Fostering self-control in students

Agenda

1. The difference between punishment and inconsistency versus positive behavioral support.
2. Steps in fostering students’ self-control.
   a. Identify what the student does well and likes to do.
   b. Identify the behaviors of concern.
      i. Identify whether the behavior is inappropriate or challenging.
   c. Identify the possible reasons the student uses the behavior of concern.
      i. Does the student’s health or routines affect his or her behavior(s)?
      ii. Is the student using behavior:
          • To seek attention.
          • To seek power.
          • To seek revenge.
          • To display feelings of inadequacy.
          • To obtain, escape, protest or avoid.
          • To regulate his or her energy level.
          • To regulate his or her senses.
          • As a form of play.
      iii. What does the student get out of using the behavior or concern?
   d. Select positive discipline strategies to use with inappropriate behavior.
   e. For inappropriate behavior that persists or challenging behavior, collect additional information about why the student uses the behavior of concern.
      i. Identify where the behavior does not occur and with whom the behavior does not occur.
      ii. Ask questions about the efficiency of the behavior.
      iii. Observe the student.
      iv. Ask questions about specific situations in which the behavior happens.
      v. Ask questions to assist in developing a plan to teach acceptable behaviors.
   f. Develop a positive behavior support plan that includes ways to:
      i. Change the environment or interactions with the student to meet the underlying reasons the student uses the behavior.
      ii. Teach the student replacement skills to use to get his or her needs met.
      iii. Prepare adults and peers on how to respond when the student uses the behavior of concern.

Steps in fostering students’ self-control

1. Identify what the student does well and likes to do.

2. Identify the behavior of concern.
   a. List the behavior of concern.
   b. Identify whether the behavior is inappropriate or challenging.
      • **Inappropriate behavior** is abusive to materials, interferes with acceptance by or positive interaction with others, has existed for a long time, is not improving or is getting worse, is mildly harmful to the students or other, and/or prevents learning from occurring.
      • **Challenging behavior** involves extreme property damage and/or is extremely harmful to the student or others.

3. Identify the possible reasons for the behavior.
   a. Does the student’s health or routines affect his or her behavior(s)?
      • Medication.
      • Medical conditions, such as asthma or allergies.
      • Sleeping patterns.
      • Eating patterns.
   b. Determine why the student uses the behavior.
      • To seek attention.
      • To seek power.
      • To seek revenge.
      • To display his or her feelings of inadequacy.
      • To obtain, protest, escape or avoid an object, activity, event or person.
      • To regulate his or her energy level.
      • To regulate his or her senses.
      • As a form of play.
   c. Determine what the student gets out of using the behavior. What’s the “pay-off” from adults and/or peers?
      • What one thing could adults do to cause the behavior(s) to occur?
      • What kind of response does the student get when he or she uses the behavior?
      • What does the student get from using the behavior?

4. Select positive discipline strategies that best match the reason(s) for the inappropriate behavior(s). See attached strategies.
   a. Identify how the behavior will be prevented.
   b. Select a nondirective strategy to use in response to the behavior.

5. If the inappropriate behavior persists or is challenging, collect additional information and develop a theory about why the student uses the behavior. See attached resources.
   a. Identify the existing supports for the child.
      • Ask questions regarding where the behavior does not occur and with whom the behavior does not occur. What events, actions or persons are reinforcing or positive to the student?
   b. Ask questions to help determine the efficiency of the behavior(s). Does it result in a pay-off every time?
• What amount of physical effort is involved? Determine if the student has a way to communicate. Identify what’s been done in response to the challenging behavior and its effect on the behavior.

c. Observe the student.
• Record specific incidents of the behavior, the setting events that were present (e.g., the student was in another setting or the student was alone), the perceived function of the behavior and the actual consequences for the behavior.

d. Ask questions about specific situations in which the behavior happens.
• When does the problem occur? (e.g., during specific periods of the day, when waiting for an activity to begin or when being ignored) Where does the problem occur? (e.g., in particular settings) Who is present when the problem occurs? (e.g., in the presence of particular people) What is going on when the problem occurs? (e.g., during student-directed or staff-directed activities or during one-to-one, small group, or large group activities)

e. Ask questions to assist in developing a plan to teach acceptable behaviors.
• What other acceptable behaviors could the student learn to do that could serve the same function as the old form of behavior?

