

## Chapter 5

# Basic Behaviour Theory and Techniques

- Basic Behaviour Theory
- Ways to Analyse Behaviour
- How to Modify Children's Behaviour
- Establishing Good Relationships
- Common Pitfalls in Applying Behavioural Techniques



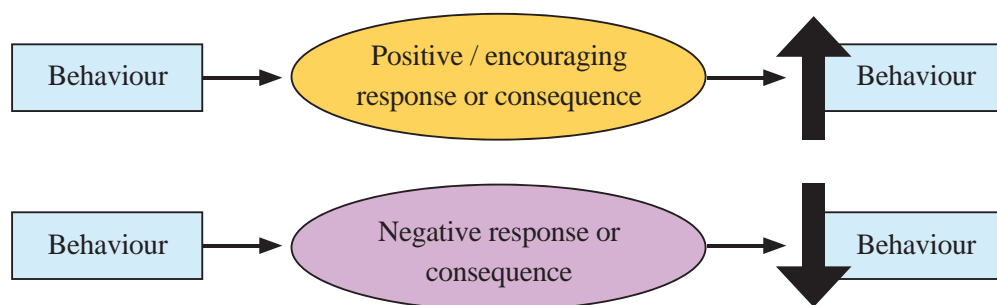
# Chapter 5: Basic Behaviour Theory and Techniques

When teachers have children with special needs in class, early identification of their problems and arrangement for referral is only the first step. Teachers also need to manage the children's learning, emotional and behavioural problems in the classroom in order to help them adapt to school life and learn more easily. To handle these issues effectively, teachers must understand the basic behavioural principles and techniques. This chapter will introduce the basic behaviour theory, ways to analyse behaviour, and how to modify children's behaviour.

## I. Basic Behaviour Theory

### The basic behavioural principle: Law of Effect

Although human behaviour is complex and varies greatly among individuals, certain behavioural patterns can be identified. Put it simply, when our behaviour (whether desirable or undesirable) is followed by a positive and encouraging response (such as praise or reward), the chance of us repeating this behaviour will increase. However, if our behaviour is followed by a negative response (such as criticism or reproach), or even no response, the chance of us repeating this behaviour in the future will be reduced.



For example, when a boy takes the initiative to answer a question, regardless of whether he is right or wrong, the teacher responds positively by praising his active attempt, the chance of the boy answering questions actively again will increase. On the other hand, if the teacher shows disapproval publicly towards the boy's incorrect answer, the chance of the boy answering questions actively in the future will be reduced.

## II. Ways to Analyse Behaviour



Refer to Chapter 5 of the DVD

### 1. Understanding the Motivation and Functions behind Behaviour

The motivation behind children's behaviour is relatively simple. It is mainly:

- To get things they like, e.g. praise, attention, material reward and interesting activities; or
- To avoid things they dislike, e.g. reproach, neglect, punishment and activities they hate.

Being able to understand the motives behind children's behaviour helps teachers decide on the methods used to modify their behaviour. It will also allow teachers to predict which methods will be more effective and which will be futile.

### 2. Analysing the Antecedents and Consequences of a Behaviour

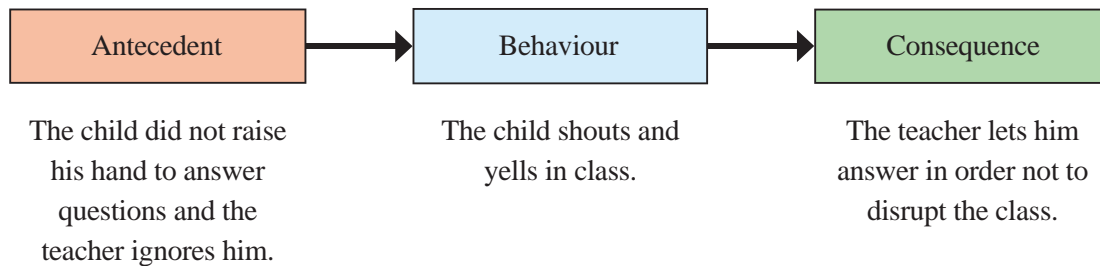
There are usually antecedents and consequences to a behaviour. An antecedent refers to the event happened immediately before the occurrence of a behaviour. It (could be a person, a setting or an incident) may be the factor triggering the behaviour. A consequence refers to the event appears right after the occurrence of a behaviour, e.g., the child gets a reward or loses certain privileges.

