

# Supporting a colleague with refining their classroom management practice

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**Effective classroom management creates safe and supportive learning environments for all students. This practice guide is designed for experienced teachers and school leaders supporting colleagues with refining their classroom management practice using the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO)'s foundational classroom management resources. AERO's foundational classroom management resources are designed for beginning teachers, teachers working in new environments or experienced teachers who want to refine or refresh specific elements of their classroom management practice.**

Supporting a colleague with refining their classroom management practice can help them identify their goals and priorities, raise awareness of current practice, affirm and reinforce good practice and assist their refinement of practice through building knowledge, modelling, planning and rehearsing. This can lead to teachers having increased confidence and motivation when using the refined practices and skills to effectively manage their classrooms.

A teacher or school leader can support their colleague with refining specific elements of their classroom management practice by working with them one on one, over an extended period of time and in individually tailored and focused ways.

The support offered should be specific to the colleague's demonstration of the practice or skill outlined in AERO's [foundational classroom management practice guides and skill resources](#). This support can vary depending on the colleague's awareness of their own practice and their knowledge of evidence-based classroom management practices and skills.

### **To effectively support a colleague with refining their classroom management practice:**

1. Build and maintain a collaborative relationship.
2. Decide on a specific practice or skill to observe and prepare for the observation.
3. Observe the specific practice or skill.
4. Conduct a feedback session.
  - a. Praise effective practice.
  - b. Prompt reflection.
  - c. Model.
  - d. Plan.
  - e. Rehearse.

# Effectively supporting a colleague with refining their classroom management practice

## 1. Build and maintain a collaborative relationship

Making an active effort to build and maintain a trusting relationship with your colleague will enable you to work collaboratively with them to refine their classroom management practices and skills.

First, identify what you bring to the collaborative relationship and define your approach to supporting a colleague with refining their practice. Reflect on your own experiences, values, beliefs and biases about observation, feedback and refining classroom management practice, and how these may influence your approach:

What are my experiences of effectively managing classrooms? How have these experiences changed over time?

What strengths and challenges did I previously have or now have in my own practice?

How have I been supported to develop and refine my own classroom management practice?

What made the support helpful or unhelpful? How might I draw on these experiences to help me support my colleague in refining their practice?

What do I already know about classroom management? How can I build on or consolidate this understanding using AERO's [foundational classroom management resources](#)?

How will I ensure I give evidence-based advice when responding to questions?

How can I make sure I have enough time available to support my colleague?

Where will I go for my own support?

As you prepare to support your colleague, make time to get to know them. This will help you understand what is important to them, which will help build a trusting relationship and strengthen the support you provide. You can ask questions, such as:

What is your favourite thing about being a teacher?

What are your short- and long-term goals and your career aspirations?

What do you think makes a great teacher?

What motivated you to enter the profession?

Why is it important to you that you refine your practice as a teacher?

In all interactions, encourage colleagues to feel comfortable expressing themselves without fear of negative judgement and so you can effectively support them with refining their practice. You can do this by:

- being respectful, staying emotionally composed and demonstrating empathy
- using a positive, warm, authentic tone and positive non-verbal communication, such as encouraging facial expressions and positive body language
- encouraging open communication and actively listening to understand what your colleague is saying, paraphrasing to check for understanding
- taking time to think and consider your responses
- being open to sharing your own experiences and challenges in implementing effective classroom management practices, and encouraging your colleague to do the same
- using AERO's [foundational classroom management resources](#) and [observation tools](#) to establish a shared language and understanding of effective classroom management
- staying focused on the specific practices and skills you observe and record in the classroom management [observation tools](#) so you can conduct feedback sessions in a constructive and supportive manner
- identifying when your values and beliefs may differ from your colleague's and how you might work together through these differences.