6. Develop a positive behavioral support plan to use for two weeks. See attached strategies.
   a. Modify the environment and interactions with the student to meet the student’s underlying reasons for using the behavior.
   b. Replace the existing behavior by teaching new skills the student may use to get his or her needs met.
   c. Respond to the existing behavior consistently. Look at adult reactions to the challenging behavior and the consequences adults provide to the student for the behavior. Determine what needs to be changed. Gain consensus from adults regarding how everyone will consistently respond.
   d. Reduce the occurrence of the existing behavior either by preventing or stopping it. Decide on emergency procedures to use, if necessary.

Positive behavioral support plan for: _______________________________ Date: ____________

1. List what the student does well and likes to do:

2. List behaviors of concern and identify whether each is inappropriate or challenging.

3. Identify the function of and possible reasons for each behavior of concern.

4. Select a preventative and a nondirective strategy to use with each behavior.
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<td>5. Identify the environment changes needed to meet the underlying reasons the student uses the behavior.</td>
<td>6. Identify the interaction changes needed to meet the underlying reasons the student uses the behavior.</td>
<td>7. Identify what replacement the student will be taught to use instead to get his or her needs met.</td>
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Positive behavioral support plan for: _______________________________ Date: ____________

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<td><strong>8.</strong> Plan how people will respond to the challenging behavior.</td>
<td><strong>9.</strong> Plan how people will reduce the challenging behavior.</td>
<td><strong>10.</strong> Identify the people responsible for using or supporting this plan.</td>
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Positive behavior support strategies
Environmental supports

**Room arrangement** – Color code areas of the room and connect these to a picture schedule of routines throughout the day. For example, have a blue tablecloth on the snack table and a picture of snack on blue paper on a picture schedule. If a student becomes anxious when new people enter the room, move the student’s desk closer to the door so he can see people coming. If a student knocks into others when going to the coat hooks, move the coat hooks closer to the student or the student closer to the coat hooks. If the student knocks into other student consistently in lines, put markers to stand on spaced adequately apart. If a student continually disrupts others in group activities, enlarge the space where group activities occur.

**Furniture** – If a student flips her desk, give her a desk connected to a chair. If a student climbs on the furniture, try attaching crates with u-hooks to the tops of the furniture and use these to store materials. If students are fighting over the one blue chair, remove it or get another blue chair. If a student cries each time you put her in a standing table, lower the equipment so that it is the same level as others involved in a standing activity.

**The number of materials** – If turn taking is required, post a picture chart indicating when each student will get a turn. If a student is dumping materials on the floor, then reduce the number of materials. If a student is having difficulty waiting in line, add a rack of magazines for students to peruse while waiting.

**The way materials are displayed** – If a student cannot find her belongings in her desk, try adding a tubby within the desk that can be pulled out like a drawer. If a student knocks everything off the table, try adding Velcro to the bottoms of the containers on the table. If a student cannot select an activity from many, try putting the activities in containers and gluing pieces of the activities to the containers. Have the student match a picture of the activity to the container of his choice. If a student climbs on shelves and knocks them over to get preferred materials that are out of reach, then move the materials so they are accessible. Or, if a student is always getting into the teacher’s supplies, then put the supplies out of sight in a locked cabinet.

**The classroom schedule** – Provide a picture schedule of routines throughout the day. Post each picture on a separate page in left to right progression across the wall. Include a “Not always” picture to put up over a routine that does not happen due to a change in the schedule. Try to plan for ways the student can use the picture schedule independently. For example, try devising separate picture schedules in a small folder. Have the student refer to his folder for how to complete independent seat work. For each routine, provide three or more pictures on a piece of paper with a beginning picture that shows what he should do to prepare for the routine, a middle picture or pictures that shows what he should do within the routine, an ending picture that shows how he should complete the routine and a “finished” envelope. Try having the student use a name card with Velcro that he can be taught to move from one part of the routine to another as he begins the next thing. If a student disrupts an activity, then reduce the length of an activity or provide an alternative break area for the student to go to for a portion of the activity. Include breaks in the schedule.

**Seating** – If a student picks on the same one or two other students, then rearrange the seating so the student never sits or stands in line next to those other students.

