

Doing the Verbal De-Escalation Dance

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Doing the Verbal De-Escalation Dance



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Positive Behavior Intervention Supports



Old Thinking

- View the student as the problem
- Fix the student
- Emphasize reducing behavior
- Rely only on negative consequences
- Focused on 'quick fix' designed by expert

New Thinking

- View systems/settings and skill deficiencies as problem
- Change the environment and teach skills
- Emphasizes increasing skills
- Focus on positive approaches
- Focused on sustained results using a team approach

Glossary of Terms

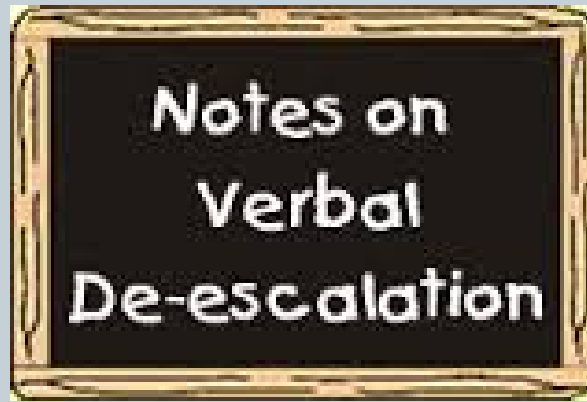


- **Behavior Escalation:** The cycle or stages in which conflict and/or undesirable behavior worsens and becomes more intense, serious, and possibly dangerous (Fecser & Long, 1998; Colvin & Sugai, 1989).
-
- **Diffusing or De-Escalating Behavior:** Utilizing research-based positive behavior supports and interventions to lessen and alleviate conflict with the goal of returning to the stage of recovery or the state of calm (Duggan & Dawson, 2004).

What is “Verbal De-Escalation”?



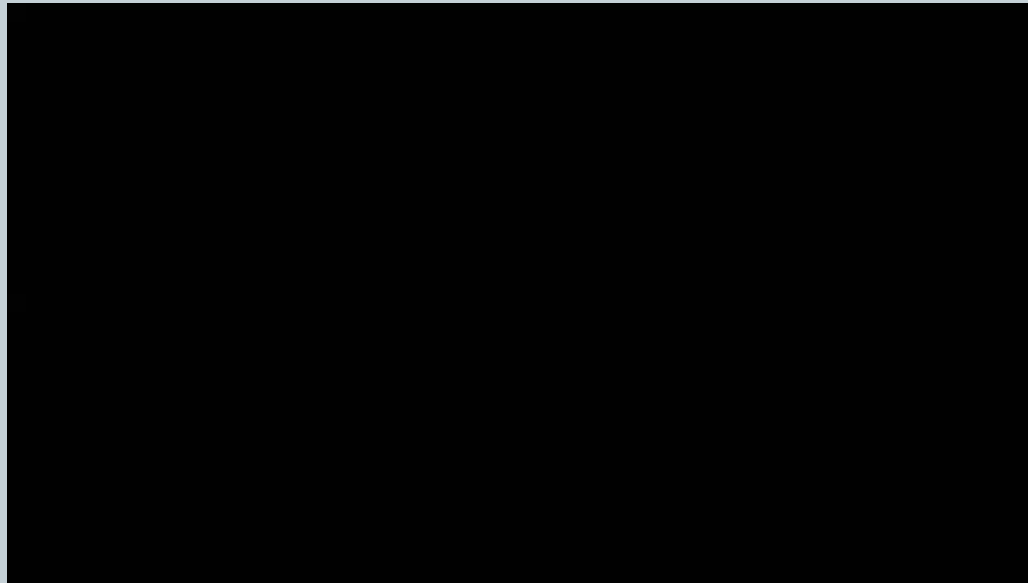
- A targeted intervention for use with students who are at risk for aggression. It is basically using **calm language**, along with other communication techniques, to **diffuse**, **re-direct**, or **de-escalate** a conflict situation (Kerr & Nelson, 2010).