Antecedent and consequence are often crucial factors influencing whether a behaviour will occur. If we can fully understand the antecedent and consequence of a behaviour, we will have the essential clues to change the behaviour. This method of analysing behaviour is termed ABC Behaviour Analysis.

Antecedent	Behaviour	Consequence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• When did it usually happen?</li><li>• Where did it usually happen?</li><li>• Who were there?</li><li>• What happened?</li><li>• What did the others say / do?</li><li>• What did the child say / do?</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What happened?</li><li>• What did the others say/ do?</li><li>• What could the child get from it?</li><li>• What could the child avoid?</li></ul>

(Teachers may refer to “Appendix 4: ABC Behaviour Record” to record and analyse a child's behaviour.)

For example, when the teacher asks a question, a child always tries to answer the question without raising his hand. The teacher tries to ignore him, but the child shouts and yells. In order not to disrupt the class, the teacher has to let him answer. Let us try to analyse the antecedent and consequence of this problem behaviour:



In this example, we find that whenever “the teacher ignores the child”, the child tends to “shout and yell” to get the teacher’s attention. In addition, “the teacher eventually lets the child answer the question in order not to disrupt the class”, which further reinforces the child’s problem behaviour of shouting and yelling. Therefore, to tackle this problem, the teacher may try to:

- Change the antecedent:  
Set the rule of raising hand before answering questions in advance.
- Change the consequence:  
If the child shouts and yells, do not let him answer the question. Instead, use the management strategies in the next section to reduce the child’s undesirable behaviour.  
If the child abides by the rule and raises his hand before answering the question, praise and encourage him accordingly to reinforce the child’s desirable behaviour.

### III.How to Modify Children’s Behaviour

The methods mentioned below can effectively modify children’s behaviour. When dealing with children’s behavioural problems, we tend to focus on how to reduce undesirable behaviour and neglect how to encourage desirable behaviour. In fact, both are equally important. When children behave well more often there will be less time and opportunity for them to misbehave. Therefore, teachers should try to use the methods complementarily and flexibly when they refer to the strategies described below.

 Refer to Chapter 5 of the DVD

## Ways to Change Antecedents

As mentioned above, antecedents refer to events occurred right before a behaviour. For example, is the child more likely to display such behaviour in certain classes (when did it usually happen)? Knowing the clues about antecedents allows us to apply the following methods to change the antecedent such that problem behaviour can be avoided.

### 1. Setting Rules

For children to have desirable behaviour, we should better set up rules in advance. The rules must be:

- Appropriate in number - A maximum of 3 to 4 will be enough. Children will forget if there are too many rules.
- Reasonable and easy to follow - They should match with the children's age and development, and the children should be able to carry them out.
- Able to be implemented practically - Pay attention to any limitations of the objective circumstances.
- Use positive terms - Instructing children "not" to do certain things can only stop the undesirable behaviour without teaching them the acceptable behaviour. If children have not learned what they should do, soon they will do the undesirable behaviour again. Therefore, when setting rules, negative statements should be turned into positive ones. For example:

Negative statement	Changed to	Positive statement
"Don't shout"	→	"Keep quiet" or "Speak softly"
"Don't run"	→	"Walk slowly"
"Don't snatch other's toys"	→	"Share toys with others"

In addition, teachers should also:

