



Top 10 Signs Students Will Become Disruptive

1. **Blurting** – some students just can't seem to follow the protocol for attention. It could be they are impulsive or that they are so excited about their idea, blurting when it relates to what is being taught is redirectable. However, blurting that doesn't contribute will often be a sign of more things to come.
2. **Disrespect toward the teacher or peers** – students that have that tone, I am sure you know what I am talking about, or that constantly question or say things that are rude – this degrades culture and often invites copycat behavior.
3. **Body Splays** – the more territory the student takes up, typically the more they do not respect the authority – finding a way to limit their space, outside of their intimate space is super helpful. The structure of their body just encourages a disengaged passive stance and it won't move them to doing academics.
4. **Constant requests for the bathroom, water fountain or the nurse** – typically more than 2 per a one-hour block is considered excessive. It could also be that they spend significant time there. I will be the first to say that sometimes you need some bathroom time – it happens – however, making hourly requests isn't good for classroom engagement or completing work.
5. **Cross-Dialogue with Peers** – that isn't related to the current lesson. This could be verbally, non-verbally, or through a device.
6. **Lack of eye contact** – and not because they are looking down at their work but because they are avoiding eye contact or are not engaged. This does not apply to the student that is anxious and is cocooned into themselves, they could be listening to every word, or distracted by internal thoughts, more investigation is probably needed on that student but they are typically not going to become disruptive.
7. **Periodic Perching** – that sounds like it should be something fancy, doesn't it? It just means that they are moving to the edge of their seat, and sometimes they are glancing around also, but it's typically because they are bored and are trying to wake themselves up, or they are looking for a target. Boredom is often an indicator that something may happen that is not conducive to creating a learning environment.
8. **Continuous body motion** – this could be because they look angry or just because they cannot sit still, which will often lead to more impulsive behavior. With elementary aged students look for weight on the balls of the feet and circling movements. These behaviors are a dead give-away that things are not going to go well.
9. **Scanning eye gaze** – I will often ask staff in trainings what they are looking for when they are scanning like this... PREY, that is what they are looking for. They are seeking something to provide them with the feedback they are looking for. This is another one that often comes from boredom or the need for more feedback.
10. **Dropped chin** – and they aren't reading or writing – this can often lead to a body splay.

Connection, this is always the key ingredient. If we were making a smoothie it would be all the fruit and vegetables, without it we could not make the smoothie. It's the foundation for all the other components.

Top 10 Strategies to Reduce Stress

1. Reduce the use of fluorescents - Fluorescent lights can cause stress on the nervous system. Many students are impacted by Irlen Syndrome, which affects the brain's ability to process visual information. Since most teaching is visual/auditory rather than kinesthetic, this can impact the ability of a learner to learn.
2. Have students store their belongings under their desk - Many students that are in 6th grade or below come into school with energy that is not always conducive to sitting still and doing work; whereas high school students lack that energy until much later in the day. Many school schedules have not caught up with this, so providing these students with a natural boost can be beneficial. Having items underneath the desk can provide this boost as it forces the student to bend over and collect their items, which releases serotonin from the gut into the bloodstream, which can put the student temporarily on track. It won't keep them regulated for the long term but it will help for a few minutes and may provide a distraction that can help to get them back on track.
3. Try standing stations - We are not meant to sit, and students that are either prone to sleeping or have a lot of energy (often kinesthetic learners), will function much better if they are standing. The proprioception required to stand forces the body to focus for a bit and can help to keep the person engaged. Although the typical style is sitting, offering a standing station can provide students with choices that will benefit them and allow them to access their most productive learning style. As times continue to change and student needs evolve, adapting teaching methods to meet the diverse needs of learners is essential.
4. HIIT - I realize that many students do not want to work out at school but the research is clear that 'short-burst training' can help to raise endorphins, lift mood, and help an individual to feel more energized. Participating in high intensity exercise even for a few moments can push more oxygen into the brain and the larger amino acids into the muscles, which allows individuals to have greater access to the prefrontal cortex. In a school setting, this can be done by having a student deliver things upstairs. It may not be practical for an entire class to participate in this task together, but those with higher fitness levels can participate in the deliveries while other students could possibly move their desks and chairs for an activity.
5. Water, Water, Water - Water is a natural regulator for all humans. The sight of water, the sound of water, videos of water. Students can come into a class watching a video of a waterfall. If you notice that a student is becoming agitated in class you could put on the sound of rain. If you have a student who needs a movement break, they could fill water bottles (I often keep an empty one with me for this purpose). You could also have students water plants. Water will work for almost everyone.
6. Appreciation, Connection & Productivity - Take roll calls by asking each student about their favorite meal, pet, or school activity; this provides the appreciation. The class can then comment on their statement, which provides the connection. After roll call is taken have the students get out the supplies needed for the activity or set up; this provides productivity. This may sound like an odd activity, and typically it takes about 5-7 minutes for a class of 17 to 24 students. This activity helps to prime the prefrontal cortex for learning because it releases serotonin, dopamine and oxytocin. Using this strategy is a great way to foster a positive and supportive classroom environment each day, as this is really a recipe for learning.

