

Presentation Notes

Strategies to Support Students with Challenging Behaviours

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Causes & Strategies

The list of underlying causes is by no means exhaustive but these are the most common reasons for many of the challenging behaviours we see in children and teens.

What follows are a list of strategies, with some details on how to implement and use them during a music lesson. Many of these strategies are effective for all children; so feel free to incorporate any of them into your lesson routine.

Music is a World
 within itself with a
language we all
 understand.



Iceberg Analogy

Often the behaviours that we see are symptomatic of an underlying cause. If we think of symptom and cause using the iceberg metaphor then the behaviour is what we see (it's a form of communication) and if we can address the underlying reason for the behaviour (below the surface) then we can help stop or diminish the behaviour.

When we're interacting and teaching students that can't sit still, won't pay attention, have lack of engagement, and have little to no interaction, we find ourselves spending more time "dealing" with behaviour rather than teaching music. This can be frustrating, especially when a typical music lesson is limited to 30 to 60 minutes. Children and teens with neuro-atypical brains (Autism, ADHD, Anxiety disorders, learning disabilities) often struggle with the following:

What's Below the Surface (Causes)

Anxiety

Sensory Input

Expressive Language

Receptive Language

Focus & Attention

Working Memory

Motor Planning

Executive Function

Body Breaks

Children that are dysregulated sometimes just need to “take a body break” to help them refocus.

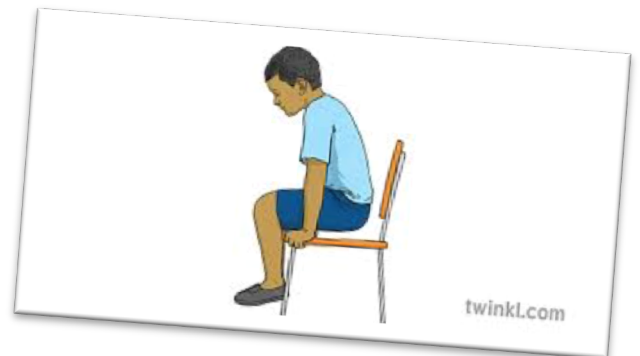


Walking and Clapping

- Bear Walks, and Crab walks are perfect for younger children (under age 6).
- Clapping hands to wake up the fingers, or stress ball squeezes.
- Clapping out the rhythm or using their feet to march out the rhythm.

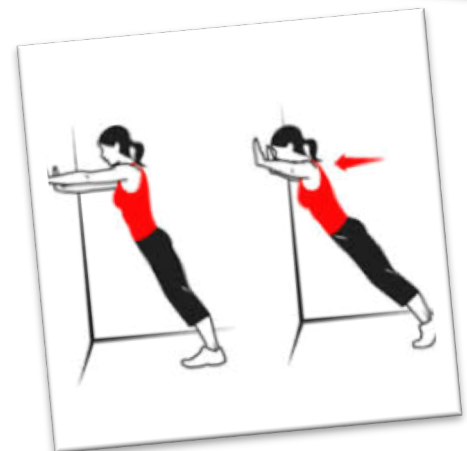
Pushups (seated or wall)

- Chair push-ups: in a seated position have hands flat on the chair against the thighs and push up and hold (repeat 3 or 4 times), or alternatively standing facing a wall and push against the wall with the hands. (hold for a count of 10)



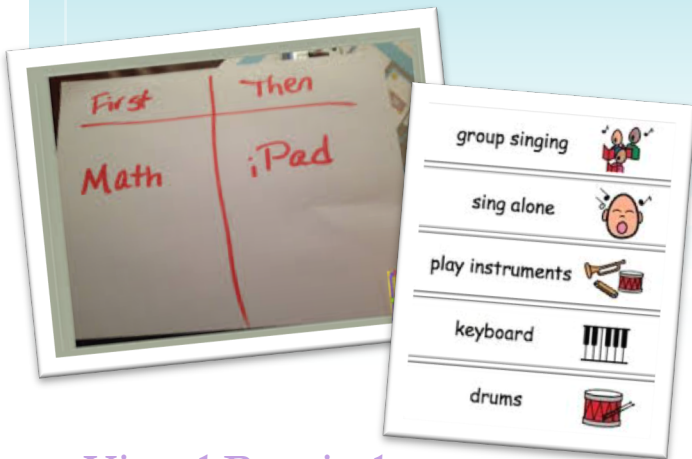
Deep Breathing Techniques

- Box breathing- in through the nose for a count of 7, hold for 5, out through the nose for 7, hold for 5 (repeat)
- Hold a finger up to the nose and say “smell the flower” (breathing in through the nose) now gently “blow out your candle” (repeat)



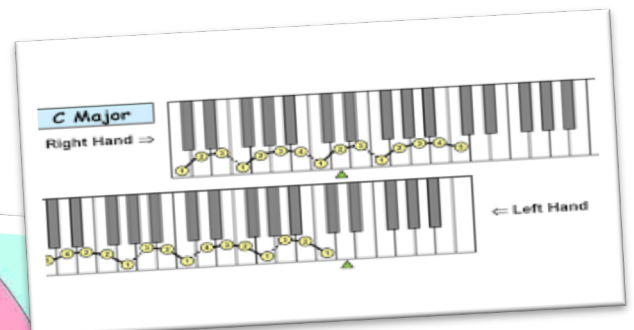
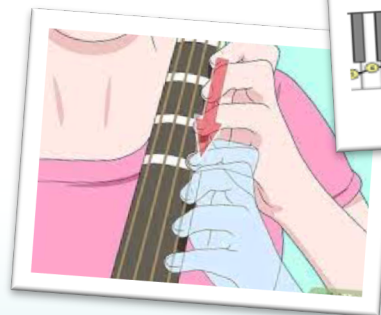
Visual Strategies

When a message is given verbally it doesn't necessarily stay in short term memory. Having a visual reference that is accessible and always within view can be very calming and settling for kids that are anxious, scattered or struggle with working memory. If they know what is coming next they don't have to guess or "wonder" what it could be. This reduces anxiety. A schedule can be created in the moment using a small whiteboard, sticky notes or something more permanent using pictures/words and a Velcro strip.



Visual Reminders

For students that struggle with motor planning having a technique broken down into steps and "visibly displayed" as a reference can be very beneficial.



Simplify

In addition to using visuals it's important to keep the language of instruction simple. Short sentences and allowing for extra time to process the message helps children that have weaker receptive language skills and slower processing time understand the instruction and respond.

Breaking down the schedule for younger children to "first _____/then _____" can be effective if a child is resisting an activity. **First** we'll play your scale 2 times with each hand **then** we can play the music memory game.



Visual Timers

Young children do not fully understand the concept of time so having a timer that shows "time passing" can be helpful for younger students that tend to have short attention spans.

Visual timers also help children and teens that feel overwhelmed when they perceive a non-preferred task as "long and boring" and resist the task by becoming disengaged, fidgety, or inattentive. There are many visual timer apps available for download.

Environment

Children and teens that are sensitive to sensory inputs such as noise, movement, lighting, etc. may benefit from having the environment adjusted such as, dimming the lights and using a quieter tone of voice. Using a piece of paper to cover all, but the section of music that is being worked on, can also help students who struggle with sensory input as well as those that find it hard to focus, or are dyslexic.



The language that we use is important!

Affirming emotions creates a relationship of trust.

"I see that your feeling.... Why don't we take 5 deep breaths."

Separating the individual from the behaviour can be very effective.

"Your body seems to be wiggly today maybe we need to move....take a break."

"Let's look at our hands, hmmm, they look a little sleepy. I think we need to get them ready to make some music why don't we wake them up!"