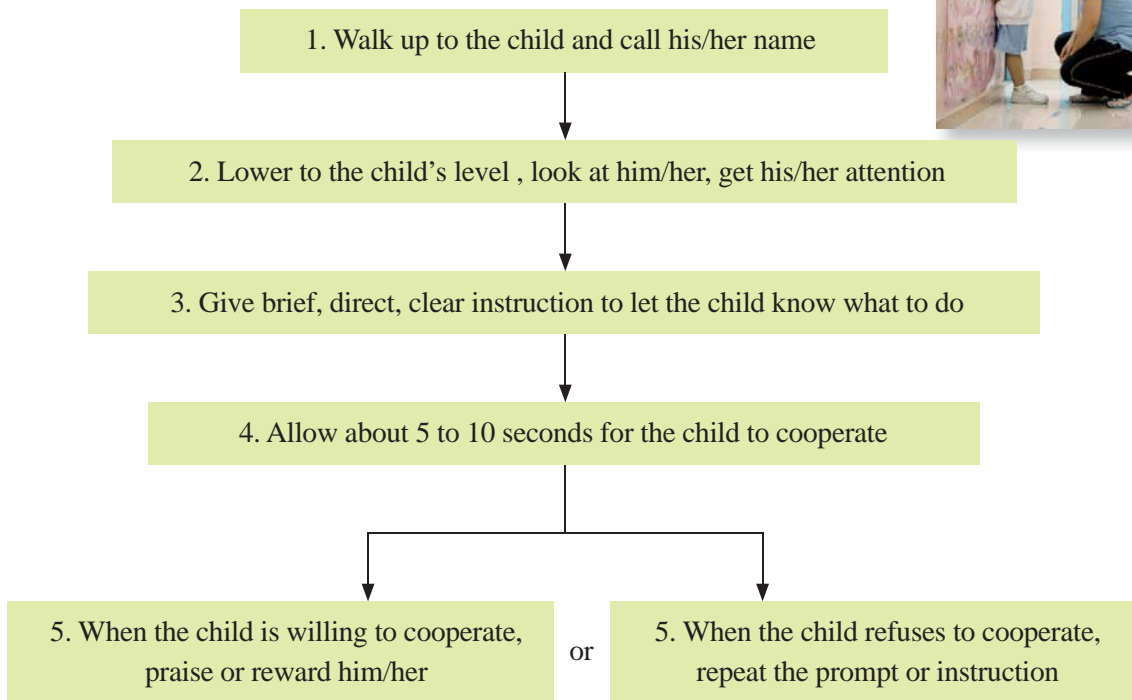
- Be fair. All children in class must follow the rules.
- After setting the rules, all the teachers should enforce them consistently.

### 2. Giving prompts/instructions

After the rules have been established, prompts/instructions should be used as reminders when children do not follow them right away. When giving prompts/instructions:

- Speak concisely, such as, "Raise your hand before answering". Avoid long speeches.
- Do not ask children questions such as "Is it okay..." or "Would you..." as it will give children the chance to say "no".

Steps in giving prompts/instructions:



(If the child still refuses to cooperate after repeating the instruction, refer to “Ways to Change Consequences” in the next section.)

### 3. Offering Limited Choices

- Children are generally more obedient and cooperative when offered the right to choose.
- Giving children limited choices can avoid them going into tantrums for insisting on getting what they want.
- For example, let children pick a snack from a choice of three, or an activity from a choice of two.

### 4. Diverting Attention

- As soon as you notice a child is going to misbehave, try diverting his/her attention and lead him/her to engage in another activity.
- This method is particularly suitable for younger children.
- For example, if two children are going to fight over a toy, the teacher can take out two other interesting toys to distract them. The teacher can also guide them to exchange their toys and learn to share with each other.



## 5. Engaging Children

- When children have nothing to do, they will tend to misbehave due to being bored.
- The teacher can arrange some engaging or interesting activities for children to avoid misbehaviour arising from boredom.
- For example, when children are lining up in the corridor waiting to wash their hands, the teacher can lead them to sing or recite rhymes with movements.



