Important *Prevention* and *Response* Strategies for Classroom Teachers
Mann, 2013

Prevention strategies are used to increase the likelihood that behavioral concerns will be prevented.
Response strategies are used in response to behavioral concerns to reduce the likelihood of repetition or escalation of the concern.

1. **Teach classroom routines and Behavioral Expectations:** Identify classroom routines (e.g., arrival, dismissal, in-class transitions, whole group discussion, what to do when you've completed an assignment but others aren't done, etc.) and teach routine protocols including the behavioral expectations within each routine. If routines are well-taught, the teacher should only have to prompt "what do we do when…?" to elicit the correct behavior (e.g. "what do we do when we're done with work before others are done?").

    Once routines are identified, *they must be taught*. Identify key classroom routines and teach those routines to students (typically at the beginning of each school year and then as needed).

    Classroom Routines Matrix: A classroom 'Routines Matrix' uses the language of the school's behavioral expectations. Each classroom teacher designs and teaches the protocols for their classroom routines and determines what positive behaviors are expected to occur within each routine.

An example of a classroom 'Routines Matrix':

Routines: Expectations:	Arrival to class routine	Asking a question	Sharpen pencil	Group discussions	What to do when done with work and others aren't	Silent reading	class end routine
Respectful	Listen for Directions	Raise Hand Polite Language	Quiet	One person speaks at a time	Quiet	Silent Take care of your book Listen for adult instructions	Line up Silent and Straight
Responsible	Straight to Your Desk	Ask Relevant Questions	Use only if needed	Stay on Topic	Check 'Options Board' for ideas	Have book ready Read something you are interested in	All papers in their place
Safe	Hands and Feet to Self		Walk to and from the sharpener	Accept differences of opinion	Stay at your desk	Stay in your area	Chairs in

2. **Notice positive behaviors at least as frequently as you notice problem behaviors.** While results of 'praise studies' often recommend a 3:1 (or greater) ratio of recognition for positive behavior to problem behavior, striving for at least a 1:1 ratio is often a good initial target.   Use a positive behavior list or matrix to help remind you of the positive behaviors you are looking for in each school context, location or routine.

3. **Strive for high ratios of *positive contacts* to *negative contacts*** (reprimand, signs of disappointment, negative judgments).

   - **Use Positive Greetings.** Smiles, first names, hellos, high-fives, fist-bumps.

   - **Be 'Present' with Students When You Speak with Them.**   Provide brief, frequent positive interactions with students showing you are aware of them, listening to them, interested in them. Assure that you interact with each student within every activity period.

   - **Be Glad to See the Students:** Practice the types of verbal and non-verbal messages/communications that convey that you are glad to see them.

   - **Discover and Stress Each Student's Value to the Classroom Community:** Observe contexts in which each student contributes positively to the community and strive to increase their self-awareness of their value.   In this way, help students discover and develop their 'place' as a positive and *valued* contributor.

4. **Use consistent routines for transitions:** Transitions of all types are stressful for both children and adults. Unstructured and unsupervised transitions can be extremely impactful for any student, but especially for children with poor self-regulation and other related executive skills. All kinds of transition are important to strategically address, but perhaps the most important are the transition to school (getting ready to learn) and transitioning home (prepared for post-school).   Two very important and frequently practiced routines are:
   - **Morning Meeting**
   - **Closing Meeting / Closing Circle**

   For more elaborate descriptions and numerous examples, please explore the work of Responsive Schools/ Responsive Classroom (https://www.responsiveclassroom.org).

5. **Be aware of student attention span limitations.** Plan short (5- 10 minute) instruction sessions followed by opportunities for quiet movement for those who need it.

6. **Proximity Control:** Prevent or Interrupt negative behaviors by body positioning (walking near a student), maintaining calm demeanor and positive non-verbal language, and, when needed, providing a non-verbal signal for attention (light tap on the desk) or, facilitating a brief positive/engaging communication. Be aware of students for whom your close proximity increases stress (and escalates behavior) rather than helps them refocus or calm down. For these students be respectful of space but ensure that your contacts with them are positive and frequent.

