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# Table of Contents

<b>Part One: Building the Foundation</b> .....	8
<b>Section 1- Resistant Behavior in Students</b> .....	10
•What is Resistance Behavior? .....	11
•The Rules of Resistant Students .....	14
•The Goals of Resistant Behavior .....	18
•Resistant Behavior and Learning Disorders: Is There a Connection? .....	20
•Resistant Behavior and Loss .....	22
•The Foundations for Appropriate Behavior .....	23
<b>Section 2 - Twenty-Seven Strategies for Improving     Classroom Management</b> .....	24
1. Creating a Classroom Structure .....	25
2. The Importance of Consistency .....	27
3. Emotional Safety .....	28
4. Creating a Classroom Culture .....	30
5. Using the Culture of Students .....	32
6. The “F” Word .....	34
7. A Classroom Identity .....	36
8. Family or Factory .....	38
9. Reducing Distractions .....	40
10. Effective Furniture Arrangement .....	42
11. Teacher Movement .....	44
12. Competition-vs-Cooperation .....	45
13. Effective Grouping .....	47
14. Involving Students in Decisions .....	49
15. The Moan and Groan Box .....	51
16. Involving Parents .....	53
17. Student Contracts .....	54
18. Classroom Goals .....	56
19. Peer Helpers .....	58
20. Know Your Gatekeepers .....	60
21. Status and Recognition .....	61
22. Robot Names .....	63
23. Building Walls or Roads .....	64

# Table of Contents

continued...

24. The Hot Seat .....	66
25. The Unexpected .....	67
26. Have A Way Out .....	69
27. Arrange for Backup .....	70

## ***Part Two: Effective Strategies for Intervention.....71***

### **Section 1 - Assessing Resistant Behavior .....73**

•Gathering Information From Others .....	75
•Gathering Information From the Student .....	78
•Assessing for Loss Issues .....	80
•Precursors for Change.....	82
•Creating Support .....	84
•Developing a Plan .....	87

### **Section 2 - Intervention Strategies for Resistant Behaviors .....89**

•Precursors for Change Revisited .....	90
Sense of Necessity .....	91
Ready for Anxiety .....	93
Awareness .....	95
Confronting the Problem .....	97
Effort .....	98
Hope .....	99
Social Support .....	101
•A Dictionary of Interventions .....	102
Acting Out .....	103
Arguing .....	105
Attention Seeking .....	106
Blurting Out .....	107
Carelessness .....	108
Cheating .....	109
Clowning .....	110
Domineering Behavior .....	111
Forgetfulness .....	112
Impoliteness .....	113
Insubordination .....	114

# Table of Contents

continued...

Lying .....	115
Name-Calling .....	116
Noisiness .....	117
Obscene Language.....	118
Procrastination .....	119
Stealing .....	120
Tattling.....	121
Temper Tantrums .....	122
Whining .....	123
<b>Part Three: Motivation and Reinforcement .....</b>	<b>124</b>
<b>Section 1 - Motivating and Reinforcing Change in Resistant Students .....</b>	<b>126</b>
• Gathering More Information .....	127
• Getting Parents on Board .....	129
• Good Deed Tickets .....	130
• The Phantom Foot .....	131
• Affirmation Stones .....	132
• Resistant Students and Basic Needs .....	133
Belonging.....	133
Power .....	134
Freedom.....	135
Fun .....	136
• Resistant Students and Learning Modalities .....	137
Visual Learners.....	137
Auditory Learners .....	139
Kinesthetic Learners .....	140
• Motivation Through Example .....	141
<b>Section 2 - Following the Ground Rules.....</b>	<b>142</b>
• There Are No More Enemies .....	143
• Take Care of Yourself .....	144
• Expect Miracles.....	145
• Stop The Insanity .....	146
<b>References .....</b>	<b>148</b>

# What is Resistant Behavior?

The issue of resistant behavior in children and adolescents is not a new issue for America's educators. However, elementary school teachers, counselors, and administrators increasingly report concerns within two areas. First, some educators believe that there is an increase in defiant and oppositional behavior among younger students. Second, they also believe that extremely resistant behavior is being observed at earlier ages. These beliefs are based on referrals for disciplinary action and special services. These concerns prompt elementary school educators to seek guidance and support for their efforts to manage and redirect the resistant behavior observed within their students.

Resistant behavior is often connected with a person's experiences and the related attitudes and perceptions regarding these experiences. Students who are resistant may display any or all of the following behaviors.

