

DEVELOPING APPROPRIATE AND RESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOUR

Keep it simple. (For you and the kids benefit!)

Appropriate and Responsible Behaviour is a natural consequence of the 3R's:

Respect and Responsibility for Self
Respect and Responsibility for Each Other
Respect and Responsibility for Law and Country

Importantly this is also a reflection of traditional Indigenous culture. Validate the 3R's to the children by inviting the Elders to "unveil" a notice in each classroom displaying the 3R's and explaining why they so important to their culture and their survival, personally and as a tribe.

Reinforcing the children's identity ie who they are, their beliefs about themselves and their heritage, creates expectations about their own behaviour and how they should be treated by others eg "Your culture and people have survived longer than any other culture on earth because you respected each other."

(Make a prominently displayed Time Line to give children perspective on the success of their cultures continuously over tens of thousands of years compared to cultures in the rest of the world. Indicate important events like large fauna in Australia, end of last ice age, pyramids, start of Jewish, Christian and Muslim religions, world wars etc, introduction of voting, compulsory education for children etc)

eg 'we don't hurt animals unnecessarily because we respect country'

eg 'we eat good food because we respect ourselves'

Ask the AT's and Elders to help you and the students make a list of words that describe what has made their tribe such survivors eg spiritual connection to the land and each other, caring, sense of fun, joyful, independent, self sufficient, responsible, fantastic parents, law abiding, sharing, encourage and support each other etc etc.

Developing a strong identity gives children an internal guide book of personal descriptors and "rules" to follow when choices have to be made and life gets tough. A teenager who sees themselves as independent and responsible (personal identity) with a sense of belonging to a larger tribal or family group that values these qualities (group identity), will be in a much better position to make constructive choices regardless of peer pressure.

eg If your personal identity says you respect yourself and others, then drinking to excess is inconsistent with who you are as a person (identity).

Even if the family "rules" are destructive eg expectations of binge drinking, schools can help children develop a personal and cultural identity that provides alternative models of behaviour and gives them the confidence to challenge distortions of family "culture" that may have evolved. This autonomy in decision making is not only consistent with Indigenous culture it is one of its greatest strengths for individual and group survival.

Traditional culture is rich in stories that are metaphors for socially appropriate behaviour that fosters social cohesion and individual wellbeing. Refer to the stories and have Elders come into the school regularly to tell, read and discuss them.

To create desired behaviour:

- Focus on the Positive

Reinforce the behaviour you want at every opportunity in a continuous “drip feed”. Explain why the behaviour is desirable by relating it back to the 3R’s and the personal and tribal identity descriptors eg “That was great the way you all helped each other. Just the way your mob have always done”.

(Note: If you are trying to change behaviour it takes seven positive reinforcers for every one negative!)

- Undesirable behaviour

Explain these consequences to the students so that they clearly understand each step.

Step1

REMIND student why behaviour is undesirable using 3R’s as reference, especially remind them how their behaviour is disrespectful to their friends.

eg “You can choose not to learn for yourself, but you can’t interfere with other student’s right to learn. Especially when knowledge is so important to your culture.”

Step2

WARN student of consequences if still not complying but use a neutral tone of voice that makes it clear the behaviour is a choice the STUDENT is making not some problem you have to solve.

eg “It’s up to you, its your choice. You can either behave appropriately for what we are doing in the class or go to the thinking spot”

Step3

TIME OUT or “THINKING SPOT”

This is NOT punishment. It is a choice that the student makes:

Choice 1 Appropriate Responsible Behaviour for the task

Choice 2 Time on the thinking spot (one minute for each year of age up to ten minutes)
Use a timer that the child can see. At the end of time out, acknowledge it is over, but avoid eye contact and use a neutral tone of voice
eg “Times up mate”.

Initially your spot (or spots) may need to be outside the classroom (under supervision?) but as students realise this is their choice and nobody else’s, you will find spots can be inside the classroom.

If a child appears to be genuinely preferring to be in time out, it may be because they cannot handle something occurring in the classroom eg teasing, level of the work, not enough kinaesthetic learning strategies etc.

Most students are quite stunned when confronted with the fact that they are responsible for their behaviour and only they can decide how they behave. Every time they take responsibility for their behaviour, they empower themselves.

(Some Indigenous people feel this concept can be in conflict with cultural understanding of responsibility. However very old Elders I have spoken to around Australia over many years, have told me this is not the case. Rather, they say that younger Indigenous people have been misled by “white fellas’ and religions’ interpretations of black fella ways”. I have been told this is also relevant to distortions surrounding the real nature and purpose of payback (“restoring balance”, “explaining rather than blaming”).

Note: There is enormous variation around Australia in how Indigenous people view their contact with Religion. Some have embraced religion with loving acceptance, others are extremely angry and hostile towards its influence

HARRASSMENT AND TEASING

Bullying behaviour, whether verbal or nonverbal is not about individuals: bullies and victims. Very few people will resist bullying others if the social environment allows it to occur (especially when bullying is actually rewarded).