7. **Use Active Supervision:**
   Three Components of Active Supervision:
   1) *Move:* Using proximity control, move strategically throughout the classroom. Proximity to teacher increases likelihood of student attention to task (for most children). Movement also allows teacher increased opportunities to scan for positive behavior, academic concerns and emerging social/emotional/behavioral concerns.   Teacher opportunities for private interactions with students increase. It is important to continue movement rather than to 'camp out' in areas of predictable concern, however, frequent visits to those areas may be helpful.

   2) *Scan:* Scan the classroom seeking evidence of pro-social behavior (i.e., students demonstrating positive behaviors from the classroom behavioral matrix), and respectfully notice (verbally or non-verbally) pro-social behavior. Also scan for emerging concerns, implementing non-verbal proximity control as a first step when possible. Scanning effectively helps children to know that you are attuned to and engaged in what is going on in the classroom. Children should expect that you'll notice pro-social behaviors at least as frequently as you'll notice problematic behaviors.

3) **Interact:** Talk with kids; ensure that every student is spoken to positively, or provided a non-verbal positive contact during every classroom period. Interactive comments can be task-performance related, but can be simple social contacts. Use name, smile, kind voice/ kind words.

8. **Use pre-corrections or rehearsals:** Prior to predictable problematic behavioral contexts, provide the opportunity for students to practice, or at least think about, the behaviors expected in the upcoming context. For instance: "OK everyone, we are about to start a group discussion, who can tell me the group discussion norms (ground rules)?"

9. **Teach and Practice Goal-Setting:** Teach students to set 'micro-goals' (i.e., goals that can be met in a short period of time, such as, complete the next 10 problems correctly), weekly goals and long-term goals and assess the achievement of goals. Getting children used to thinking ahead and planning allows teachers to connect behavior to goals; that is, some behaviors are goal-helping (behaviors that help you reach your goals) while some behaviors will be goal-defeating (behaviors that move you further away from your goals). Goal-setting also helps adults to understand each child better, and will help children understand themselves better.   To be effective, teachers must be persistent and tolerant (non-judgmental) in teaching goal-setting as many children will want to resist and avoid setting goals.

10. **Be aware of your Positive Kinesics (Body Language) and Para/Non-verbal Communication:**
    Heighten your awareness of the non-verbal messages sent through body posture, motion, and voice factors:
    1. Use Facial Expressions that convey interest, concern, curiosity and kindness rather than anger, disappointment, exasperation.
    2. Supportive Stance: About a leg length away, on an angle to the student, hands visible
    3. Personal Space: Know personal variations – generally 1.5 to 3 feet.
    4. Awareness of Gestures and movements: Non-threatening.
    5. Tone: Avoid inflections of sarcasm, impatience, disrespect, etc. Use tone that is supportive, understanding, comforting (practice your tone).
    6. Volume: Volume appropriate to situation and person.
    7. Cadence: Even Rate and rhythm.

11. **Understand common reasons for misbehavior:**
    1. Skill deficits: Student behavior is often connected to a student's real or perceived deficit in social, emotional, academic or executive function skills.
    2. 'Function of behavior': What the student is getting (gaining/accessing) or avoiding (escaping) as a result of the behavior.
    3. Presence of stressors and lack of skill in managing stress (teach stress awareness and stress management).
    4. Lack of self-confidence (feeling competent) in expected task.
    5. Power/Control triggers.

