider 53  

**Final reflections on behaviour** 54  

**References** 55
Introduction

Where there is an imbalance between a student’s and a school’s perspectives of appropriate behaviour, both parties may misinterpret the other’s actions and challenging behaviours can escalate. Learning to Behave is designed to set these relationships – and consequently learning – in a more positive direction with a programme of support that helps students to see other viewpoints and engage constructively in learning opportunities. Grounded in a cognitive approach, it essentially offers a type of training in problem-solving skills as students identify problems, generate alternatives, think about consequences and find solutions.

From imbalance to equilibrium

A student’s ability to behave in what is considered an appropriate manner, in the school context, may be shaped by their:

- temperament
- socialisation
- gender
- cultural beliefs
- resilience
- learning needs
- self management skills.

Also influencing the student’s behaviour, and interacting with the personal factors listed above, is how well the school:

- communicates its expectations and values
- reinforces acceptable behaviour and discourages poor behaviour
- accepts and accommodates the diversity of its students and their learning requirements
- develops positive, professional relationships between staff and students and their families
- promotes and creates opportunities for success
- engages students in activities that challenge, consolidate and extend their learning.

If the student’s personal perspective does not match the school’s perspective of what constitutes appropriate behaviour, this “imbalance” (Dwyer, 2008) can lead to misunderstandings and conflict.

To restore the equilibrium, students and teachers sometimes need additional support and advice so each can understand the other and make the adjustments needed for the student to begin or continue to learn. If students understand the reasons behind a school’s expectations, they are more likely to respond positively to reminders and clear instructions about how to behave in any given situation.

A cognitive approach

The activities in this book are based on a cognitive perspective of behaviour modification. This model is founded on three basic principles:

1. Cognitive processes (for example, expectations, perceptions, attitudes, attributions, beliefs and mental images) produce particular types of behaviour.
2. People can monitor and change their own cognitive processes.
3. Changes in cognition can change behaviour.

In a cognitive approach, therefore, the focus is on developing the ability to view current processes from different perspectives and to reflect on the consequences of such thoughts. It is this focus that underlies the activities in this book.

Specifically, the activities can be seen as a type of problem-solving skills training (as outlined by D’Zurilla and Goldfield, 1971, cited in Ayres, Clarke and Murray, 1995). In completing them, students identify problems, generate alternatives, think about consequences, plan and find solutions (Ayres et al, 1995).
Curriculum links

In many countries, including the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, the national curriculum requires schools to explicitly teach values, life skills and learning skills.

Learning skills or key competencies (Erb, 2008) include: managing self, thinking, participating and contributing, relating to others, and language symbols and text. These skills can each be broken down further to a set of subskills. For instance, “relating to others” can include the development of empathy and listening, with an explicit objective of getting students to understand the views of others. The aim is to develop these skills across subjects so that students demonstrate behaviours compatible with a range of positive learning environments. This book can be used as a resource for teaching some of these skills.

Some ways to use this book

This book has been designed so that it can be adapted and used to suit the needs of a wide range of classrooms and schools. For example, it may be helpful to:

- teach targeted learning skills or key competencies
- form part of a pastoral care programme
- use as a programme during tutor class
- supplement a health programme
- provide reflection sheets for withdrawn students
- use in small groups as a programme of work or part of a larger programme (eg, on managing anger)
- incorporate into an individual programme for a student with behavioural difficulties.
Read through this account of a student’s morning. Then discuss it with another student and highlight all the examples you can find where you think Billy has been rude (impolite).

Billy Bad Manners

Billy got up late for school, despite his mother calling him for breakfast 20 minutes earlier. He went to the kitchen where his mother offered him some orange juice but he just grunted and took it from her. He stretched across the table, nearly knocking his brother’s juice over, and grabbed a box of cereal. He ate noisily and spoke to his mother with his mouth full of food. He demanded to know what she had done with his school socks.

After he had got ready his mother dropped him off at school in her car. She told him to have a good day but he just shrugged his shoulders and got out of the car, slamming the door.

The school bell had already gone. He got to his classroom, entered and found a seat. When Mr Whyte, his teacher, asked him why he was late, Billy replied, “I overslept.” He found he had left his pen at home, so he helped himself to a spare one belonging to his friend Ben, who sat beside him.

Mr Whyte asked the class a question but Billy shouted out the answer before the teacher could invite anyone else to speak. When Mr Whyte handed him his exercise book, he took it reluctantly.

At the end of the class Billy pushed past the other students so he could leave first. Outside, the principal (headteacher), Mrs Greene, asked Billy to “slow down” but he just ignored her.
**Thinking about the story ...**

Consider how Billy’s behaviour can make people feel. In pairs, fill in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who was Billy rude to?</th>
<th>In what way did Billy behave rudely?</th>
<th>How would this behaviour make the person feel?</th>
<th>How could Billy have behaved politely?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>His mother</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His brother</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Whyte</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other students in his class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Greene</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**TOPIC ONE: SHOWING RESPECT**

**Being polite**

In pairs, discuss and complete the questions below.

1. What does it mean to be polite?

2. What are “manners”? Give some examples.

3. Why is it important to be polite?

4. Being polite means following norms or rules of behaviour that have been developed to demonstrate you are considering the feelings and needs of others. The table below outlines some situations in which you should demonstrate politeness. Complete it by writing what might be a polite response in each situation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Polite response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A teacher is carrying a box of books. You are walking behind and you notice there is a door coming up that the teacher will be unable to open.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You need to borrow a pen from a friend.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You have come top in the class at maths and the teacher praises you.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone next to you sneezes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You need to speak to someone urgently but this person is talking with someone else.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A teacher greets you with “good morning” as you enter the classroom.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The bell rings at the end of class.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A new student joins your class.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>