**Activities and tasks** – Provide a variety of activities for students to choose from. Try using a Picture Exchange Communications System to teach students to spontaneously request choices.
First, it is extremely important to use activities that the student likes and are therefore reinforcing to the student. For example, a student may like listening to country western music. Using a reinforcing activity, two adults begin by teaching the student how the exchange system works. After a picture is made of the item, such as a cassette of country western music, with a corresponding word (e.g., Walkman) to give the student additional cues, the picture is placed between the student and the Walkman.

When the student reaches for the Walkman, the adult behind the student helps the student pick up the picture of the Walkman and place it in the hand of the other adult. The second adult then says, “Listen to music,” and immediately hands the Walkman to the student. Eventually, the student should learn to pick up the picture and give it to the adult without physical prompts from the adult.

Next, the adult moves away from the student so that he must seek out that adult — and later other adults — to exchange the picture of the desired item for the real item. This teaches spontaneity and the student also learns to “communicate” within a social context.

**Note:** Adults should refrain from asking, “What do you want?” or saying, “Put the picture in my hand.” Say nothing until the student places the picture in your hand. By getting to listen to the music, the student learns that communication has a meaningful outcome — he gets what he wants. The teaching has occurred in that the student has learned that he initiates a request, people respond. Also, try not to turn the time that the student is listening to the music into another instructional time as this is the reinforcement for requesting and it should be fun.

Eventually the student can be taught to choose between two or more desired items as he pulls off a picture attached with Velcro from a board or book. What is tricky about using PECS is that the activities have to be rewarding to the student. This may mean they will have to change as he gets bored with them.

**Note:** There are other phases to PECS that can be obtained from T/TAC.

When planning tasks, try to keep several things in mind. In order for a student to learn to be independent, he will need to be involved in all aspects of the routine. This means the student should choose the materials, obtain them, use them and put them away. When choosing activities, consider the following questions: What does a typical student of the same age enjoy? What skills will the student see value in doing? For example, will he see an outcome that benefits him or helps him to be more independent? What is the student motivated to do? For example, a student could rake the leaves at school, get paid, match some of the coins to outlines of the coins needed to purchase a soda and then go buy one from the drink machine.

**Clothing** – If a student chews on his shirt, ask his parents to send him in small shirts. If a student tries to leave rooms with high ceilings, try having the student wear a baseball cap, thus providing him with a lower ceiling above his eyes.
Interaction supports

Cue the student

- **Provide verbal cues.** For example, if a change in routine occurs, try saying, “Usually we go to P.E., but not always. Today we will go to an assembly.” If a student is trying to escape an activity, try saying, “Say break, please.”
- **Provide models** by showing the student what to do. For example, if a student is trying to escape an activity, try pointing to a picture of a student looking at magazines and say, “Say break, please.”
- **Provide physical assistance** by assisting the student to do something. If a student is trying to escape an activity, try placing your hand over the student’s and have the student point to a picture of a student looking at magazines that says, “Say break, please.”
- **Use props.** If a student is trying to escape from an activity, give the student a picture of a student looking at a magazine with the words “break, please” below and have the student hand it to you. If the student has difficulty transitioning, it may help to give the student a ball to carry that represents something he enjoys doing in the next activity — outdoor play. If a student frequently covers his eyes with his hands, try having him wear a baseball cap. If a student frequently picks up items with unusual textures, try having the student carry a rabbit’s foot.
- **Provide physical assistance** to prevent the problem. For example, put your hand on a student’s back to stop the student from rocking back and forth.

Ignore inappropriate but not harmful or destructive behavior

Some students misbehave because they need attention. When the behavior is annoying, but not harmful, it may be best to ignore it. For example, students often find that foul language gets them immediate attention. If you ignore the cursing, the student may initially curse more but will eventually see there is no gain in using that language and stop.

Redirect or distract students from potential problems

The pictures of steps within routines could include steps to prevent a student from engaging in inappropriate behavior. Then you could try ignoring inappropriate behavior and interrupt it by redirecting the student to complete the next step. For example, if a student attempts to flush a toilet repeatedly, interrupt the flushing by having him point to the next step in toileting. Or, if eating too fast is a problem, picture cards of the steps in eating lunch could include a “look around” step to prompt a student to slow down while eating. If eating too fast means the student ends up waiting for others to finish, a final picture card could be of magazines. When the student finishes lunch, prompt him to obtain and look at a magazine from a magazine rack in the cafeteria while he waits for others to finish eating.