## Ways to Change Consequences

Consequences refer to events that happened after the behaviour occurred. As mentioned previously in the “Law of Effect”, the nature of the response towards the behaviour (positive / negative) will reinforce or reduce the chance of recurrence of the behaviour. Therefore, to promote children’s good behaviour, positive responses should be used to encourage them. Conversely, negative responses should be used to reduce inappropriate behaviour (Refer to the section on “Reducing Undesirable Behaviour” on p.57).

### (I) Encouraging Desirable Behaviour:

#### 1. Verbal Praise

- Verbal praise include:
  - ♦ General praise, such as: “Good”, “Well done”.
  - ♦ Descriptive praise, such as: “Thank you for helping me to put away the crayons, Brenda.”
- Use descriptive praise to let children know exactly what they have done well for being praised.
- Avoid mixing belittling comments with praise, such as “I didn’t realize that Charlie knows how to line up. Now this is a good boy”. You may notice that the same sentence contains praise of “knowing how to line up” as well as implied mocking of “not thinking that he could line up in the past”. The double-bind message will confuse the child, making it hard for him to understand whether the teacher is praising or blaming him.
- Do not be afraid that the child will be “spoiled by praises”. Only if the teacher praises the child even after he/she has misbehaved will the child be spoiled.
- When children behave well, they should be praised. Even if a child fails to achieve, he/she should be praised and encouraged for his/her attempt and effort.



## 2. Eye Contact/ Encouraging Gestures

- Giving attention to children’s desirable behavior prevents them from misbehaving to seek attention . Positive attention includes smiling at the children, winking at them, watching them in activities, giving them a thumbs-up, patting their shoulders gently or touching their heads, etc. Do note whether the children like or accept such kind of encouragement.



## 3. Giving a Reward

- Rewards may be:
  - ♦ Interesting engaging activities, such as riding a tricycle, playing with toys.
  - ♦ Material rewards, such as stationery, stickers.
- When giving a reward, let the child know what he/she has done to earn the reward.
- Every child has different preferences. What is attractive to one child may not be desired by another. Therefore, when giving a reward, be mindful of the child’s preferences.
- Do not worry that children will rely on rewards to behave themselves or become materialistic when we give them rewards. Positive recognition helps children to understand what they have done well and gradually build up positive behaviour and habits in them. When the good behaviour becomes a habit, teachers may gradually reduce the frequency of rewards (but can still encourage children with verbal praise).

## 4. Behaviour Reward Chart

- When a child behaves well, put a stamp or a sticker on the behaviour reward chart. When a certain number of stickers is reached, the child can have a reward, such as an interesting activity or a material reward to encourage his/her desirable behaviour.
- A behaviour reward chart can be used for a child, a group or the whole class.

(Teachers may refer to “Appendix 5: Behaviour Reward Chart” to record and reward children’s desirable behaviour.)

### Steps in applying the behaviour reward chart:

- i. Prepare a behaviour reward chart in advance and explain its function to the child.
- ii. Discuss with the child about the target behaviour and reward as well as how to earn the reward. Write down on the chart.



- iii. Whenever the child achieves the target behaviour, put a stamp or a sticker on the chart and praise him/her.
- iv. When the stamps or stickers reach a certain number, present the reward to the child.

### Keys to applying the behaviour reward chart:

- The target behaviour should be written down in brief, clear, concrete and positive terms, e.g., “Raise your hand before answering questions” instead of “Behave in class” or “No shouting or yelling”.
- At the start, do not set the target too high. Make it easier for the child to get the reward (such as earning a sticker for achieving the target behaviour three times) to let the child have a sense of achievement. Then slowly raise the level of difficulty e.g. getting a sticker for performing the target behaviour every five times).
- When the child misbehaves, do not punish him/her by removing the stamps on the chart as it will lead the child not trusting the behaviour reward system any more. Teachers should use the following methods to reduce undesirable behaviour in the child.