12. **Be aware of the adult role in a Conflict Cycle.**   Children's thoughts and feelings are activated by various stressors that may be present for the student. Stressors are different for everyone and how children respond to stress depends upon their current skills in managing stress. Children often respond to overloads of stress with negative thinking and then react to their own thinking with growing emotion which often spills out as inappropriate behavior.   When children's behavior seems out of proportion to the context, it is important not to over-react, thereby adding a new stress to the child's experience and often igniting a power battle, escalated conflict and potential damage to the relationship. At these times, here are thinking strategies to help keep your emotions in check:

13. **Act like a See-Saw rather than an Elevator:** Remind yourself to go down (emotionally) when the child goes up.

14. **Act like a Thermostat:** Thermostats lower the temperature when things get hot. Remind yourself that it is up to you to cool down the room when emotions are heating up, rather than adding heat to the fire.

15. **Self-Talk Strategies:** Use self-talk strategies to calm yourself and to re-focus on the needs of the student:
    - **Q-TIP** (Quit Taking It Personally): Use Q-TIP to remind yourself not to personalize what the child is saying or doing – it isn't about you – rather, it's about how the child is processing his/her stress; the child's inner world (how he is processing information) is impacting his/her emotions and behaviors.
    - **CRQQ** (Calm, Respectful, Quick and Quiet): Use CRQQ to remind yourself to address the student's needs calmly, respectfully, quickly and quietly, rather than reacting impulsively to the child's behavior.
    - **Think, "What are the student's current stressors and how does he/she manage his/her stress?"** instead of reacting to the student's emotion with your own need to feel in control, learn what the student's stressors are and try to validate their current experience before trying to get them back to task.

16. **Teach and practice a general signal for attention (can be verbal, non-verbal or both):** Use a practiced verbal or non-verbal signal for transitions and for early response to emerging behavioral concerns.
    - Example: Teacher says to whole class, *"OK everyone, 'Give me 5'."* ('Give Me 5' = 2 eyes looking, 2 ears listening and 1 mouth silent).
    - Example: Rhythmic clap: (Clap-Clap…Clap-Clap-Clap)

    The signal cues the implementation of taught and practiced attention behaviors.

17. **Use 3-Rs (Remind, Re-teach, Re-cue, Relationship):** Use as a kind, low-key correction to remind students of positive behaviors that have been taught.
    - Examples of Remind, Re-Teach, Re-Cue:
    - When Joe decides not to help out a classmate, Mr. M discreetly gets his attention and points to the behavior matrix where behaviors for 'Citizenship' in the classroom are listed.
    - "Sue, remember that showing respect in class means using a quiet voice – thanks."
    - "Jay, show me the perfect way to quietly raise your hand. Excellent!"
    - "Manny, remember the group discussion rule: one speaker at a time – you'll get your chance in a second."

    The 4th 'R' is 'Relationship': Always use response interactions as an opportunity to *strategically* build rapport/relationship. Any conflict with a student should be reflected upon for whether the conflict has *improved the relationship, damaged the relationship, or left the relationship unchanged*. If damage is suspected, plan a strategy to resolve. If resolution is unsuccessful, seek collegial support.

18. **Use Empathic Listening and Attending Skills:**
    - Listen nonjudgmentally to student perspective:
        - Does not excuse misbehavior but conveys understanding of student's point of view.
    - Undivided attention to the student (be *present* with student).
    - Listen carefully to what the student is really saying (feelings, not just facts).
    - Use restatement of what you heard to clarify understanding and to convey the message that you are listening.
    - Allow silence for reflection (avoid filling quiet moments with moralizing or power/challenge statements).

Attending Skills: Attending skills communicate that you are there to listen, are attentive to student needs, and want to hear what the student has to say. This is done non-verbally through positive facial expressions, body language, and an engaged posture, and verbally with few words and a positive, relaxed, non-threatening tone of voice. **Examples:** *Non-verbal: head nods; smiles; engaged gestures; expression of genuine curiosity about the student's point of view; space; Verbal: "I see." "Yes,", "You seem to be starting to relax a little -- that's great." "I want to hear what you have to say." "Can I get you some water"; "Would you like to sit in this chair or over there." "Soon, we'll walk through what happened so I can really understand your point of view."*

