

How to Handle a Student Who Habitually Calls Out

This week's article is in response to a cavalcade of questions regarding one of the most frustrating classroom management issues. Namely, how do you deal with a student who, despite receiving consequence after consequence, continues to call out in class?

Before we get to the solution, it's important to note that there are times during a normal school day when you may want to allow your students to respond to you or their fellow classmates without raising their hand. Small-group instruction, certain learning games, and discussion of read-alouds are a few possible examples.

These moments, however, must be clearly and narrowly defined—because unless there is thorough understanding of how to join the flow of give-and-take conversation, it will negatively, and often severely, affect your learning environment.

For the majority of the time the practice of hand raising should be in play. After all, done correctly, it serves a critical role. By allowing every student the freedom to voice their thoughts, ideas, and questions without fear of interruption, it safeguards fair participation of all.

For most students simply following your classroom management plan is enough to eliminate calling out. But occasionally you may come across a student who can't seem to get a handle on it.

Typically, but not always, it comes from a new student—beginning of the school year or otherwise—who has acquired the habit of calling out because in her (or his) previous classroom it was the only way to be heard.

Like a lion cub that doesn't get enough to eat, she has learned that she must assert herself or get pushed to the margins.

What follows is a solution to help her break the habit quickly and with compassion.

Provide assurances.

A student with a compulsion to call out needs your assurance. She needs to hear from you personally that raising her hand will guarantee her an equal opportunity to express herself. It's a promise you make while looking her in the eye.

By the same token, she also needs to know that you will never respond to her when she calls out. Hearing this plainly and clearly from you will relieve a good deal of the internal stress that is causing the habit.

Prove it.

You must now prove to her, and to all your students, that you only call on and respond to those with their hand up. Answering even one call-out will further engrain her bad habit and encourage others to do the same.

Because when you respond to those who fail to raise their hand, you send the message that they have to compete to be heard—which leads to more and more calling out, hand waving, and other disruptive behavior.

Look, but don't respond.

If, after speaking to her privately, she calls out again, which is likely, it's best not to follow conventional advice and simply ignore her. Ignoring the behavior will invite an even more vocal and disruptive form of the behavior.

Instead, make brief but pleasant eye contact with her (2-3 seconds) and then call on someone else. The eye contact acts as an unmistakable reminder of your previous conversation, and she'll understand what it means right away. Continue to do this whenever she calls out.

Let her experience success.

When you do notice her sitting quietly with her hand raised—and you will—casually call on her like you would any other student. Don't make a big deal or offer rewards or praise. A simple smile will suffice. Let her experience her success, on her own terms, down deep where new habits form.

Also, be sure and give her wide latitude in answering your questions or expressing her ideas. When she's finished, pause and move on like it's the most normal thing in the world. Then let the good moment permeate.

Enforce.

It's best during this process not to enforce a consequence. Wait until she settles into her success for a day or two, then pull her aside and tell her that you'll be enforcing a consequence from now on.

This final step will ensure that she won't backslide. If another student asks why you're not giving her consequences like everyone else, just be honest. *"Because she's new and is learning how we do things."*

Your Word

Responding to students who call out is the very thing that encourages it—along with encouraging a host of other disruptive behavior. More troubling, it feeds on itself, growing stronger and more urgent the more you allow it.

And sadly, amidst the disruption, hand waving, and yelling of answers are the shy, quiet personalities, relegated to the periphery because of their unwillingness to battle for attention along with the other lion cubs.

To reverse this harmful behavior you must teach, model, and explain to all your students in a highly detailed way the how and why of hand raising and the many ways in which it benefits them and their fair and happy classroom.

You must then prove to be a person of your word. You must show your students through your consistent behavior, and commitment to your classroom management plan, that their thoughts and ideas are important, valued, and beneficial to all.