At the start of the process, discuss and agree on expectations with your colleague so you're both clear on what you're trying to achieve and how you'll do this. Investing this time at the start of the process will improve the experience and results for you and your colleague. You and your colleague can explore questions, such as:

- How is your colleague hoping this collaborative relationship will support their classroom management practice?
- How will you ensure your advice is evidence-based?
- How often will you and your colleague meet, for how long and where, and how will you communicate between meetings?
- What records will you keep?
- Will you need to report to anyone? What specific things might you need to report?
- How will your colleague explain your presence as an observer to the students?
- What else do you and your colleague need to consider specific to their context?

Throughout the process, value the quality and focus of the time spent together, rather than the number of hours.

Despite your best efforts, there may be instances when the relationship becomes strained. If this happens, consider taking a break before meeting to review the agreed expectations. Continue to actively listen and acknowledge challenges.

## 2. Decide on a specific practice or skill to observe and prepare for the observation

Observing your colleague and collecting objective evidence of their classroom management practice supports a fuller awareness of their actions and their impact on students. Collecting evidence on a single practice or skill will keep the observation and feedback focused and manageable.

### Decide on a specific practice or skill to focus on

Before an observation, meet with your colleague and discuss the following questions, referring to the list of AERO's [foundational classroom management practice guides and skill resources](#). Listen without interrupting. Avoid leading questions such as 'Which part of your entrance routine is ineffective?' Instead, you could ask:

How would you describe your classroom management practices and skills?

Of all the classroom management practices and skills in AERO's foundational classroom management resources, which is a strength for you?

What would your students be doing differently if your classroom management was more effective?

What changes could you make to refine your classroom management?

How do you know that these changes are necessary?

Which specific practice or skill would help you refine your classroom management?

Do you want to focus on that?

### Once you've decided on a specific practice or skill to focus on

Arrange when you'll observe the practice or skill, making sure you'll be there early and long enough to observe it. For example, when observing an [exit routine](#), you'll need to be there in time to observe the teacher wrapping up the final learning task and stay until all students have left the classroom and the area outside the classroom.

Use the relevant [classroom management observation tool](#) to identify what success looks like for the agreed focus. Discuss any differences in how you describe practices and skills, and agree on a common language. For example, do you call it [scanning](#) or something else when you're consistently and intentionally monitoring all students?

Discuss how the practice or skill will be demonstrated during the observation.

Agree on when the feedback session will occur. This will need to take place as soon as possible after the observation, be long enough to implement all stages of the feedback session and, if possible, be in the colleague's classroom or a similar setting to support effective rehearsal.

### Prepare for the observation

Read the relevant [foundational classroom management practice guide or skill resource](#) to enhance your knowledge of the focus of the observation.

Remind your colleague of the observation and feedback session via email or in person.

Have the relevant [classroom management observation tool](#) available to objectively record what your colleague says and does at key moments, as well as how students respond.

### 3. Observe the specific practice or skill

During the observation, follow the agreed approach to documenting the observation by writing down or filming your colleague's behaviours related to the focus practice or skill, as well as students' responses. Use the relevant [classroom management observation tool](#) to take written observation notes. These should be objective and avoid opinions or assumptions. The checklists in the [classroom management observation tools](#) will help you record whether the observable actions of a practice or skill have been demonstrated and in what ways. They'll help you identify strengths and areas for refinement in your colleague's practice.

Filmed observations provide clarity for the feedback session by showing the actual practice. If you and your colleague have decided to film their practice, be sure to follow school or employer policies regarding recording students and staff.

Arrive on time for the observation and leave at the agreed time. If you're observing a routine, be sure to arrive before the routine commences.

During the observation, use the checklists in the [classroom management observation tool](#) to identify which parts of the practice or skill were demonstrated by your colleague.

Try to note key additional details about your colleague's actions and students' responses, ensuring these are objective and only describe what your colleague and students said or did. For example, when [setting behaviour expectations for completing learning tasks](#), how did your colleague communicate to the students how they should be working? An objective observation note might be: *Students instructed to work in pairs at a noise level only the person next to them can hear.*

### 4. Conduct a feedback session

Objective, accurate and constructive feedback to your colleague can strengthen their awareness and help them develop an enhanced understanding of their practice. Focusing on what they did in the classroom and providing descriptive and factual feedback on how these actions compare to the steps or elements for success in AERO's [classroom management observation tools](#) will help identify opportunities to refine specific practices or skills. Use the checklists in this section to script, rehearse and conduct the feedback session.