Reassuring Skills: Reassuring statements communicate that you care about the student and care about the issues that are important to them. Effective reassurance communicates that you want to help solve the problem together along with an optimism that you and the student can figure out what to do. **Examples:** *"I am here to help." "I want to understand exactly what happened." "I want to understand things from your point of view." "I'm sure we can figure this out together." "We're going to work this out." "It takes some courage to talk about what you are thinking and feeling." "The more I hear things from your point of view, the better I'll be able to help."*

Acknowledging and Reflection Skills: Acknowledging and reflection is a basic level of validation, it communicates on a concrete level that you are tuned in and listening to what is being expressed by the student. Sometimes this is done by acknowledging what the student is showing or doing; sometimes by reflecting back something the student says. **Examples:** *"I appreciate hearing about what you are thinking and feeling." "You're telling me clearly how you feel." "I can see that you are angry." "I see, so you felt uncomfortable." "I can tell that it isn't fun for you to talk about this." "You think Ms. Kelly is unfair and mean." "You're saying that the work is baby work."*

Affirming Skills: Affirming statements communicate a positive view of the student by recognizing positive qualities they possess or behaviors they exhibit. Affirmations communicate that the adult likes the student and believes that there is a better side of them than their problem behavior (optimism). **Examples:** *"I like the way you're using words." "You're doing a great job settling down and getting ready to talk about this." "Thank you for telling me that." "Thank you for being patient." "You are handling a difficult situation really well." "I can see that was hard for you to say." "You are really trying to get yourself together."*

19. **Use Validation and Decoding:** A student may express his/her stress and feelings ***through behavior (actions)*** or through words. S/he may not always be aware that s/he is trying to communicate his/her internal stresses or feelings. *Validation* can help a student feel 'heard' and thus lowers the need to continue expressing feelings through behavior/actions.   Validation can help improve teacher-student communication, build trust, and possibly help a student be more aware of the connections among thoughts, feelings, and behavior.

Validating Skills: Validating statements effectively convey to the student that you non-judgmentally accept their thoughts, feelings and behaviors as important, real and understandable. You really hear them.
   - Example of validation to an overactive student: *"It's hard to get back to the slower pace of school work when you still have so much energy from PE."*
   - Example of validation to a student who says 'I am stupid': *"It's tough to keep working hard when you feel like you're not getting it fast enough."*   Provide praise for resilience and persistence.
   - Example of validation to an angry, frustrated or sad student who you know is having troubles at home: *"it is extra difficult to focus on school work when you've got lots of stress going on in your life."*

More Validation Examples: *"I can understand you feeling that way." "I can see why you would feel embarrassed about what happened in class." "I get it, it felt like she was saying, **you** are stupid." "That must have been a really*

frustrating situation to be stuck in." "It's hard to sit through a long class with no breaks." "It's hard when it seems like everyone else gets it and you still don't understand."

Decoding Skills: Decoding statements help students connect what they are doing and saying to what they are feeling. Decoding statements connect freely expressed, undisguised feelings to specific behavior by explaining the emotional meaning expressed in the behavior. Seek to decode the hidden questions (or beliefs) that rest underneath feelings and behavior. Respond to a child's real concerns rather than providing a direct knee-jerk response to the child's comment, question or behavior.

- Decoding Example: Young student comments that all of the art work around the room (drawn by students) is ugly. The teacher understands the hidden question and so does not say "it isn't nice to call the pictures ugly"; rather, she responds, "in this class you don't have to draw pretty pictures; you can draw the kind of pictures you want to draw".

More Decoding Examples: *"Throwing the book told me that you were frustrated with the assignment, and that's really important information for me – it's OK just to tell me next time." "It made you sad when no one picked you to play during recess and cursing at me was a way to show me that something was bothering you." "Saying I'm stupid is a way to ask for help when you don't understand the directions, I understand, but I want you to know that it's my job to help clarify whenever students don't understand something – I do that for students all day long."*

Validation doesn't excuse a person from doing his/her job, but provides acknowledgement of the reality that life can be stressful. Sometimes all a person needs to know is that someone understands. The more you take the time to get to know a student, the more effective and accurate validations and decoding can be.