## (II) Reducing Undesirable Behaviour:

### 1. Planned Ignoring

- When children misbehave, do not pay any attention to them, be it verbal or non-verbal responses. For example, do not look at them or speak with them.
- Planned ignoring is particularly effective for dealing with relatively mild and attention-seeking behaviour, such as making faces, or whining.
- At first, the child may not understand why you are ignoring him/her and will seek your attention by intensifying his/her behaviour. Only by persisting to ignore his/her behaviour that the teacher will find the method effective.
- Continue to ignore the child until he/she stops the misbehaviour. Then pay attention to the child again.



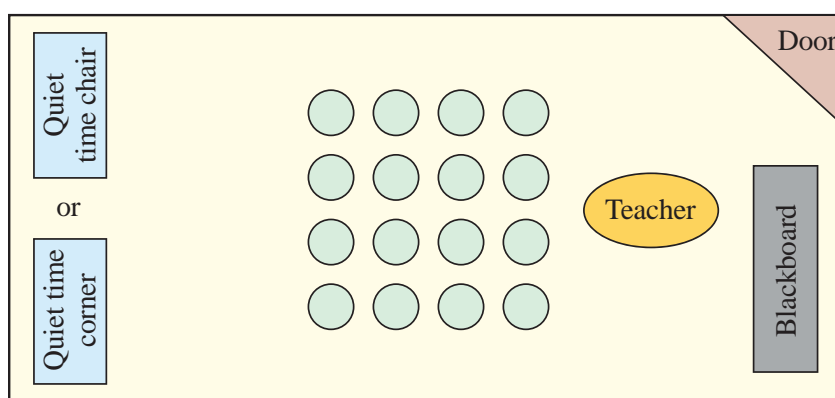
### 2. Logical Consequences

- When children misbehave, manage the problem behaviour by choosing a consequence that is appropriate to the situation. The consequence will involve depriving their privileges (such as taking away the object that is causing the problem or removing the child from the activity that he/she is doing).

- For example, if children fight for a toy, take the toy away for 10 minutes. If a child performs dangerous acts on a climbing frame in the playground, ask him/her to stop playing on the frame for 15 minutes.
- Take action immediately. Explain briefly to the child why the activity must be stopped, such as, “You did not share your toy, and now it must be taken away for 10 minutes.”
- Remember to keep your promise. When the time is up, let the child resume the activity.
- After the activity is resumed, show the child what he/she should do instead, e.g., “Please take turns to play with the toy, each for a few minutes”. Do not preach the child immediately.

### 3. Quiet Time

- When children misbehave, take them away from the activity that is causing the problem, and let them sit quietly for a few minutes in a specified place / chair at the edge of the activity.
- For example, when a child always leaves his/her seat in class, or refuses to do class work, the teacher may make use of the quiet time method.
- A quiet time usually takes place in the same room in which the problem occurs. Below is a classroom plan with a ‘quiet time corner’ or place for the ‘quiet time chair’ suggested. Make sure that there are no interesting things within the reach of the child at the location:



#### Steps in using quiet time:

- Explain to the child clearly what misbehaviour he/she has done for placing him/her in the quiet time. For example, “You kept talking in class. Now you have to go to the quiet time corner for 5 minutes.”

- ii. Take the child to the quiet time corner or chair, ask him/her to sit quietly for a specified period of time (1 minute for two-year-olds, and 2 minutes for two- to five-year-olds).
- iii. Do not preach or argue with the child.
- iv. Do not pay any attention to the child during quiet time.
- v. If the child remains quiet for the set time, praise him/her and let him/her return to the activity. If the child fails to keep quiet, consider using time-out as discussed below.

