It is normal for children to be impulsive. Have you ever had students blurt out the answer? Or wave their hand in the air calling “pick me” before you have finished asking the question? This is impulsivity. Impulsive people often blurt out answers and make immediate value judgements.

Intelligent people have a deliberateness about what they do. They stop and plan rather than rush head first into a task. Effective problem solvers are purposeful and consider alternatives and consequences. They make sure they understand the instructions and will take time to collect relevant information. These students are also able to listen to different points of view.

Give students clear guidelines, goals and outcomes and time to plan step by step how they might approach a task.

When students are being impulsive, they haven’t had time to consider possibilities and consequences of actions before beginning a task. After giving an instruction, ask, “what would you be doing if you were following the instructions correctly?” Have them either share with the class or simply to a partner to ensure they have had time to process what they are about to do.

Another phrase that is extremely effective to manage impulsivity is to say “in a moment but not quite yet...” before you give an instruction. Here is the difference. “Please find a partner and decide who will go first.” Or “In a moment, but not quite yet, please find a partner and decide who will go first.” Often with the first statement, students are already looking for a partner and do not hear the second part. The second statement tends to stop students before they rush off and they will be more likely to hear the rest of the instruction.

Using wait time is also a powerful strategy to manage impulsivity. M.B Rowe’s study, reported in the *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, shows after having asked a question, the average teacher waits one second before either calling on a student, asking another question or answering the question him/herself. This gives students no thinking time. It is unrealistic to expect anyone to be able to give an informed answer in one second. Wait at least seven to 10 seconds before calling on a student to ensure think time. Another study reported students often raised their hands when the teacher asked a question in order to trick teachers into thinking that they had the answer and were thinking. However when called upon to answer the question the students often said, “I forgot.” The raised hand may be a strategy to not to have to think.

A fabulous analogy I heard at a primary school was children describing managing impulsivity as the difference between being a frog or an owl. A six-year-old girl explained; “A frog blurts and an owl thinks.” Another school uses the traffic light: Stop Think Go.

I came across a great way to introduce this concept in a grammar school in Brisbane. The teacher placed small bowls of M&M chocolate lollies on each student’s desk and did not mention or draw attention to them for the afternoon. Fifteen minutes before school finished she invited students to get their M&M’s for an activity. Of course most students had eaten them. The teacher, disappointed and shocked, explained that the lollies had been soaked in a laxative. The teacher reported she had to explain the effect of laxatives, and the students were mortified, especially the boy who realised he would be on the bus when the effects would hit. A memorable lesson on managing impulsivity.