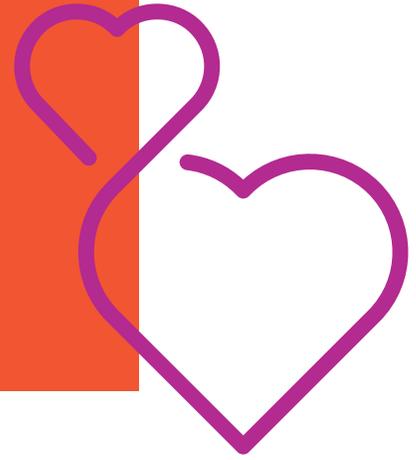


# Proactive Classroom Tweaks That Prevent Challenging Behavior



Every **behavior is a message** — a clue to what a student needs, fears, or hopes for. In inclusive classrooms, our greatest power lies not in how we respond to behavior, but in how we **design learning environments** that make challenging behavior less likely to emerge in the first place.

The following tweaks are grounded in **neuroscience, trauma-informed practices, and inclusive design**. These aren't add-ons or behavior management tricks — they are *foundational teaching moves* that create classrooms where students feel safe, connected, and motivated.

*Use this handout to reflect, adapt, and try just one small tweak at a time. Be sure to click on any underlined phrase for even more strategies and solutions.*

## 1. START WITH STRENGTHS

Build your entire approach from what students do well. Incorporate student talents, interests, and sensory preferences into tasks and routines using tools like the Strength-Based Grid.

- *When students feel valued, seen, and capable, they are more cooperative and confident.*

## 2. EMBED RITUALS OF CONNECTION

Open the day or class period with a quick connection moment: a check-in, greeting ritual, question of the day, or light-hearted activity.

- *Regulated behavior starts with relationship. Safety is the intervention.*

## 3. OFFER REAL CHOICE, OFTEN

Empower students by offering choice in what they learn, how they show understanding, where they sit, or who they work with.

Here are 101 ideas for doing just that.

- *Choice increases motivation and reduces power struggles. Students feel in control of their experience.*

## 4. PREDICTABLE ROUTINES + VISUAL SUPPORTS

Use visual schedules, timers, and consistent routines. Preview changes. Practice transitions.

- *Predictability reduces anxiety and supports executive functioning — for everyone, not just students with IEPs.*

## 5. TEACH EXPECTATIONS PROACTIVELY

Don't assume students "should know better." Teach, model, and practice routines for common activities like entering the room, asking for help, or managing materials.

- *Clarity prevents chaos. Students thrive when they understand what's expected.*

## 6. PRE-CORRECTION IS A QUIET SUPERPOWER

Give gentle reminders of expectations before tricky moments — “What will respectful partner work look like today?” or “Let’s remember our hallway voices.”

- *Anticipation prevents escalation. A simple preview can redirect behavior before it occurs.*

## 7. MAKE REGULATION TOOLS AVAILABLE TO ALL

Provide calming tools — noise-canceling headphones, fidgets, breathing visuals, cool-down prompts — that anyone can access freely, without stigma.

- *Students self-regulate more often when tools are normalized and available without asking.*

## 8. INCORPORATE SENSORY + MOVEMENT BREAKS

Intentionally build in time for movement, stretching, sensory activities, or walks — not just when behavior goes off track.

- *Physical regulation supports focus, mood, and engagement.*

## 9. DESIGN FOR ACCESS — NOT PERMISSION

Apply Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles to ensure all students can access learning in multiple ways — regardless of labels or diagnoses.

- *Planning with inclusion in mind prevents frustration-based behavior later.*

## 10. CREATE PREDICTABLE RELATIONSHIPS, NOT JUST SYSTEMS

Use strategies like the 2x10 rule — 2 minutes of connection for 10 consecutive days — to build rapport, especially with students who often feel misunderstood.

- *Connection before correction changes everything.*

## 11. MOTIVATE WITH PURPOSEFUL, ENGAGING TASKS

Engage students with tasks that are interesting, relevant, hands-on, and scaffolded to their level. Avoid busywork and aim for meaning.

- *Engagement reduces misbehavior. When students are invested, they don't need to seek stimulation elsewhere.*

## 12. REFRAME BEHAVIOR AS COMMUNICATION

Invite educators to shift their lens: instead of asking, “What’s wrong with this student?” ask, “What are they trying to tell me?”

- *This compassionate shift leads to better responses, not just better rules.*

## 13. DITCH PUBLIC BEHAVIOR SYSTEMS

Avoid clip charts, token boards, or public callouts. Use private conversations, reflection tools, or restorative check-ins instead.

- *Preserves dignity. Punishment doesn't teach — connection does.*

## 14. TEACH REGULATION AS A SKILL FOR EVERYONE

Use class-wide mini-lessons on feelings, zones of regulation, mindfulness, and coping strategies. Model your own emotional awareness.

- *Self-regulation isn't for “certain kids” — it's for all humans.*

## 15. DESIGN FOR FLOW

Create tasks with the right balance of challenge + support so students enter a state of flow — where time passes quickly and focus deepens.

- *When learning is immersive, behavior challenges disappear.*

## 16. REGULATED ADULTS → REGULATED CLASSROOMS

Model calm, use co-regulation strategies, and tend to your own nervous system. You could even post this reminder:

“Students borrow our calm. Or our chaos.”

- *Students sense our energy. Our regulation is a powerful teaching tool.*



**Shift Classroom Culture:**  
Stop Send-Outs with Calm,  
Strength-Based Response

**START HERE**

**Behavior Breakthrough:**  
In this free video + handout, learn how to stop send-outs and start using strength-based responses to manage student behavior.

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