1. Refuses to fulfill routine social or occupational tasks
2. Complains of being misunderstood or unappreciated
3. Is argumentative
4. Is sullen
5. Criticizes or disrespects authority
6. Expresses resentment towards others
7. Displays verbal or physical defiance
8. Is pessimistic
9. Displays a negative attitude

According to O. Randall Braman (1997), resistant and oppositional behavior can be displayed in one of five categories. Each category can certainly describe the behavior of a specific student. However, many students demonstrate behaviors in multiple categories. The following is a brief description of each category

# STRATEGY 2: The Importance of Consistency

A critical component of a classroom structure is the need for the educator to be consistent with implementation and management of the structure. As soon as resistant students realize that the educator lacks consistency, the quicker they learn to manipulate the situation in order to gain both control and power. Consider these questions.

1. Do I consistently reinforce the rules in my classroom?  
Or do I reinforce them depending upon my mood?
2. Do I consistently apply the rules, consequences, and rewards to all students? Or do I let some students “slide?”
3. Are the rules in our school consistently reinforced by all educators?  
Or do some of my colleagues “drop the ball?” (Note: When resistant students discover that some educators do not support the school rules, they will learn to play one educator against another.)

Initially an educator may encounter more challenges by resistant students in regards to consistency. However, the quicker one models this behavior the quicker the students will understand the behavioral and academic standards and limits of the classroom. Remember that challenges to expectations are normal and, at times, necessary. In a sense, it's the student's way of testing the teacher. Once again to quote Ron Johnson, “Teachers have to establish order before they can teach.” Being consistent does not imply negative and forceful behavior on the part of the educator. It can certainly exist in a kind and supportive environment.

# STRATEGY 15: The Moan and Groan Box

An exciting way to involve students in classroom decisions is by using class meetings. William Glasser (1998) is a major proponent of class meetings. He feels that this strategy provides students with opportunities to practice cooperation, decision-making, and problem solving. In addition, it is an effective way to use positive peer influence to redirect resistant behavior. One unique way to structure class meetings is through the use of a "Moan and Groan Box." Tell the students that the class now has a "Moan and Groan Box". A "moan" is an inside the classroom problem. A "groan" is an outside of the classroom problem. Have the students design or decorate a box that now becomes the class' "Moan and Groan Box." Now tell the students that if they have any "moans" or "groans", that they can write them on a piece of paper and place them in the box. Once a week the box will be opened and the class will help the students with their problems.

There are, however, three rules.

1. We attack problems not people.
2. If we sign our names, it means that we want to talk to the teacher privately.
3. We respect privacy by not opening the box.



# STRATEGY 2: Gathering Information From The Student

An important consideration within the “information gathering arena” is the use of self-reports from students. Too often individuals fail to ask “the customer” to identify needs and concerns. An overlooked resource for gathering information is indeed the student in question. However, many resistant students are suspicious and/or threatened by the questions of adults when those questions are perceived as being either “too probing” or invasive. If this is the case, perhaps a subtle approach may prove more helpful. The following suggestions can assist the educator in gathering information from the student.

1. Have students write a story or draw a picture about themselves. In the case of the picture, have the students describe their drawings. One may discover new insights regarding the students based on these self-reports.
2. Conduct an informal conversation with the student. Perhaps you can talk during lunch period or recess time. Maintain a relaxed and informal situation. People tend to share more information when they feel comfortable and safe.
3. Conduct a personal interest inventory. This inventory may also prove to be a valuable tool for motivation. We will address this inventory again in Part Three. Here’s a sample inventory.

Name of Student \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

1. My favorite things include...

---

---

2. My special hobbies and interests are...

---

---

3. My friends include...

---

---

4. The things that make me feel happy are...

---

---

5. Things that frighten me are...

---

---

6. I become angry when...

---

---

7. At school I usually feel...

---

---

8. Away from school, I often feel....

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SAMPLE PAGE

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# Insubordination

An insubordinate student is unwilling to submit to authority. This type of resistant behavior is anchored in power struggles and a need to control and manipulate. At times, this student can behave in a revenge mode. An insubordinate student constantly “tests” the teacher to see if the teacher can be provoked. In general, this student requires more structure and a stricter and more serious learning environment. Begin with a close examination of the classroom organization. Is it inconsistent? Are the rules routinely followed? If these are not the cases, then the classroom structure needs to be improved. Once that occurs, these interventions may be useful.

## *Strategies*

1. Send the student to “time out.” Review Strategy 27 in Section 2 of Part One, “Arrange for Backup.”
2. If possible, ignore the behavior.
3. Isolate the student until you have time to deal with the situation personally.
4. If possible, leave the room or have the rest of the class leave the room. It’s difficult to have a power struggle when there is no behavior. audience.
5. Surprise the student with an act of kindness or praise for another more appropriate