#### 4. Time-out

- When a child shows more serious misbehaviour, such as destroying objects or hurting people, or refusing to keep quiet during the quiet time period, the teacher may use time-out.
- The approach is similar to quiet time. The difference in time-out is that it involves taking the child away from the activity he/she is doing to a room separate from others.
- The time-out room should be:
  - ♦ safe, with dangerous objects removed;
  - ♦ boring, with no interesting objects;
  - ♦ well-lit and well-ventilated.
- Due to environmental constraints, there may not be a suitable room for time-out in some kindergartens / nurseries. The following suggestions may be helpful:



Find a more spacious corner in a free computer room for time-out



A corner of the activity room

- Other places may be considered, such as:
  - ♦ A corner of the staff room / general office;
  - ♦ Outside the Principal's office;
  - ♦ The corridor outside the classroom.
- When choosing these places, consider at the same time the child's safety and the availability of staff to monitor the child from a distance. Interruption from other activities going on around the child should also be reduced to a minimum.

- If the child can remain quiet for the set time, let him/her go back to activities.
- If the child throws a tantrum or does not keep quiet, start timing only from the moment he/she can be quiet.
- Time-out is a more serious strategy, and therefore should not be used often.
- Some children may be exceptionally resistant to time-out and show strong reactions. On the other hand, some may welcome time-out as it helps them to get away from activities they do not like. Under such circumstances, time-out should not be used and teachers should consider using other methods to deal with the child's behaviour problem.

The table below lists some examples to illustrate the steps in handling children's misbehavior. They also demonstrate how to put together the above techniques in application (The child is about three years old in the examples below):

Steps of Strategies	Example: Not sharing toys	Example: Not following instructions	Example: Hitting people
1. Tell the child what to stop and what to do instead	"Mandy, please put down the toy. It's Sharon's turn "	"Lucas, please put down the toy and return to your seat for work"	"Brenda, put down your hand. You can't hit Lincoln."
2. Give the child time to cooperate	Wait for 5 seconds	Wait for 5 seconds	Wait for 5 seconds
3. Praise the child for cooperating	"Thank you for your cooperation"	"Thank you for following the rule"	"You are a good girl to be able to control yourself"
4. If the child refuses to cooperate, carry out the consequence and tell the child why	Give Logical consequence - "You are not sharing. You must stop playing with the toys for 3 minutes"	(Still not cooperating after repeating the instruction) "You did not do what I said. Now you must go to quiet time for 2 minutes"	"You are still hitting Lincoln. Now go to the quiet time corner for 3 minutes"
5. When the time is up, resume the activity	"Time is up. Now you may play with the toys again. Remember to take turns and give them to the next child when I ask you"	"The quiet time is over. Now go back to do your class work."	"The quiet time is over. You may leave the quiet time corner and return to your seat"
6. If the problem recurs, use the back-up strategy	"You are not sharing. This time you have to stop playing with the toys for 4 minutes"	"You are still not doing class work. Now you have to go to time-out for 2 minutes"	"You are still hitting Lincoln. Now you have to go to time-out for 3 minutes"
7. If the child still refuses to cooperate, use another back-up strategy	"You are still not cooperating. You need to go to the quiet time corner for 2 minutes"	"You are still not cooperating. Now follow me to have time-out for 3 minutes"	"You are still not cooperating. Now follow me to have time-out for 4 minutes"

## IV. Establishing Good Relationships

The methods mentioned above can effectively encourage children's desirable behaviour and reduce inappropriate behaviour. However, just knowing the techniques is not sufficient. Whether children accept your teaching and discipline depends on their relationship with you. Teachers can use the following methods to build good relationships with children so that teaching and discipline can be made easier.

### 1. Communicating with Children More

- Talk with children more to understand how they think and feel.
- Show interest in what they say. Listen attentively to them and maintain eye contact with them.
- Give appropriate responses from time to time, such as nodding or responding to their words such as using “hmm”, “oh”, “I see”, etc.



### 2. Expressing Care

- Pay attention to what children like and what they do so that they would feel that you care about and value them.
- Use body language to show that you care for them, such as patting on their heads gently and holding their hands.



