

# Teaching Students to Ignore Misbehavior

(Excerpt from *The Solution Book*, Topic Booklet D)

## Teaching Students to Ignore Misbehavior

If the teacher ignores a misbehaving student, but other students watch the student or tell the teacher what the student is doing or talk to the student, the teacher's inattention will probably lose its effectiveness. Attention from other students may be enough to keep the student misbehaving. If you use the ignoring strategy, teach your students how to ignore as well.

Training students how to ignore can be done in two steps. The first step is to give a five- to ten-minute lesson on what is meant by ignoring. The second step is to give students some practical experience in ignoring and feedback on how to ignore effectively.

In the initial training session, begin by discussing why the ignoring strategy is being used. Then practice role playing until students begin to understand that ignoring a misbehaving person means that the person "is not there." The discussion and practice session might go something like this:

*"Class, there may be times in this room when someone is acting silly and misbehaving. When this happens, I would rather ignore that person and concentrate my attention on students who are working hard and behaving themselves. I may not pay any attention to the student who is misbehaving. This is called 'ignoring.' Ignoring means that while someone is misbehaving, we pretend that person is not even there.*

*"Ignoring is meant to show someone who misbehaves that we do not pay attention to silly behavior in our classroom. When I'm ignoring someone because that person is being silly, it would help me if all of you would ignore that person too. Now, this isn't easy to do. If someone is making noise, you'll have to keep on working as though the noise does not bother you at all. If someone is out of his or her seat, you'll have to pretend that the person is not even around. Each of you will have to take care of yourself and not worry about what someone else is doing; you won't worry about tattling on a student or about telling a student what to do or not do. When we ignore someone, we let that person figure out the best way to behave.*

*"Now, let's play a game. Let's see who can ignore misbehavior. Everybody, take out a book and open it. It doesn't matter which book. Just pretend that you're reading the book. I'm going to come around and bother you. I want to see if you are able to ignore me."*

Go to a student and gently pull on a sleeve. If the student looks up, begins to laugh, or responds to you in any way, turn away immediately. Say, *"She couldn't do it. Boy, this is hard. I'm looking for someone who can pretend that I'm not even here."* Go to another student and pull on a sleeve. If the student responds, repeat the statement above. If the student is successful in ignoring you, say, *"Wow, class, look at this. Lauren is ignoring me. I'm pulling on her sleeve and she's just pretending to read her book. That's what ignoring is all about."*

Continue going from student to student. Quickly turn away from any student who cannot ignore you. Praise any student who can successfully ignore you while you're tugging on a sleeve. Repeat this procedure until almost all the students are successful at ignoring you. Then say, *"I'm very pleased at how well all of you have learned to ignore. From now on, when someone in our classroom is misbehaving, I'm going to be counting on the rest of you to be mature enough to ignore that person and to stay on task."*

This role-playing session serves only to introduce the students to what ignoring means. Students will require consistent feedback. The first time that someone misbehaves after the role-playing session, ignore the student. Look at the other students in the class. If any students are ignoring the misbehavior, praise them. Let them know how mature and helpful you consider them to be. If no students are ignoring the misbehavior, say, *"I'm looking to see if any people in this class can ignore a misbehavior. Great, Greg is doing his math and Dot is working on her science lesson. That's really neat. Now I see that Stuart and Humphrey are doing their work. That's really helpful. You're doing your work and are ignoring the fact that someone is acting silly. Thank you."*

In order for the ignoring strategy to be effective, you and your students must be consistent in ignoring the misbehaving student.

NOTE: Don't let the students assume that the misbehaving student is ignored altogether; ignoring occurs merely when he or she is engaged in misbehavior. The ignoring strategy should never be used by the teacher or students as an excuse for failing to interact with a particular student. Ignoring means that certain behaviors are ignored but never that a person is ignored.