Role Play



In the scenario, what did the teacher do wrong and why do you believe that was wrong?



The Cycle

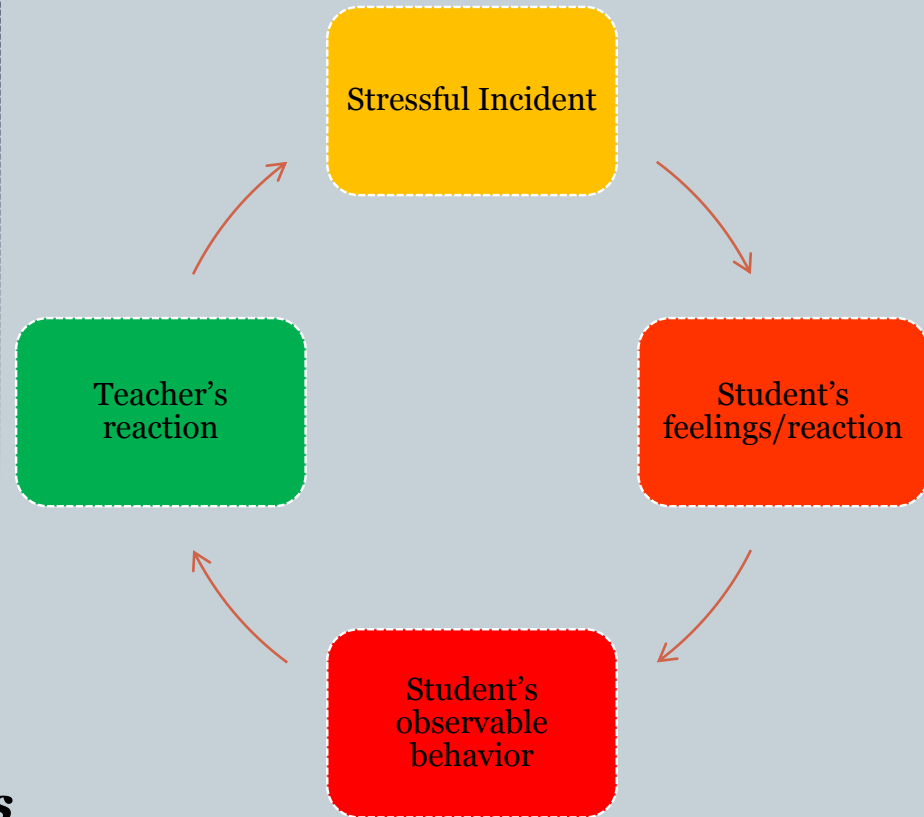
1) a stressful incident for the student

2) the student's feelings or reaction

3) the student's observable behavior (or misbehavior)

4) the teacher's reaction

“The teacher’s reaction can serve to perpetuate and even escalate the conflict when the teacher uses negative criticism, reprimands, and punishment”
(Fecser & Long, 1998).