### 3. Being Fair

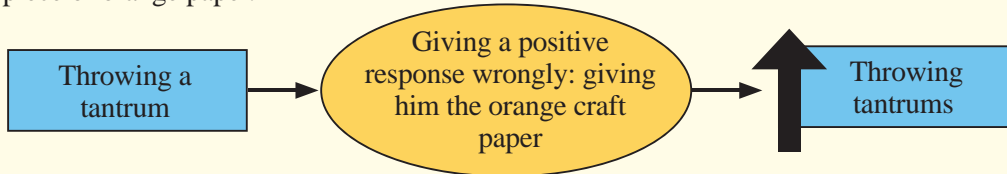
- Try to be fair and treat every child the same as possible.

## V. Common Pitfalls in Applying Behavioural Techniques

The abovementioned techniques do not sound difficult to apply. However, beware of the following common pitfalls :

## 1. Accidental Rewards

During art and crafts class, Mason did not get his favourite orange craft paper and threw a tantrum by lying on the floor. In order not to disrupt the class and to calm Mason down soon, the teacher asked another child to let him have the piece of orange paper.



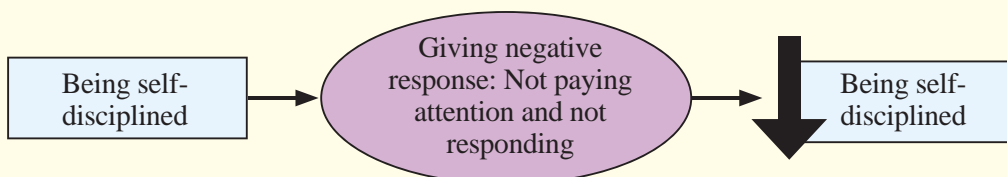
The teacher's original intention was to calm Mason down. So she gave him the orange craft paper. Such handling yields an instant effect of stopping the child's misbehaviour. However, the fact that Mason could get what he wanted after throwing a tantrum only reinforced his tantrums in the long run.

### Suggested management:

- Calmly instruct the child to stop the tantrum, such as, "Please stop screaming and stamping your feet".
- If the child follows the instruction, praise him and show him what he should do, such as, "If you want the orange craft paper, you can ask Sarah politely, 'May I exchange the orange craft paper with you?' You must not throw a tantrum."
- If the child refuses to cooperate and continues to throw tantrums, use quiet time or time-out for his problem behaviour.

## 2. Ignoring Desirable Behaviour

John was self-disciplined and did his class work. The teacher did not worry about nor pay attention to him. By contrast, Mason refused to do his class work and was disruptive in the classroom. Therefore, the teacher focused all her attention onto him. When John raised his hand to tell the teacher that he had finished the work, the teacher did not have time to take notice of him.



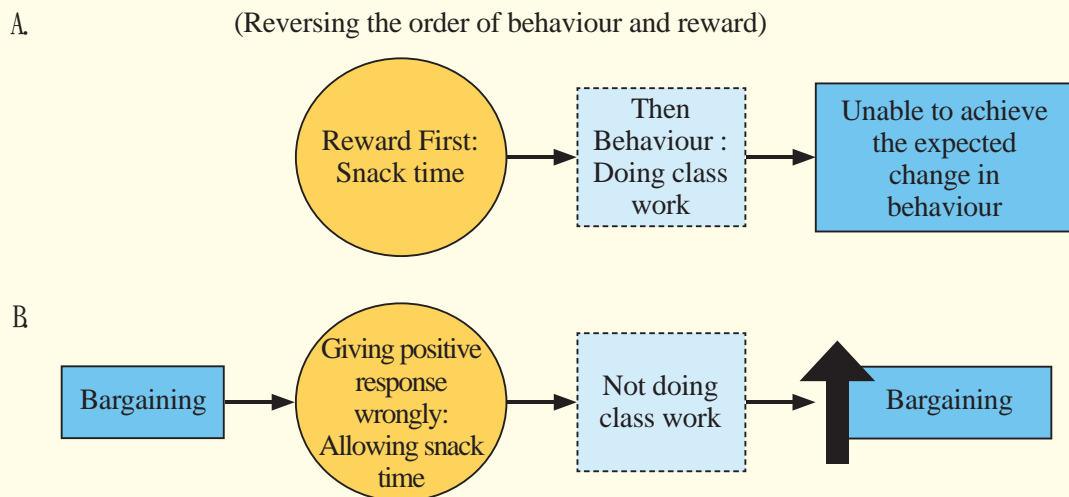
When child A disciplines himself and does his class work but gets no attention from the teacher, whereas by contrast, child B refuses to do class work and the teacher spends a lot of time with that child; over time, child A will lose his motivation to behave well.