When a student tries to leave an activity, ask her to get a tissue for you. If a student is yelling, whisper something in his ear. In general, be ready to step in, to shift a student’s attention or to add a new activity to avert a problem before it gets out of hand.

Remind students of rules before they break them

When a student is about to hit another student, you can sometimes stop the action before it happens by calmly pointing to the class rules and saying, “Remember, use your words/signs/picture cards.”
You may also need to give the student the word needed such as “move” or “stop” before the student hits.

**Give two alternative appropriate choices before the inappropriate behavior occurs**

Offer the choice of having the student work with the teacher or the teaching assistant, provide choices of conversational topics or offer choices between chores. When a student is about to take another student’s ball, show the student two choices regarding what he can do with toys other than the ball and say, “You can shovel sand or slide down the slide. Which do you want to do?”

**Comment on good behavior**

Catch students when they are sharing, helping other students with hard tasks or dealing well with frustration and immediately compliment them. You might say, “You helped Ben with his coat. I bet that makes you feel good to help Ben.” “You left the workbook when you were frustrated. You must have felt great when you then went back to it again when you were calm.” This way the desired behavior is made very clear to the student.
Nondirective techniques

Identify the problem between two students in conflict – “You both want to use the computer.”

Identify the consequences of the student’s or students’ actions – “There is only one computer. One of you will have to wait for a turn.”

Ask a “What can you do?” question – “What can you do while you wait for your turn on the computer?”

Remind students of rules after they break them – If a student hits another student, the adult says, “Hitting hurts. Use your words,” or actually gives the student the words/sign/picture cards and explains, “Hitting hurts. Say move.” Then help the students see the consequences of the misbehavior. For example, “His face is red and he is crying because hitting hurts.”

Give two appropriate choices or alternatives to the misbehavior – When the adult says to the student, “It’s time to go inside,” the student begins to tantrum, saying, “No, I don’t want to.” The adult says and gestures, “Would you like to carry my clipboard or push Joe’s wheelchair inside?” The off-limits choice is excluded, but the student still gets to choose. This not only avoids a struggle, but encourages students to make decisions about their lives.

Provide a quiet spot for students to go to and be by themselves when they are upset – Sometimes students lose control and need to cool off or go to a quiet place. This time away should last as long as the student feels is needed to calm down. The key is to avoid being punitive and instead to turn this quiet time into a learning experience by not leaving the student alone unless he or she wants to be. After the student has calmed down, the adult and student can talk about the student’s feelings or the adult can redirect the student to another activity. See attached handout.

When the student communicates nonverbally, be sure to recognize his communication attempt by describing it to him – For example, say, “You are throwing the ball to me.” Then identify the purpose of his communication attempt by saying, “You want me to throw it to you or take turns dribbling with you.” Give a clear answer, such as “Yes, I’ll play catch with you,” and act according to your answer, taking time to follow through with what has been communicated.
How to use a quiet spot

How to set up a quiet spot

Set a quiet spot up as a learning center for one student to use at a time. Create a small, cozy space that is enclosed on three sides. Make it within view of wherever large group activities take place.

For younger children, a quiet spot should offer only a large pillow or stuffed animal. It is labeled as the “quiet spot” and has two posted rules in picture and written form: one student at a time and toys stay outside.

For older students, a quiet spot should only offer a large pillow or comfortable, heavy chair, such as a recliner. It should be enclosed on three sides, preferably by locating it in a corner and using a tall bookshelf or file cabinet to create a third side. Consider bolting a bookshelf or file cabinet to the wall.

How to teach children to use a quiet spot

- First, calmly label the student’s feelings by saying, “You seem angry.”
- Second, in a supportive and caring manner, offer a way for the student to regain self-control by saying, “Let’s go to the quiet spot until you are calm.”
- Third, go with the student to the quiet spot until the student is able to go alone.
- Fourth, stay with the student and encourage him or her to respond with words in the future. Or, if the student prefers to be alone or was seeking attention through misbehavior, invite the student to rejoin the class when ready, explaining, “When you’re calm we want you to come back,” and quickly leave.
- Fifth, let the student decide when to return to the group.
- Sixth, welcome the student back to the group.