The Seven Stages of Behavior Escalation



Seven Stages of Behavior Escalation

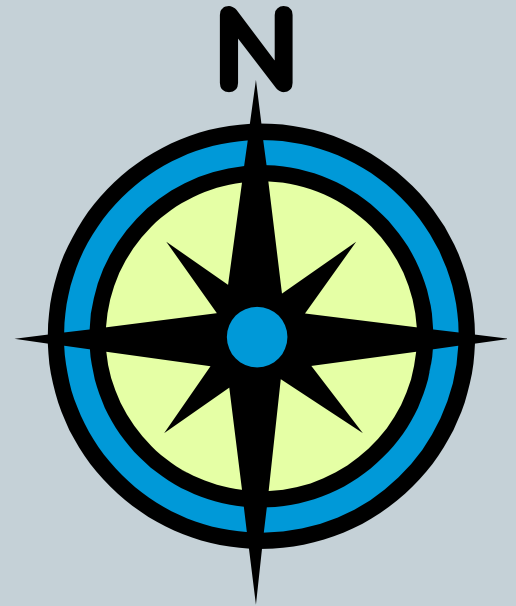


| Stage | The student |
|------------------------|---|
| 1 Calm | Is relatively calm and cooperative. |
| 2 Trigger | Experiences unresolved conflicts that serve to trigger the student's behavior to escalate. |
| 3 Agitation | Is increasingly unfocused and upset. |
| 4 Acceleration | As the conflict remains unresolved, the student actually FOCUSES on the conflict. |
| 5 Peak | Is out of control and exhibits the most severe behavior. |
| 6 De-escalation | Having vented in the peak stage, the student displays confusion in this phase, but the severity of the peak behavior subsides. |
| 7 Recovery | Often wishes to participate in <i>non-engagement</i> activities such as going to the nurse or counselor's office, or putting her head down. |

Phase One: Calm



- Student is cooperative
- Accepts corrective feedback
- Follows directives
- Sets personal goals
- Ignores distractions
- Accepts praise
- On-task

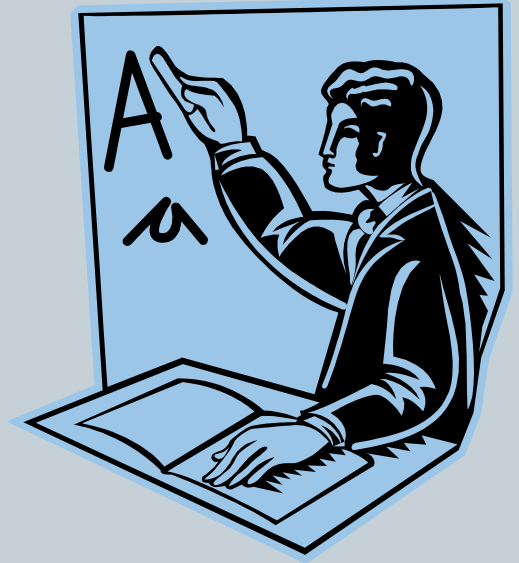


Strategies: Calm



Four Strategies:

1. Classroom Structure
2. Quality Instruction
3. Managing Attention
4. Teaching Behavior

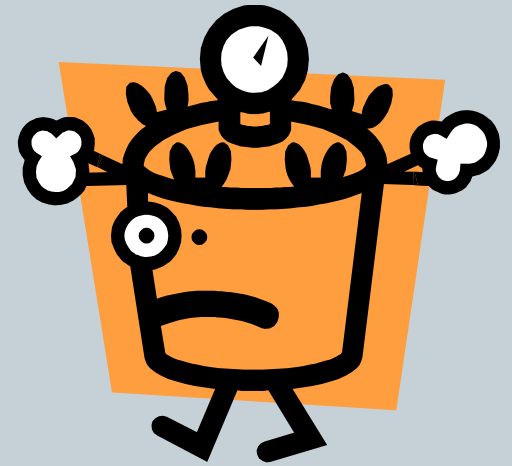


Phase Two: Trigger



Student experiences a series of unresolved problems

- Conflicts/Failure
- Changes in routine
- Pressure
- Ineffective problem solving
- Facing correction procedures



Strategies: Trigger



Intervention is focused on prevention and redirection.

- Increase opportunities for success
- Respond to students exhibiting expected behavior
- Reinforce the student's first on task response
- Intermittently reinforce on-task behavior

Strategies: Trigger



Three major areas:

- Formal programs or services: curriculum interventions, counseling, community services, medical assistance
- Pre-Correction: anticipating the problem behavior and intervening beforehand
- Addressing non-school based triggers: parent conferences-partnerships, school support services, wrap-around services

Phase Three: Agitation



Overall behavior is unfocused and distracted.

- Off-task
- Questioning/Arguing
- Out of seat
- Bothering others
- Social withdrawal



Strategies: Agitation



Intervention is focused on reducing anxiety.

