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# Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall Respond vs. React

*The goal isn't to get rid of all your negative thoughts  
and feelings; that's impossible.*

*The goal is to change your response to them.*

*—Marc and Angel Chernoff*

## Reflecting On Your Beliefs

Can you think of a specific student who challenged you and made you feel frustration, stress, or anger? Do you have memories of a specific class that made you question your decision to be an educator? Think back to your response to those stressful times or frustrating behaviors. Could you have done anything differently? Honestly, I must answer yes to all of these questions, and I admit there were opportunities where I could have done a lot of things differently. I ask you to recall your interactions with the frustrating behaviors of a student or a class that challenged you. Did you consider changing your own behavior or were you more focused on changing the student's behaviors?

Most of us have a philosophy or belief system about children's behavior. But where do these come from? Each of us brings thousands of life experiences that influence every interaction we have with our students. Those experiences include interactions with our own caregivers and families, marketing campaigns and imagery, media representations of specific groups, social commentary, and the list goes on. Our deeply rooted belief systems dictate how we view behavior, what we expect of children's behavior, and more importantly, how we respond to their behavior. As we progress through adulthood, many of us become more set in our ways—more inclined to believe that our way is the “right” way. This one-sided view can create a divide when we teach children from different cultures, backgrounds, or generations, or whose families' belief



## Specific Strategies/Reflection

Remember: Respond vs. React

- A response is planned and driven by goals.
- A reaction is unplanned and driven by emotion.

### 1. Model De-escalation with Language – Planned Responses

“What do you need right now? Can you tell me?” vs. “I’m not putting up with this.”

“Can you try that again in a way we’ve agreed upon?” vs. “I’ve told you so many times.”

“I will listen to you when your voice is at a level 2.” vs. “Don’t talk to me like that!”

“You are welcome to join the group when you feel calm.” vs. “You need to calm down!”

Add your own planned responses here:

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### 2. Identify a signal or code word with the student/child:

Identify a pre-determined code word/phrase/signal that allows the student to communicate that they have reached an emotional level where they typically struggle to manage their emotions. The code word sets into motion what the student can do and what the adult will do to help him/her calm down.

**Student:** Calls out code word (bluebird, ninja, cloudy day, etc.)

**Adult:** Responds “bluebird” and places a kitchen timer or sand timer on student desk or table

**Student:** Moves to “Peace Corner” or other quiet space with a timer for three minutes or is allowed to do another predetermined calming activity

When time is up, the adult communicates to the student that they handled the situation well and made a good decision. If a tracking system is in place, the adult or student marks success for the interaction. The goal





**QUESTIONS  
to  
CONSIDER**

**1.** Where do your beliefs about how children should behave originate?

**2.** Do you believe children with severe behavioral issues can change and improve their behavior? Why or why not?

**3.** Reflect on a specific student/child behavior that causes quick agitation for you? Why does it bother you? Can you think of an approach to this behavior that will allow you to respond differently?

**4.** How would you have responded to the situation with Matthew?

**5.** Do you feel you typically respond to or react to misbehavior? What evidence supports your answer?





- Your students' behavior is not your fault. Your response to it is your responsibility.
- Take the time to reflect about your interactions with students/children.
- Regularly ask yourself, "Could I have done anything differently?"
- It's okay not to respond immediately. If it's bothering only you, you don't have to address it right away.
- It's always the adult's job to de-escalate.
- Give yourself permission to do something different, regardless of judgment, if you think it will work.
- Choices = Power. It creates options for all involved and allows both parties to feel some control. (If anyone handles a "crisis" better after reflecting on The Matthew Debacle, it makes admitting it to you slightly less painful.)