Introduce a quiet spot by explaining its purpose, helping students to agree on the rules for its use and then demonstrating how to use it by appearing frustrated, angry or sad and going to the quiet spot to calm down.

Special considerations

For younger students, if a student refuses to go to the quiet spot, give the student two choices of ways to go to the quiet spot, such as “Walk by yourself or hold my hand?” If the student does not respond, then repeat the choices one time. If there is still no response, explain to the student that because he or she is having trouble making a choice you will make a choice for the student and physically assist the student to the quiet spot.

For older students, if a student refuses to go to the quiet spot, give the student two choices of going to the quiet spot or returning to his or her desk. If the student does not respond, repeat the choices one time. If there is still no response, explain to the student that because he or she is having trouble making a choice you will make a choice for the student and ask the student to go to the quiet spot. If the student refuses, ignore him or her and continue teaching. Document the time the student is missing from class work and address pay-back time once the student has calmed down. If the student loses control, consider removing the class. See Class removal handout.

If a student refuses to stay in the quiet spot, explain to the student that he or she needs to walk out with his or her mouth closed and hands down. Younger students may run out while still angry. If
so, assist the student back to the quiet spot and say, “When you’re calm you may come back. Calm means you walk out with your mouth closed and your hands down.”

If a student refuses to leave the quiet spot, wait and see if it lasts. If so, set a time limit and redirect the student to an activity.

If a student goes to the quiet spot frequently, make sure that he or she is using it as a place to regain control. If not, then begin requiring the student to pay back the time spent in the quiet spot, explaining, “You owe me x amount of time working because you used that amount of time in the quiet spot.”

Emphasize to students that the quiet spot should no longer be needed by the end of the school year. Make the expectation that self-selected group removal is a short-term solution and the goal is for each student to learn to use words and choose appropriate outlets to express his or her emotions.
Teach replacement skills the student may use in lieu of the old form of behavior

**Teach empathy** by asking the student who’s been harmed to say so or show the other student why their behavior is problematic. For example, “Tell Julie, stop hitting me. It hurts when you hit.”

**Use an “If...then” statement**, along with objects or pictures, to reward the student with a preferred activity following participation in a required activity. For example, if you want him to bowl, say, “If you bowl then you can dribble,” and point to both balls as you speak.

**Shape approximations of appropriate behavior.** When a student reaches for someone’s hair, tell the student to say, “Hi!” and assist the student to wave.

**Teach alternative, acceptable behaviors** that serve the same function as the misbehavior. For example, decide what new skills a student needs to learn. Pick an appropriate behavior to teach the student that will result in as quick and consistent an outcome as the inappropriate one. Then tell, show or physically assist the student with what to do instead of the challenging behavior. For example, the pictures of steps within routines could include steps to prevent a student from engaging in inappropriate behavior. Then you could try ignoring inappropriate behavior and interrupt it by redirecting the student to complete the next step. For example, if a student attempts to flush a toilet repeatedly, interrupt the flushing by having him point to the next step in toileting. Or, if eating too fast is a problem, picture cards of the steps in eating lunch could include a “look around” step to prompt a student to slow down while eating. If eating too fast means the student ends up waiting for others to finish, a final picture card could be of magazines. When the student finishes lunch, prompt him to obtain and look at a magazine from a magazine rack in the cafeteria while he waits for others to finish eating.

If a student appears to enjoy sensory input, rather than eliminating these behaviors, try to find acceptable or normal alternative behaviors for him to use. For example, when the student reaches for someone’s hair, he could be redirected to stroke a rabbit’s foot that he carries in his pocket.

**Reward displays of the new skills**, such as offering verbal praise for a student that uses a new skill.

**Respond consistently to the old form of behavior**

**Prevent the behavior if at all possible.**

**Stop the behavior.** Remember, a strong reaction sets the stage for a power struggle. Instead, try to speak softly, move quickly, stay calm and neutral and be consistent.

**Use planned body language.** Plan whether to touch the student, get on the student’s level, or smile. Also, think about the distance to keep between you and the student.

**Use few words.** It is very difficult for an angry student to hear what you’re saying. Be clear and concise and focus on what you want the student to do instead.