- If not addressed student may escalate **or** remain distracted making instruction difficult
- Strategies are accommodations
- Implement before onset of escalation
- Make structural/environmental modifications
- Provide reasonable options & choices
- Involve in successful engagement

Strategies: Agitation



What to do before a behavior escalates

- Achieve eye contact.
- Use the student's name.
- Use a non-verbal signal/Silent communication.
- Do the unexpected.
- Get them to think – give them time to decide.
- Reduce distance – use proximity.
- Give more “start” requests instead of “stop” requests.
- Make non-emotional instead of emotional requests.
- Use the “broken record” technique.

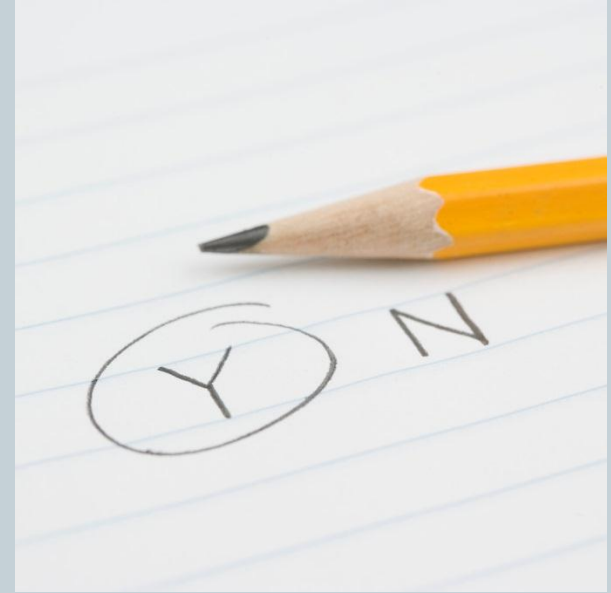


Strategies: Agitation



Strategies that work:

- Teacher empathy
- Movement activities
- Space
- Options/Choices
- Student involvement
- Preferred activities
- Relaxation techniques
- Teacher proximity
- Pre-arranged signal
- Independent activities



Strategies: Agitation

Techniques that backfire:

- Raising your voice
- Drawing unrelated persons into the conflict
- Insisting you are right
- Insisting on having the last word
- Using sarcasm
- Making assumptions
- Attacking the student's character
- Making comparisons with siblings ,events, or other students
- Holding a grudge



Phase Four: Acceleration



Overall behavior is staff-engaging leading to further negative interactions.

- Questioning/Arguing/Threats
- Noncompliance and defiance
- Provocation of others
- Rule violations

Strategies: Acceleration



Intervention is focused on safety.

- Remove all triggering factors
- Avoid escalating prompts
- Maintain calmness, respect and detachment
- Approach the student in a nonthreatening manner
- Utilize non-confrontational limit-setting procedures

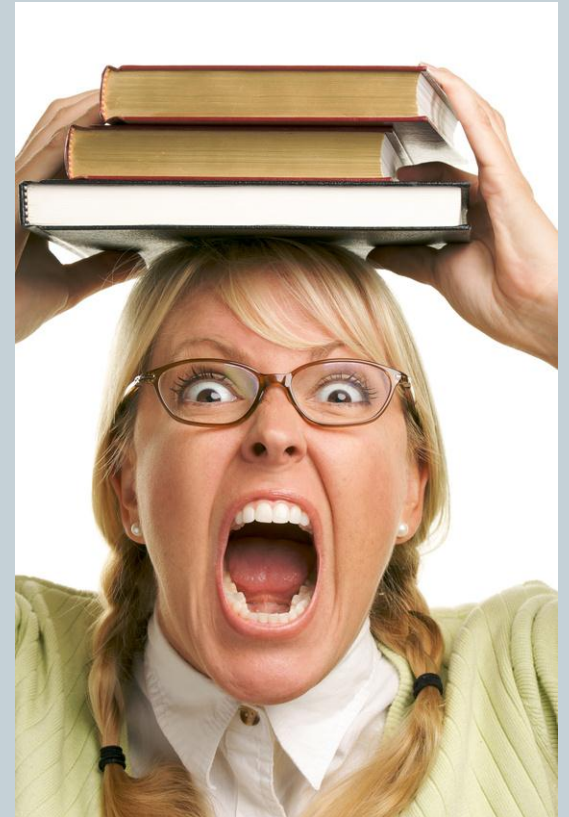


Phase Five: Peak



Overall behavior is out of control

- Physical aggression
- Severe tantrums
- Property destruction
- Self-injury
- Running, screaming