20. **Teach and prompt "Calming Breath"** or **"Belly Breath"**:
- Breathe in to a count of 5, hold for 3, and gradually release the breath.

Prompting a "Belly Breath" is a simple cognitive/sensory strategy to help cleanse students of negative or fixated thoughts and can re-center their focus on the task at hand. It is a strategy that students can use on their own and in other settings in which stress is causing early signs of distraction and disengagement (fidgeting, looking around, grimacing, mild disruptions).

Prompt: "Jon -- try a calming (belly) breath."

21. **Prompt an "Engine Check" (Older: "Energy Check"):**
- A cognitive/sensory strategy aimed at increasing self-awareness of operating at one's own optimal level of energy. If well taught and practiced, the prompt should elicit the implementation of strategies that get the student's engine running (or energy level) 'just right'. Requires thorough teaching and practicing of the strategy so that when prompted, the student (or whole class) will know exactly what to do.

22. **Prompt use of a Frustration Journal (writing or drawing):**
- This strategy is appropriate only for students who are able and willing to benefit from the use of writing **OR** drawing to acknowledge their stresses and/or feelings for the purpose of regaining focus on task. This strategy must be well taught and practiced, and must be perceived by the students who use this strategy as a tool to help/support them to do their best work rather than as a consequence for misbehavior.

Prompt: "Jon, I think this may be a good time to use your frustration journal so you can get yourself back on-track."

23. **Prompt use of Positive Thinking Journal:**
   - Teach students about the power of negative and positive thinking and have students develop a positive thinking journal. Once developed and understood as a tool to stop negative thinking patterns, directing a student to his/her positive thinking journal at the first sign of concerning behavior can be an effective teacher 'Response' strategy. A positive thinking journal can be an on-going, growing, and personalized journal or pad that contains student written or pasted thoughts/ideas/pictures that have the potential to stop a negative thinking pattern. This journal may have inspirational quotes or messages, positive ideas, pictures of the child's favorite pet or places, or anything that the student believes could break a cycle of negative thinking. It is important to teach students about the impact of negative and positive thinking in advance of implementing this strategy.

24. **Prompt an Energy/Exercise/Movement Break:**
   - As with any strategy, this strategy should be assessed for its effectiveness with students for whom it is used. The caveat with exercise or movement breaks (described below) is that they can be used by students as a classroom avoidance strategy rather than used as a productive stress-management strategy. It is beneficial to keep careful track of on-task and in-class data for students who frequently use this strategy (be diligent about taking baseline data so that student progress is measured against prior performance rather than as compared to peers or standards). Data may show that even though the student seems to be using the strategy frequently that he/she is actually on-task longer and in-class more often.

   - **Exercise Break:** Brief 5-minute exercise breaks should be taught and practiced as a specific exercise break protocol. Because of the distraction caused by exercising, this strategy is usually best to occur outside the classroom (hallway or private office area). If supervision is required, this strategy may not be possible, but since the value of this strategy may be high for some children, it is worth it to problem-solve to allow this strategy to occur.

      - 5-Minute exercise should offer a few options, but it is recommended that an Occupational Therapist, a Physical Education instructor and/or a Health Education instructor partner in the design of 5-minute routines (that include a wind-down period) that can be practiced and then posted in the exercise area. A combination of calisthenics and 'sensory-balancing' activities is recommended.