The feedback session should take place in an environment where you can model and your colleague can rehearse the practice or skill, free from students and distractions. You should allow enough time to complete the full feedback session.

Use the evidence you recorded in the observation as the focus of your feedback. Keep in mind that there may be things that occurred during the lesson that your colleague is not consciously aware of. Be responsive to their needs, adapting your feedback and scaffolding the refinement of the practice or skill through modelling and rehearsal.

If a colleague requires assistance beyond refining their classroom management practice, or there are any concerns about their wellbeing, encourage them to engage with the appropriate school leader or support staff. In these circumstances, your colleague may need specialised support. This is beyond your role in supporting them with developing their classroom management practice.

## Before the feedback session

AERO's [classroom management observation tools](#) contain checklists to help refine classroom management practices and skills. Analyse the observation evidence against the checklists in the tool:

Did the colleague fully demonstrate all the steps of the practice or all the elements for success for the skill?

If they didn't fully demonstrate all practice steps or elements for success:

What did they complete well? What aspects can you praise? What have they refined since your previous feedback session (if relevant)?

What is their next priority to focus on? Is it a single step of a practice, a specific skill or an element of a skill? For example, 'When conducting an exit routine, the step to remind all students of the expectations for finishing the lesson was not fully demonstrated.'

Within the practice step or skill, what specifically needs refinement? What evidence is there to support this? For example, 'The expectations for finishing the lesson (practice step) were not clearly communicated (skill) because they were not broken down (skill element).'

## Script, rehearse and then conduct the feedback session

Script, rehearse, then conduct each part of the feedback session using examples from the observation evidence you collected on the relevant [classroom management observation tool](#).

### a. Praise effective practice

Praising specific classroom management practices and skills builds confidence and awareness of what's effective. It can affirm the impact of specific practices and skills and is valuable in building a trusting relationship.

Praise your colleague on specific actions related to the relevant classroom management practice or skill.

Highlight the positive impact your colleague's actions had on student behaviour and engagement in learning.

### b. Prompt reflection

Prompting reflection increases your colleague's awareness of their actions during the observation and the impact of these actions on student behaviour and engagement in learning.

Ask questions to prompt reflection, such as:

- When you [action], what was your desired outcome? Did you achieve this?
- Can you remember what happened after you [action]? What did the students do?  
What was the effect you were aiming for?
- What did your students do when you [action]? Was this the desired outcome?
- How successful was it when you [action]?

Videos of your colleague's practice can support reflection. Encourage them to make their thinking visible by asking them to provide a commentary alongside the video to explain their actions.

Ask questions to gain insight into your colleague's understanding of a practice step, a skill within a practice or an element of a skill, for example:

- Why is it important that you [insert specific practice step, skill or skill element]? For example, why is it important to gain all students' attention before clearly communicating the behaviour expectations for finishing the lesson?
- What impact is intended by [insert specific practice step, skill or skill element]? For example, what impact is intended by clearly communicating your expectations for finishing the lesson?
- What would effective practice look like in [insert specific practice step, skill or skill element]? For example, what would effective practice look like in deliberately pausing and scanning to ensure students understand and are following instructions?

Use the relevant [classroom management practice guide or skill resource](#) to support your colleague to:

- reflect on what they could do differently to strengthen a practice step or skill
- identify why a practice step, skill or skill element is important
- precisely identify the single aspect of a practice step, skill or skill element that, when refined, will make the biggest difference to their classroom management.

Ask questions to identify and agree on a specific practice step, skill or skill element for refinement, referring to the relevant [classroom management practice guide or skill resource](#). These could include:

- What is the ideal response from students when you [insert specific practice step, skill or skill element]? For example, what is the ideal response from students when you use a verbal correction?
- What could you do differently to [insert specific practice step, skill or skill element]? For example, what could you do differently to use an assertive voice?
- How could you improve [insert specific practice step, skill or skill element]? For example, how could you improve your position so you can see all students when entering the classroom?
- How can you refine this specific practice step, skill or skill element?