Strategies: Peak



Intervention is focused on safety

- Focus is on crisis management
 - implement your plan (contact the office, clear the room, etc.)
- Safe strategies
- Behavioral Emergency
 - Assessment of Risk Factors
 - Behavior Support Plan
 - Mental Health/Other Assessment
 - Functional Analysis Assessment

Strategies: Peak



Short-term interventions:

- Isolation or removal of involved student
- Allow time for student to “cool down”
- Removal of other students

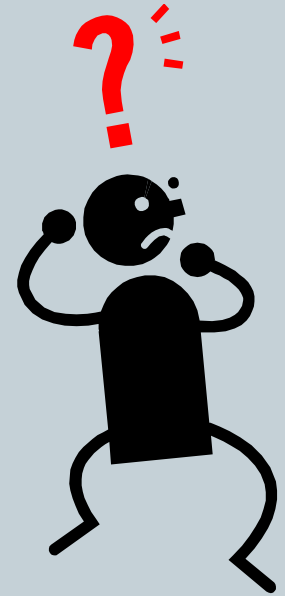


Phase Six: De-Escalation



Overall behavior shows confusion and lack of focus.

- Confusion
- Withdrawal
- Denial
- Blaming others
- May respond to concrete directions



Strategies: De-Escalation



Intervention is focused on monitoring for re-escalation of behavior

- Monitor for health/safety of all involved
- Avoid blaming
- Allow time and space
- Engage in independent work
- Cool-down time
- Determine appropriate time to debrief

Phase Seven: Recovery



Overall behavior shows an eagerness for busy work and a reluctance to interact.

- Eagerness for independent work
- Subdued behavior
- Defensive behavior
- Sleep

Strategies: Recovery



Intervention focuses on returning to normal activities

- Follow through with consequences
- Positively reinforce any displays of appropriate behavior
- Debrief/rehearse problem solving routine



Strategies: Recovery



Effective consequences...

Does the consequence

- Model, instruct or teach a more appropriate behavior?
- Interfere with the flow of the lesson?
- Give the learner the choice to redirect and receive instruction?

Is the consequence effective?



Verbal De-Escalation

“It takes two to Tango!”

Goals of Verbal De-Escalation



- Open up clear lines of communication.
- Build trust and validate the individual's situation.
- Get the individual talking about his/her situation.
- Gather the necessary information for a positive resolution.
- De-escalation is NOT a recipe or formula.
- It is a flexible, fluid set of options much like dancing



Verbal De-escalation Techniques



There are two key concepts to remember:

- Reasoning with an angry person is not possible. The first and only objective in de-escalation is to reduce the level of agitation so that discussion becomes possible.
- De-escalation techniques are inherently abnormal. They go against our natural 'fight or flight' reflexes. To be effective, we must remain calm and centered. We need to be professionally detached. Therefore these skills require practice to become useful.

Effective Communication



- 70% of communication is misunderstood
- Communication becomes more difficult when the person's ability to understand what you are saying and or their ability to express their own thoughts or needs are compromised by their symptoms.
- When students can't express their needs, they become more angry and frustrated more quickly and more frequently.
- Your ability to engage a student in conversation and successfully resolve a conflict often depends as much on **how** you say the words you choose as much as the words themselves.

