THE CLASS CLOWN

I. BEHAVIOR: Specific attitudes and actions of this child at home and/or at school.

1. Continually disrupts class with wisecracks.
2. Will do or say anything to be in the spotlight.
3. Doesn’t know when to stop.
4. Has a smart-aleck response for everything that happens.
5. May even enjoy the attention of being reprimanded.
6. May actually be quite funny at times. This is a reality a teacher cannot overlook.
7. May be either a very bright or a very poor student.
8. Won’t quit until he/she gets attention. His/her behavior cannot be ignored.
9. May be popular and gregarious.
10. Physically and mentally active.
11. Usually, emotionally immature.
12. Bothers other students—touching, grabbing, etc.
13. Not really a leader; may actually be a loner.
14. Too busy clowning to get work done in class.
15. Very peer-conscious.
16. Clowns to cover up for poor performance.
17. May be hyperactive.
18. Tries not to be serious—makes a joke out of everything.
20. Often unprepared; doesn’t bring books or supplies to class.

II. EFFECTS: How behavior affects teachers, classmates, and parents in the school learning environment and the home family situation.

1. Attention of teacher and classmates is constantly diverted to this student’s clowning.
2. Teacher is upset by his/her inability to channel this student’s energy constructively.
3. Teacher fears other children may begin clowning as well.
4. Teacher often becomes upset because this student is not working up to his/her potential.
5. Other students are prevented from concentrating.
6. Classmates are either entertained or disgusted by the behavior.
7. A real danger can be presented by such behavior in open equipment classes.
8. Often, classmates resent the fact that the teacher is spending so much time on this student.
9. Regaining attention is difficult because some kids linger on this student’s humor.
10. Creating a serious tone in the classroom is difficult.
The Class Clown

III. ACTION:  
- Identify causes of misbehavior.
- Pinpoint student needs being revealed.
- Employ specific methods, procedures, and techniques at school and at home for getting the child to modify or change his/her behavior.

1. Primary cause of misbehavior:
   - Attention: This student desires attention at any price, and feels clowning is the only way he/she can get it.
2. Primary needs being revealed:
   - Sex/Sexuality: This person wants to establish relationships with people and is very unsure of how to go about it.
   - Escape from Pain: Situations at home or at school may be very painful, and this student may be hiding the pain by being the class clown.
3. Secondary needs being revealed:
   - Achievement: Sometimes the student’s inability to achieve in the academic world causes him/her to become the class clown.
   - Status: The class clown is saying, “Look, I’m somebody!” He/she seeks to feel worthwhile. Conversely, some of these students have high self-esteem and just like to entertain.
4. Remember, this student may not like the role of class clown. Help the student find a way out of this behavior, knowing he/she will pay any price for attention.
5. Don’t ignore this student. His/her personality and needs will not allow it.
6. Enjoy the humor briefly with the class. Remember, the class clown is often funny. The humor is not the major problem—knowing when to quit is. Therefore, signal by hand movement, rather than words, that “enough is enough.”
7. Fulfill this student’s need for attention at times other than when he/she is “cutting up.”
8. In a private conference, use the “Time and Place” strategy. Say, “Humor is a good thing. But you may forfeit respect if you always allow yourself to be laughed at.”
9. Respond with silence. In a powerful way, this response gets the student to settle down, because he/she knows that each added word is getting him/her into more trouble. When the student stops, however, don’t say one word. Rather, go on with the lesson. If you say anything, the student will start up again.
10. With the class, use the “Mature Class” technique. Explain that a teacher likes to be able to have fun with the class. However, a teacher can do this only if the class is mature enough to sense the right time and place for humor. Ask students if they know what a mature class is. It’s one that knows when to work and when to have fun, one that can stop having fun and get back to work when the teacher so requests.
11. Don’t attempt to handle this student with anger, rejection, or sarcasm, and don’t try to outwit this student. Such attempts will fail.
12. Isolate the class clown from his/her audience—but don’t forget this student’s need for attention.
13. After his/her next clowning episode, laugh with the class. The second time it happens, wait until the incident is over, and then explain to the class that humor is a good thing in the classroom, at the right time and place.
14. Following the talk to the class, give the same talk privately to the class clown. Emphasize the concepts of maturity and respect. Tell the student you resent people laughing at him/her and it troubles you that he/she is helping them laugh. Tell the student you are going to help him/her handle humor in a mature manner so that it can be a personal asset rather than a liability.
15. Be prepared to provide the patience and help he/she will need. Your efforts should begin to pay behavior dividends almost immediately.

16. At appropriate times and places, give this student a chance to “perform.”

17. When humor interrupts your class, try combating it with more humor. When the class becomes unruly because of “something funny” that the class clown says or does, a problem exists only if the teacher cannot regain interest. The best way to do this is to join in the laughter for a few moments, relax, and then urge the class back to the lesson at hand. The majority will quickly obey. For the others, silence and a serious look in their direction should bring order. If it becomes necessary to discipline a few, the rest of the class is aware of your fairness as well as the need for your action.

IV. MISTAKES: Common misjudgments and errors in managing the child which may perpetuate or intensify the problem.

1. Overreacting to this student’s behavior, both in personal conferences and in the classroom.
2. Calling the class’s attention to the problem.
3. Trying to ignore the problem.
4. Issuing threats that can’t really be carried out.
5. Trying to isolate the student physically in order to stop the clowning.
6. Feeling that this student is operating this way in order to “bug” the teacher.
7. Failing to see any benefits in the humor of the class clown.
8. Having two standards of expectations and allowances—one for the class clown and one for other students.
9. Failing to realize and acknowledge that this type of humor is not a negative human characteristic. It is a positive one—and can be a constructive factor in the success of an individual.
10. Feeling that the student invariably enjoys acting like a clown and is making no real effort to change this behavior.

SEE ALSO: • The Con Artist • The Show-Off