Guide what your colleague should focus on if they're finding it difficult to identify a specific practice step, skill or skill element. For example:

- 'The observation evidence collected and the steps outlined in the guide indicate that we should focus on [specific practice step, skill or skill element].'



### c. Model

Modelling during the feedback session provides a demonstration of the classroom management practice or skill as an example for your colleague. Using the relevant AERO [classroom management observation tool](#) to analyse the specific elements of the modelled practice or skill helps to clarify effective practice.

Before demonstrating, check that your prepared script for the modelled demonstration includes all the checklist items in the relevant [classroom management observation tool](#) and rescript if not. Rehearse your model if needed. Consider how you might also demonstrate practice not as well-aligned with the evidence base.

Demonstrate the specific practice or skill for refinement for your colleague. You might pause at different points to discuss the specific practice steps or skill elements. You might also contrast an [example](#) with a non-example to identify what more and less effective practice looks like.

Support your colleague with analysing the modelled demonstration using the relevant [classroom management observation tool](#):

- What were the most important elements of the modelled demonstration for effective classroom management?
- What were the differences between this demonstration of [practice step, skill or skill element] and the practice step or skill you demonstrated?

Ask the following questions to help your colleague adapt the modelled demonstration to their own situation:

- What impact would you expect [practice step, skill or skill element] to have on your students?
- Do you see any issues with this demonstration with your class? How might we adapt this model to address these issues?
- Are there any students or classes that you need to really think about when refining [practice step, skill or skill element]? What adjustments would need to be made?
- Are there any adaptations you think you need to make to feel comfortable trying this with your class?

### d. Plan

Planning when and how your colleague will try the refined classroom management practice step, skill or skill element in the classroom will give them a real situation to rehearse for.

Support your colleague with identifying when they'll next use the refined classroom management practice step, skill or skill element. Next lesson? Tomorrow? When they next see that class?

## e. Rehearse

Rehearsing provides your colleague with an opportunity to deliberately practise a classroom management practice step, skill or skill element with your support before they practise with a class.

Repeated in a realistic setting over time, rehearsing can help replace and refine existing habits, enabling aspects of effective practice to progressively improve and become automatic. As refined practices and skills become automatic, your colleague will have more time for teaching and responding to students' needs.

Set up the rehearsal, for example:

'Now that we've identified that [practice step, skill or skill element] is our focus, let's rehearse this so you can see what it looks like. This will help you prepare and visualise what you should say or do when you next [practice step, skill or skill element].'

Support your colleague with scripting what they'll say and do the next time they use the practice step, skill or skill element. Ensure all checklist items in the practice step or skill are included.

Have your colleague rehearse using their script.

Provide feedback on their rehearsal using the [classroom management observation tool](#) checklist for the practice step or skill. Consider:

- Did they demonstrate all checklist items or elements for success?
- What specific feedback can you provide?
- How can you support them with further refining their practice? Can you give them a scenario to respond to when rehearsing?

Have your colleague rehearse multiple times to progressively improve and make the refined practice step, skill or skill element automatic, providing feedback each time.

Review and summarise by asking your colleague:

- When and where are you going to practise with students present? How will you remember to do this?
- What key elements will you make sure you include?
- How will you know if you've been successful in refining your practice?

Identify a suitable time to re-observe the refined practice step, skill or skill element. Allow time for your colleague to embed the specific focus into their practice before revisiting.

## Questions for reflection

To help you improve the support you provide to your colleague with refining their classroom management practice, consider these questions:

- How is the collaborative relationship you've built with your colleague enabling you to support them to refine their practice? Are there actions you can take to further strengthen this relationship?
- How well are you using and applying AERO's foundational classroom management practice guides and skill resources to support your colleague in refining their practice?
- Are there classroom management practices or skills you can refine in your own practice to better support others through more effective modelled demonstrations?
- Is your preparation for supporting your colleague effective? How do you know? Are there aspects of preparation you could focus on refining?

## Further reading

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