



Managing difficult behaviours

A practical fact sheet for trainers and assessors.

In this fact sheet:

- What difficult behaviour looks like and why it matters
- The impact on learners and the training environment
- 8 common behaviours, strategies and good practice tips

What 'difficult behaviour' means

In training, difficult behaviours are those that disrupt learning, reduce safety, undermine respect in the room or on site, or make it harder for others to participate and progress. They are not just a "bad attitude". They can include low-level disruption, side conversations, refusal to engage, dominating the session, dismissing safety instructions, repeated lateness, or behaviour that unsettles other learners.

In mining and automotive contexts, these behaviours matter because training often takes place in real workplaces, around safety-critical tasks, with mixed experience levels and under production pressure. A behaviour becomes a training issue when it affects learning, safe work, group trust, or assessment integrity. Evidence from AERO and OECD shows that learners do best in safe, supportive, and well-managed environments, and that a poor disciplinary climate reduces effective learning time and engagement.

Why is it important to manage difficult behaviours

Managing difficult behaviour is not about "winning" against a learner. It is about protecting the learning environment for everyone.

When difficult behaviours are left unchecked, they can:

- reduce learner concentration and participation
- weaken motivation and confidence
- make quieter learners withdraw
- normalise unsafe shortcuts
- reduce the quality of practice and feedback
- affect progression and completion.

This is especially important in mining and automotive training, where learners must not only understand content but also apply it safely and consistently.



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8 common difficult behaviours and simple strategies to reduce their impact

Behaviour	What it could look like	Strategies to reduce the impact
1. Side conversations	Learners talk over a toolbox session or group demonstration.	Pause, reset attention, restate the task, move closer, and use shorter instructions.
2. Interrupting the trainer	A learner interrupts during a safety explanation or a practical demonstration.	Acknowledge briefly, redirect, and set one-person-at-a-time expectations.
3. Dominating the session	An experienced worker answers every question and shuts others out.	Use structured turn-taking, direct questions, and give the dominant learner a non-speaking role, such as a scribe.
4. Repeated lateness	Learners arrive after the briefing or miss the setup for practical work.	Address privately, explain the impact on safety and flow, and reset expectations early.
5. Refusing to participate	A learner stands back during a task, avoids questions, or says little.	Start with low-pressure participation, pair work and specific prompts rather than public pressure.
6. Negative comments or sarcasm	Learner mocks a peer's answer or jokes when others make mistakes.	Stop it early, name the behaviour, restate respect expectations and protect the group.
7. Phone distraction	Learner checks messages during demonstrations or discussions.	Set device rules upfront and encourage phone use only when it supports the learning task.
8. Low-level disengagement	The learner looks bored, avoids eye contact, and puts in minimal effort.	Adjust the pace, use a practical task, ask job-relevant questions, and connect the content to real work.



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Practical examples for mining and automotive trainers

Mining example

During a pre-start learning session, one operator repeatedly interrupts with stories about how the job used to be done. The trainer acknowledges the operator's experience, then brings the group back to the current site procedure, asks another learner to identify the critical control, and follows up privately at the break. This protects the group, keeps the session safe, and avoids a public argument.

Automotive example

During a workshop training session, one learner jokes when a co-worker gives the wrong answer, and others stop speaking up. The trainer immediately stops the behaviour, restates expectations about respect, shifts to paired practice, and then invites quieter learners to report back first. This restores participation and keeps the practical session productive.

Good practice principles

The most effective trainers:

- When difficult behaviours are left unchecked, they can:
 - act early rather than waiting for behaviour to get worse
 - focus on the behaviour, not the person
 - keep expectations clear and consistent
 - protect the wider learner group, not just the disruptive learner
 - link corrections to safety, quality and workplace standards
 - use private conversations for sensitive issues



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Key message

Difficult behaviour is not just a classroom issue. In mining and automotive settings, it can affect safety, confidence, skill development and completion. Strong trainers manage behaviour calmly, clearly and consistently, giving all learners a fair chance to engage, practice and succeed. Plain language, clear structure and respectful correction are part of that standard.

References

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