   - **Movement Break:** A task that can be used to provide movement for a student in need of movement or change of pace in order to regain attention to task can be used as a strategic response strategy. Teacher should develop a menu of possible tasks that can be used during various contexts. Tasks are best if they are concurrently helpful to the education process, however, the big goal is to briefly change the context for the student and allow him/her a short break from the task they are currently avoiding. A movement task can be a useful break for children who have skill deficits in sustaining attention to non-interesting tasks or who have high levels of energy. Examples:
      - Pass out papers. Collect papers.
      - Organize teacher's desk or an area in the room.
      - An important errand to the office, nurse, counselor, custodian, cafeteria, or other classroom.
      - Collate papers (worksheets, materials for lessons).
      - Color code/organize materials.
      - Lead the class in a stretch break or a class-wide calming breath.

25. **Use Take-a-Break, Positive Timeout, or Re-Focus Protocol:**
   - A planned in-classroom strategy with a taught protocol that allows a student a brief 'break' to provide time and/or space from the classroom activity to regain focus and readiness for classroom tasks. ***These strategies should not be used punitively or perceived by the student as punitive,*** and should not be used with high repetition unless the strategy is experienced positively by the student with effective results (demonstrated by data). Data to address frequency, duration and intensity of concerning behaviors should be kept and periodically reviewed.

26. **Teach and then implement a stress awareness and stress management curriculum** (e.g., "Managing Stress for School Success", Mann, 2011)**:**
   - Implementation of 'Managing Stress for School Success' requires the teaching of lessons that promote self-awareness and teach stress management strategies.   Includes teaching the use of a *"Challenge to Manage"* form, or 'Stress Test', that provides a simple self-assessment of what current stressors may be leading to thoughts, feelings and behavioral output. Utilizing *Managing Stress for School Success*, or a similar stress skills curriculum should provide useful data for decision making as you glean information about the types of, frequency of, and intensity of student stressors and the student's skills in managing these stressors.

27. **Pay close attention to how children are practicing and building their Executive Skills:**
   - It is very important to note that executive skills (including emotional regulation, impulse control, time management, planning, prioritizing, mental flexibility and organization) are ***compromised*** when stressors are numerous or intense, or, when even mild stressors are poorly managed. It is of the highest priority to teach stress awareness and stress management skills while embedding other approaches to practicing and building executive skills. Growing the capacity to notice stress triggers and manage stress allows children to maximize their capacity to build, practice and utilize their executive skills. Intact executive functioning is essential to school success.

28. **Systematic Responses to repeated behavioral concerns:**
   - **Planned Teacher Check-in:** Develop an organized teacher check-in process that efficiently provides a schedule for brief teacher-student check-in. The design would provide proactive support for students who demonstrate the need for high rates of teacher attention and whose stress-level may be lessened by knowing that the teacher will provide the check-in. It is not essential at an early support level (tier 1 in a multi-tiered model) to provide written feedback or behavioral ratings at check points, however, the teacher should be attentive to evidence of student responsiveness (or non-responsiveness).
   - **Basic Behavioral Support Plan:** Coordinate with system supports (counselor support, Grade Level Team support, Professional Learning Community support) for collegial collaboration in developing a basic behavioral support plan (template available). A 'basic plan would minimally define concerning behavior in measurable terms, identify the intervention to be implemented, provide evidence of progress (responsiveness), and identify when progress will be assessed/reviewed.   Using a 'function –based perspective' (i.e., consideration of the student's function of behavior in designing the implementation strategies) is encouraged in this process.
   - **Home-School Communication System:** Develop a simple, sustainable process to ensure that valued two-way information is provided to/from school/home. Most importantly, the aim is to achieve a home-school partnership.   Home-School Communications Systems should not be a vehicle to share daily problems. It should be a vehicle for increasing the understanding of student stressors, problem-solving to increase student's awareness of his/her stressors, and to increase the student's skills in managing those stressors.
   - **Referral to Tier 2 group intervention to address:**
     - Adult attention needs
     - Peer attention needs
     - Strengthening:
       1. Specific Academic Skills
       2. Social Skills
       3. Emotional Regulation Skills
       4. Executive Function Skills