### Suggested management:

- John disciplined himself and did his class work. The teacher should praise and encourage him, either verbally or with positive attention.
- By contrast, Mason refused to do his class work and was disruptive in class. The teacher can use logical consequence or quiet time mentioned above to deal with his inappropriate behaviour.

### 3. Reversing the Order of Behaviour and Reward/Consequence

Sarah kept fidgeting with stationery, looking around and did not concentrate in her class work. Seeing all other children except her were getting ready for snacks after finishing class work, Sarah asked the teacher, “Teacher, I’m hungry. I want to do class work after I’ve had my tea.” The teacher agreed to her request, hoping that she would finish her class work after snack time.

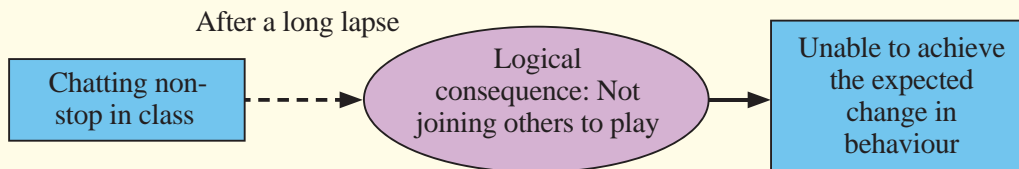


Always give reward/consequence after behaviour according to the behavioural principle. After children have performed certain behaviour, we can then give them a reward (such as their preferred things or activities). As in the above example, Sarah should be allowed snack time (reward) after she has finished class work (behaviour). Never reverse the order (Figure A). Otherwise, not only will the effort be futile, but the child will learn to bargain with the teacher more (Figure B).



#### 4. Long Time Lapse between the Behaviour and the Response / Consequence

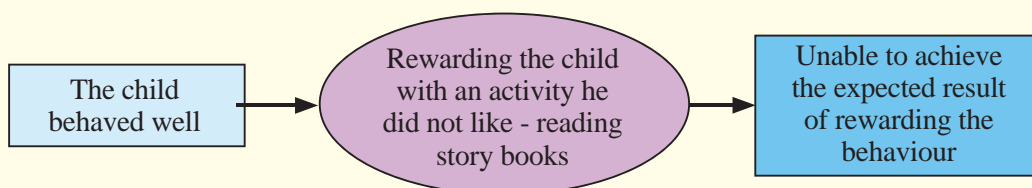
Timmy and Chester kept chatting in class. The teacher only gave them repeated reminders to concentrate without taking immediate actions. After class, the teacher did not allow Timmy and Chester to play but asked them to go for quiet time. Timmy and Chester were confused and unwilling to accept the instruction.



Whether it is praise, reward, logical consequence or time-out, it must be given immediately after the behaviour to achieve the best effect. Do not delay in responding to the behaviour.

#### 5. Giving Rewards Regardless of Children's Preferences

The teacher asked Charles to follow the rule of raising hand before answering questions and a behaviour reward chart was used. Charles performed the target behaviour well and the teacher let him read a story book as a reward. However, Charles protested, "Teacher, I don't like reading story books!"



Every child varies in personality, interests and preferences. Teachers must first understand children's preferences to identify whether the reward/response given is reinforcing or negative. Be flexible in using rewards to reinforce desirable behaviour or applying strategies to reduce inappropriate behaviour.