

What Is It?

Proximity control is a strategy in which the teacher reduces the physical distance between herself and a student as a way to remind that student of behavioral expectations.

What Do We Know about This Skill/Practice?

Proximity control has been proven effective through many years of research and practical application. Research indicates:

- Teacher proximity is an important element of active supervision that can serve as a reminder of expected behavior.
- Proximity control is an effective classroom management strategy that can increase student engagement and reduce problem behaviors.
- This strategy can be used to prevent problem behavior or to redirect problem behavior once it has begun.
- Proximity control can be easily implemented without interrupting instruction and has no associated costs.

Procedures

1. **Scan the classroom:** When providing instruction or monitoring group or independent work, look around the classroom to determine the level of student engagement and identify any signs of problem behavior.
2. **Identify the student(s):** Take note of any student or students who are not engaged or who are displaying minor problem behaviors.
3. **Move toward the student(s):** Move within close proximity (within three feet) of the student or students. Stand next to their desks or chairs for a few seconds as you continue to provide instruction.
4. **Continue to circulate and scan the classroom:** Walk away from the students and again move around the classroom while continuing to scan for student behavior.

Tips for Implementation

- When walking or standing near a student, continue teaching to maintain the pace and flow of instruction.
- Stand within three feet of the student to address problem behavior.
- Maintain close proximity to the student for a few seconds; avoid lingering for long periods of time. Circle back if necessary.
- Move around the classroom in unpredictable patterns to increase desired behaviors for all students while providing instruction or monitoring seatwork. This can serve as a proactive means to prevent problem behavior and to increase student engagement.

Things to Keep in Mind

- Proximity control can be used to address the behavior of one or more students.
- This strategy can be implemented during whole-group lessons, small-group work, or independent work.
- Because it does not disrupt instruction, proximity control can be seamlessly incorporated into any teaching routine.
- Proximity control is most appropriate when used to address minor, non-dangerous behaviors.
- Students who often engage in problem behavior are frequently disengaged might benefit from a seating change to be in closer proximity to the teacher during instruction.

Implementation Examples

Now it is time to watch what you've learned put into practice. The elementary and high school videos below depict simulated classroom scenarios and include both examples of correct implementation and non-examples of implementation that comes up short.

Elementary Video Example

In the video below, Mrs. D. expects her students to pay attention during classroom instruction. Note how in the example Mrs. D. seamlessly implements proximity control, but in the non-example she unfortunately forgets some key principles of the strategy.



High School Video Example

In the video below, Ms. Sentel expects her students to follow along during the lesson. Note in the example how Ms. Sentel uses proximity control correctly to redirect a student's attention, but in the non-example her implementation of the strategy falls short.



Foundational Research & References

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About the Author

Caitlyn Majeika is a former special education resource teacher for students in elementary and middle school. Currently, Caitlyn is a PhD student in the Special Education Department of Peabody College, Vanderbilt University. Her research focuses on using principles of data-based decision-making to enhance the implementation of behavior interventions for students who display challenging behavior in the classroom.