

# Simon says



**Hi Dr Crisp,**  
I have a problem with classroom management for the first time in my career as a teacher, which has been three years now. There is a boy in my year 8 class who consistently sabotages the lesson. By the time I have warned him, listened to his explanation, which always turns into a performance with the rest of the class egging him on, and then sent him to the principal's office, I have lost a large part of the lesson. Every class has become a case of waiting for when this student decides to put a spanner in the works and stop everything for 15 minutes. Should I try to reason with him, or am I on the right track sending him out of the class? It seems pointless.

*Dr Simon Says...*

Congratulations on your courage to ask for help with what is a common difficulty. These situations can make the most competent teacher start to doubt their choice of career! On the surface, this is a question about his behaviour but keep in mind that this problem may be symptomatic of attentional difficulties, special learning needs, or other issues. If other teachers are having similar problems, then this is more likely. Excluding this, this boy may be unengaged  
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# Simon says continued...

and has learnt that it is more entertaining to play this game.

The greatest priority is to re-establish your authority. Currently he is in control and needs to understand that you call the shots. Despite any impressive flair with words, he hasn't yet developed the capacity for adult reasoning. Even if he had, you're still the boss, so he needs to follow instructions.

Some kids need encouragement, others need to learn to limit their impulses, follow adult's directions and complete tasks. The main driver here seems to be the reinforcement he gets from your and the class's reactions – people won't perform if there's no audience.

So, it's important your responses are brief, firm, and neutral. An assertive, collaborative approach is best: a) decide what you want him to do more or less of, b) explain that you want to help him learn self-control and stay in class, c) sit him at the front of the class near you, and d) don't be drawn into verbal arguments.

A timeout procedure might also help: Explain that any non-compliant or disruptive behaviour (describe this with examples) results in a "reminder" using a subtle, non-verbal signal, and that on the third reminder he will have to leave the class.

In the first week, if he only gets two reminders and no time out, he can have one minute to present on any topic of his choosing to the class at the end of the period, then drop this to one the next week.

Try all of this for two to three weeks, but if no improvement, talk with your school psychologist. Remember, actions speak louder than words! ]

Until next time, bye for now...

**Send your letters  
and email to**

**[yoursay@ozteacher.com.au](mailto:yoursay@ozteacher.com.au)**