

# Externalizing Behaviours in Classroom and School Settings

## Background

One of the challenges educators face is recognizing students in crisis who suffer from struggles beyond those of typically developing youth. Educators often interact with hundreds of students per day, making this task difficult. Being able to understand Externalizing Behaviours and Internalizing Behaviours (please see the brief entitled *Internalizing Behaviours*) as trauma responses is one way educators can engage in trauma-sensitive practices.

## What are Externalizing Behaviours?

Externalizing behaviours are generally easy to notice, as they are external and typically represent immediate interruptions to classroom instruction. Externalizing behaviours refer to behaviors directed outward toward the social environment.



## Forms of Externalizing Behaviours



### Aggression

- often manifests itself as deliberate verbal and/or physical threats toward peers and school staff. Physical actions can include kicking, hitting, biting, etc., that cause physical harm.

### Difficult Temperment

- often manifests itself in two different ways. The first involves students engaging in behavior that persistently defies established rules. Examples of these rules in the classroom may be frequently challenging assigned seating, recurring requests to use the restroom, using the pencil sharpener unannounced, and being noticeably loud during instruction. The second form involves persistent argumentative behavior and/or unreasonable demands.



### Behavioural Impulsivity

- often manifests itself as sudden outbursts, inattention, or disorganization. These outbursts may involve the destruction of school property (from pencils to windows).

## Practical Trauma-Sensitive Suggestions:

- Modeling reacting to externalized behaviours in positive/thoughtful ways to make the negative behaviours less attractive to the student(s).
- Understanding a student's externalized behaviours as a possible trauma response, and not taking them personally.
- Providing students reminders of what behaviour is expected in the classroom and modeling what is expected at all times.
- Reinforcing expectations by using specific praise: example - delivering approximately five examples of specific praise for every corrective comment made.
- Having a conversation about the behaviour: for example - providing positive alternatives to externalized behaviours; the hope being that changes in behaviour will provide new opportunities for the student to obtain socially acceptable reinforcement.
- Building a relationship of trust with the student: For example - increasing the frequency of reciprocal interactions during non-instructional times.
- Being as specific as possible when addressing student behaviour: for example - using the student's name and the reason for the response are ways educators can be specific in addressing behaviours.
- Responding to behaviour immediately and appropriately, quickly after the behaviour's occurrence providing stronger connections between the behaviour and an appropriate strategy.
- Providing accurate and consistent options and resources to proactively minimize disruptive behaviours and increase positive classroom behaviours.
- Setting goals with the student for engaging in positive behaviours and experiences through self-regulation and mindfulness engagements.
- Developing a community of support inclusive of other teachers, school-based/community-based counselors, and family members/caregivers, that may result in establishing accommodations supportive of the student.

When externalizing behaviours are understood as symptoms/trauma-responses, educators can interact in trauma-sensitive, rather than punitive, ways supportive of the student and of their growth and development.

For all references and more information please see the full report