Barriers to Effective Communication

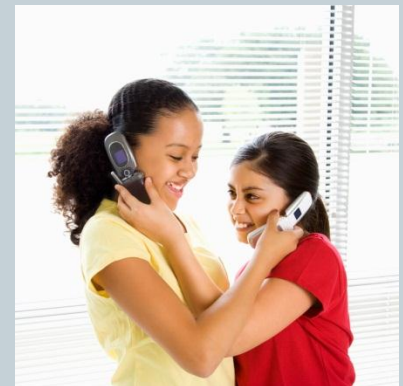


- Pre-judging
- Not listening
- Criticizing
- Name Calling
- Power Struggles
- Threatening
- Minimizing
- To verbally de-escalate another person, you must open as many clear lines of communication as possible.
- Both you and the other person must listen to each other and have no barriers.
- Barriers to Communication are the things that keep the meaning of what is being said from being heard.

Listening is an Important Component to Communication



- Three Main Listening Skills:
 - Attending: Giving your physical (and mental) attention to another person.
 - Following: Making sure you are engaged by using eye contact. Use un-intrusive gestures (such as nodding of your head, saying okay or asking an infrequent question.)
 - Reflecting: Paraphrasing and reflecting, using the feelings of the other person. (empathy)
- Listen when you are “listening.”
 - No other activities when listening.
 - Multi-tasking is not good when you are listening.



Benefits of Active Listening



- Shows empathy
- Builds relationships
- Helps people acknowledge their emotions and to talk about them instead of negatively acting on them
- Clears up misunderstandings between people



Door-openers



- Then what happened?

- Then what did you do?

- That is really interesting.

- Wow, then what?

- I see ...

- How did you handle that?

- What helped you in that situation?

- Tell me more (about that)...

Open-ended v. Closed-ended Questions

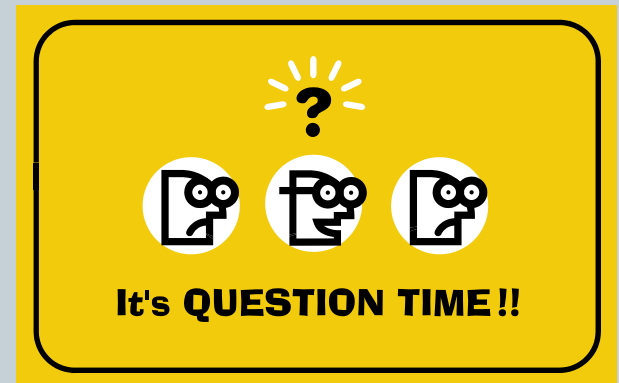


Open-ended questions

- Allow people to talk more freely

Close-ended questions

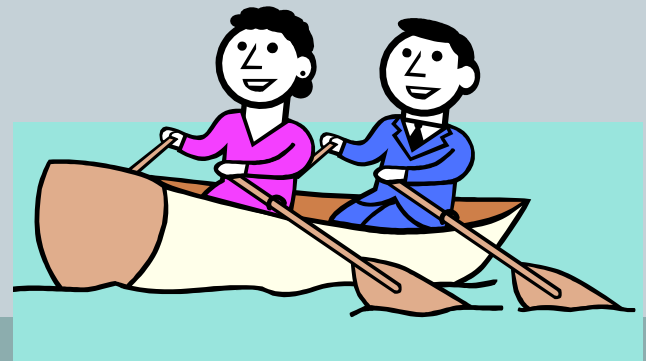
- May help “jump start” the individual who is having trouble talking at all
- Helps focus the person who is very upset or talking too much
- Are easier for an anxious person to mentally process



Congruence



- Matching words and actions
 - Denotes trustworthiness
 - Shows others that we care
 - Shows we are in control
- Incongruence
 - Interpreted as being untrustworthy or inauthentic



First.....Manage Yourself



- Physical Barriers-Survival Instincts

- Thinking Barriers-Cognitive Distortions

- Freeze
- Flight
- Fight
- Fright



- “this is so frustrating.”
- “here we go again”.