**Use agreed-upon strategies** to respond to, reduce and replace the challenging behavior. Consistency is the key to success. Make sure everyone that interacts with the student agrees that the techniques have merit and that they will use them consistently to prevent and/or respond to the behavior.
Reduce or stop the old form of behavior

Quickly identify the student’s feelings, explain what went wrong and explain what to do instead. For example, say, “You’re angry. Hitting hurts. Say stop.”

Ignore, redirect and reward.

If a student is out of control, identify the student’s feelings; take him or her to a quiet spot and leave. Teach the student to stay in the spot until he or she is calm and welcome the student back when he or she is calm.

- Quickly explain why the misbehavior is not acceptable by saying, for example, “Hitting hurts.”
- Walk with the student to the quiet area while saying, “You are (label emotion), let’s go to the quiet area until you are calm.”
- Say, “When you are calm, you may return to the group or activity.”
- Do not talk to the student while he or she is upset.
- If the student can be left alone, then leave.
- As soon as the student is calm, invite the student back to the group or activity.
- Some students can then talk about what they could do instead next time. Others may begin misbehaving again if a discussion occurs.

Physically intervene when the student is extremely physically harmful to him- or herself or others or is causing extreme property damage. Encourage the student to go to a quiet spot to calm down first. If this doesn’t work, stand behind the student and gently take the student to a sitting position. Gently place one hand on the student’s back to prevent the student from head-banging, and the other hand on the student’s wrists in front of the student’s chest to prevent the student from hitting. Put your legs over the student’s legs to prevent kicking and say in a calm voice, “When you are calm, I will let go.” Define what calm means, such as, “When you are keeping your feet still, I will let go.” Slowly release the student limb by limb and praise the student for having regained control. Then either identify what the student could do instead next time or redirect the student to an activity.
Class removal

When a student is hurting himself, another person, or causing extreme property damage, then consider removing the class versus sending the student to the office. Students that are out of control may be further agitated by a change in location and reinforced by attention from others in the hall and office. Additionally, there is a higher likelihood that a behavior plan will not be fully implemented if a student is sent to a different adult.

Plan in advance. Either the teacher or assistant should stay with the student that is out of control. If a teacher does not have an assistant then plan for another person in the building to conduct a pre-planned activity with the rest of the class in an alternate setting.

Teaching class removal

**Identify the problem to the group.** explaining, “Sometimes some of you get so angry that others are in danger of being hurt. In these cases, you need to be left alone until you can calm down.”

**Identify the solution.** Explain that, “When someone is out of control, the rest of the class will leave. You will know if it is time to leave by this signal (demonstrate the selected signal such as flicking the lights or ringing a bell. You will go to the door, walk to __________ and continue with your school work. When the student in our room has calmed down, we will return.”

**Provide motivation.** “Given that it is so easy to get pulled into problems, I want you to tell me what you would like to earn for leaving quietly with the group and completing your assignment elsewhere.” (See Social Reinforcement Menus for use in identifying student motivators).

**Provide predictability.** Have materials ready to carry to the next activity. For example, keep a milk crate by the door with materials ready to go. Let students choose what activity to complete in the alternate location. Consider either having game boards that can be used with various content, such as the week’s spelling words, or doing a journal activity where students write or draw the problem that just occurred and possible solutions.

**Provide incentive for leaving the student that was out of control alone upon return to class.** Ask students to share how they feel after they have lost control and how they would like to be treated once the class returns. Remind students of what they said upon return to the class. Connect their compliance to positive consequences.

**Practice.** Have students practice the steps involved in class removal.

For the student that is out of control, your primary objective is to get the student to calm down. Typically a student that is out of control also has a primary objective — to get you to react. Avoid reacting and do not use a stream of words. Instead, give the student space and calmly state your expectations. Keep it simple and use gestures. For example, “You’re angry, go to the quiet area and get yourself together.” If this doesn’t work, do not repeat yourself over and over again. Instead, stay out of the student’s way until he is calm and avoid eye contact. Find something to keep yourself busy. Remember, in most cases, attention will fuel the behavior.

If a student tears up the room, when he or she is calm, have him or her restore the class environment. Make this a matter of protocol. Avoid sounding punitive as the reminder is made that he or she needs to put the room back together.
Either get the student immediately back into the scheduled routines or take a few minutes to debrief by asking the student what happened, what he could do next time and how you or another adult could help next time.

References