In one famous experiment 90% of people were prepared to give painful electric shocks to people if told to do so by someone who they felt had more authority or power than they did. Therefore if you want to stop bullying you have to create a social environment where it cannot occur ie where bullying behaviour is incompatible with “who we are” (identity).

The simplest and most effective way to do this is to insist that behaviour in the school is governed by the following themes:

- School is a safe place at all times for everyone.
- This safe place happens because everyone is always treated with respect.
- Being respectful is part of “who I am” (relate to Cultural Identity Descriptors and 3R’s).
- Each person is responsible for their behaviour and how they choose to react to others.

These themes stop irrelevant and often silly discussions over what degree of harassment is “significant” and whether someone is ‘too sensitive’.

The guiding issue becomes: **“Was the behaviour, tone of voice or body language respectful of the other person?”**

NO actions of disrespect should be ignored as it diminishes not only the individual but undermines the strength and cohesiveness of the whole group (class, school, family, community).

Once you focus on whether encounters are respectful (and therefore honour each person’s personal and group identity), and then positively recognise and reinforce that constructive behaviour, bullying teasing and harassment become incompatible with the identity of the school and individuals

How to Achieve This!

1. Must be a whole school approach. (Some schools have to extend this to parents).
2. Actively teach these themes relating them back to cultural identity (3R's).

You will need to make sure that students understand how body language, tone of voice and what you actually say are all important.

Get them to act out scenarios, especially where the words may be the same but tone and body language totally change the meaning.

To help students realise the benefits of the 3R's to themselves as well as everyone else, get them to explore and discuss the following activity and questions:

- Act out and discuss what it FEELS like to be treated respectfully vs disrespectfully. Especially talk about how watching somebody else being treated disrespectfully makes you feel: safe or unsafe in the group??
 - Look at grown ups you know. Who is happy and loved? Who is unhappy and not liked?
 - What behaviour makes you feel good inside? What behaviour makes you feel churned up and uncomfortable inside?
3. Actively teach students to become aware of their own thoughts (“yarning in their head”) and how those thoughts determine how they feel and then choose to behave ie it is not situations that cause us to feel certain things but what we tell ourselves about those situations.

(For an easy to read overview of this process read the first few chapters of my book “Twelve Secrets of Health and Happiness” Penquin 1997 available to read on line or download at my web site www.louisesamways.com.au)

“Mind Matters” and “Kids Matter” programs also looks at thought processes and behaviour but check with AT's for appropriate cultural content)

4. Teach the basic steps for Conflict Resolution

Consider each persons needs and concerns (fears), and then find a solution that meets each parties needs and concerns: win win. (A simple step by step procedure is explained in my book).

5. Use the Remind, Warn, “Thinking Spot” technique already outlined, and your School's Discipline Policy with family involvement for repeat offenders.
6. How should students respond to teasing?

Once a non teasing culture is established ignoring someone's inappropriate comment can be the best approach as it gives a subtle but effective message “I'm not playing that game”. However, if teasing is rampant and generally accepted, this approach of **ignoring and avoidance may reduce the incidence of violent reactions, but won't change the behaviour or bullying culture.**

Instead in the context of the whole school approach discussed above, teach the children to confront the teasing.

First they have to decide in their own head “How much power do I want to give this person over how I feel?” (read the case study “Frank” p47 of “Twelve Secrets of Health and Happiness).

No matter what is being said the words only have as much power as YOU decide to give the person at that particular time. Realising this, and particularly practising it in role plays can diminish the impact of words enough to be able to confront the teaser(s) by saying:

“When you talk like that, it sounds to me as if you don’t respect yourself and who you are” (naming their tribe may be appropriate). This takes the focus off what was said about the victim and onto the behaviour of the bully.

(Note: Even when the person treating you badly is someone whose regard you usually value highly eg friend, parent, teacher, if THEIR behaviour is disrespectful towards you then you have the right to dismiss it. A lesson in how to criticise respectfully and valid use of authority may be needed).

I must stress that this approach while extremely effective should be discussed with the AT’s and Community Elders first, so that they understand the reasoning behind it.

In some families (non Indigenous and Indigenous) teasing, put downs and general harassment occurs because people don’t know alternative strategies for either conflict resolution or parenting and disciplining children. This behaviour will be modelled by students at school unless they are given alternative strategies and the school insists on being a safe place.

Of course it cannot be emphasised enough how much consistency (across classrooms and in school grounds) is important. In the classroom the best indicators that teasing is occurring are often nonverbal (until a fight breaks out). If you sense something is going on, stop the class immediately and clarify what is happening. Don’t ignore your suspicions.

(See also handout “Strategies to Promote a Positive, Caring, Safe Environment”)

Louise Samways 2007

louise@louisesamways.com.au