

I remember when cell phones were new...people started carrying their phones everywhere, which was very convenient, but also led to new frustrations. Phones started ringing in the middle of meetings, church services and movie theaters. At first, people rolled their eyes and thought how rude the offending person was. Then they tried shushing the offender or shooting them pointed glares with the hopes of changing the bothersome behavior. But getting annoyed didn't change the behavior and neither did social correction. Phones kept going off, because most people didn't go into meetings or movie theaters intending to annoy people. Often, they just didn't think about it until their phones went off.

It took a few years, but I noticed a shift in approach. Instead of getting annoyed (which wasn't working...), people started giving people the opportunity to get it right. They started making quick announcements at the beginning of meetings prompting people to silence their cell phones or they included a short movie clip at the beginning of every movie reminding people not to "ruin the movie, by adding your own soundtrack." And the behavior improved.

Well, if adults need reminders, then students need them more. We know that [student's brains](#) are still developing through their early 20's, with decision-making, inhibitory control and reasoning being some of the last elements to develop. In other words, students are generally more impulsive and distracted than adults and they often don't make decisions with long term consequences in mind. They also tend to be driven more by the emotional center of their brain (the amygdala) than the rational center of their brain (the pre-frontal cortex, which is still developing).



Every teacher knows how frustrating it can be to correct the same behavior over and over. It can feel a bit like the game of Whack-A-Mole. Rather than just reacting to persistent behavior and dealing with the frequent correction and frustration that follows... try shifting your approach. Prepare students by clarifying your expectations right before a behavior is expected. Even if students have heard it before, Preventive Prompts help students remember the expectations in the fog of the moment and help reduce the need for corrections.

- "Raise your hand if you..."
- "Remember to keep your conversations on topic as you are working on your projects..."
- "Why don't you tell me your concerns in a calm voice..."
- "I have some feedback for you and remember I am just looking for an 'ok'."

When students are still learning specific social/emotional skills, it can help to be even more specific: "I'm getting ready to give some instructions. Remember when you [Follow Instructions](#), you look at the person, say or think 'ok' and do what you are asked to do right away."

Simply put, quick proactive prompts help increase positive behaviors, both in school and out, and they help reduce frustration for everyone.