7. Take a breath - I know this sounds obvious, but I will say that taking a breath that regulates the body is vital, and it is different from the way that most of us breathe. The breath should have the stomach rising on the inhale and the exhalation should be longer than the inhalation. If you can pause with the air in the lungs when the breath is taken in, this will also help to promote regulation. For elementary students do a '4-4-6 breath', breathe in for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds, exhale for 6 seconds. For middle school students do a '6-6-8 breath', breathe in for 6 seconds, hold for 6 seconds, exhale for 8 seconds. For high school students do a '7-7-11 breath', breathe in for 7 seconds, hold for 7 seconds, exhale for 11 seconds. Pick the breath that works for your population. Sometimes, I will audibly practice these breathing techniques near students and they copy me, which helps tremendously and makes it so that you don't have to instruct them in the technique directly. At times you can provide the direct instruction and it is appropriate, but when dealing with an agitated student I have found that modeling the breathing can be much more effective.
8. Vagus Nerve Stimulation - This is important because this very important nerve helps to regulate the body and is vital in the amygdala being triggered or not. Just a reminder, the amygdala is the part of the brain that is responsible for 'freeze, flight, submit, fight', and I put them in that order as that is typically how they occur. The vagus nerve needing stimulation is the reason why you may rub your eyes or face when you are in a stressful situation, as the nerve sends information from the body to the brain. When the vagus nerve gets stressed or compressed, it can actually increase agitation and stress. This often happens in individuals who experience higher levels of anxiety and escalation. The easiest way to stimulate the vagus nerve is to have a person receive pressure on their forehead. Have the students them their heads down for a few minutes on their desk. This is a great opportunity to provide students and staff with a break from learning/teaching as it can help to give some downtime in between lessons. Humming, buzzing and singing can also provide stimulation to the vagus nerve. When I work with students who are typically agitated I will often ask if they can join chorus and/or band where I encourage them to play a wind instrument to help with stimulation of the vagus nerve.
9. Proprioception - This can be a huge help. During roll call you can ask that the students balance on one foot and sometimes pass a ball at the same time. One staff actually made a game for her middle schoolers where she would have them throw a weighted ball into squares and create math equations out of the activity. Even moving furniture around the classroom can be helpful. Avoid vestibular activities at school except if you are working with a student who is very fatigued. Vestibular activities include spinning, bouncing, rolling and anything that keeps the person on the balls of their feet, although most swinging is also included (which is why I always say that you need to swing a good 10 minutes or more to get to a point where it is no longer escalating the nervous system). Integrating proprioceptive activities and movements throughout the day can help students to stay on track for longer durations of time.
10. Reduce movements and sounds that can be viewed by other students - This can take some creative classroom setup. For students who are escalated by seeing motion near them, situate them so they don't see students coming and going and they may benefit from station dividers. Use white noise if you have students that are auditory aware or have them use noise canceling headphones or listen to Mozart or binaural beats. Binaural beats help to synchronize the brainwaves which enhances specific brain patterns. Each brainwave serves a different purpose and when gamma waves are reached; it promotes concentration. This specific music can help them focus on the activity they are engaged in. Incorporating mindfulness and relaxation techniques is also a great way for movement to be minimized and for the classroom to turn into a calmer atmosphere.