Managing Yourself... Non-Verbal Techniques



Model these non-verbal behaviors:

- Control your breathing
- Control your voice (volume and tone)
- Control your body language
- Control your vocabulary

REMEMBER:

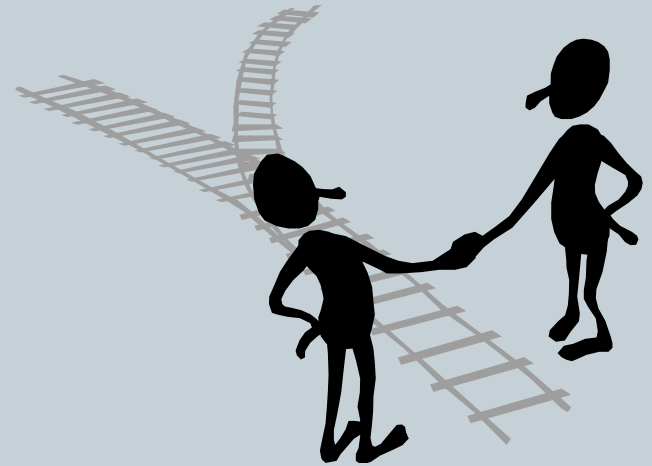
Calm is just as contagious as fear or panic

Managing YourselfVerbal Techniques



Responsive Listening Skills

- Acknowledging
- Apologizing
- Agreeing
- Inviting criticism
- Don't forget tone of voice

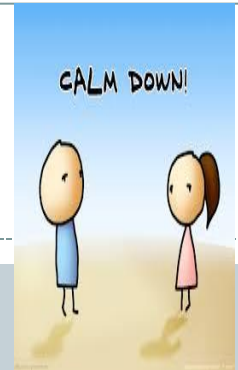


Tone of Your Voice



- A **lowered** voice level may set a tone of anger which could create fear or challenges.
- A **raised** voice may set a tone of anticipation or uncertainty which may promote excitement or disruption.
- Speak **slowly** -- This is usually interpreted as soothing.
- A **controlled** voice is one of calm and firmness which promotes confidence in both parties.
- **Humor** may unintentionally offend someone and escalate the situation. -- Use humor sparingly and always direct humor toward yourself. (Be very careful when attempting humor in this type of situation!)
- Always be **respectful** to the other person.

During De-Escalation..... Be aware of YOUR body.



- 80% -- 90% of our communication is non-verbal. It is very important to be able to identify exactly what we are communicating to others non-verbally.
- You may be trying to de-escalate the situation by talking to the other person, but your body language may be showing a willingness to get physical.
- It is also important that we recognize and understand the non-verbal cues from another person who has the potential of escalating.

Interrupt, Ignore, Redirect, Reward



Interrupt

- The first thing to do in order to break the chain of behaviors is to **Interrupt** the flow of events.
- Sometimes this can be achieved by saying the upset person's name or by calling attention to something in the environment.

Ignore

- **Ignore** negative behavioral sequence(s) verbally.
- It does not mean to ignore the danger signs. However, verbally attempting to just stop a behavior usually results in a confrontation that may escalate to a physical crisis.

Redirect

- **Redirect** the behavior

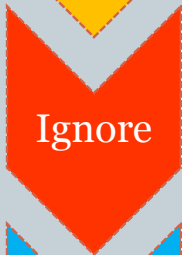
Reward

- If we want to foster new behaviors in the others, we must reinforce them with some kind of **REWARD**.
- Remember, what is rewarding to one person may not be rewarding to another.

Billy is headed toward the window with a book in his hand while mumbling to himself. Use the behavioral sequence below to intervene with Billy:



-
-



-
-



-
-



-
-

Role Play



Now, let's take another look at the scenario between Auldrick and his teacher with the intervention of Verbal De-Escalation.



- **In this second scenario, what did the teacher do right? Why do you believe that was right?**

To Do:



- Plan for and provide interesting and effective academic instruction
- Know the triggers and work to reduce or eliminate them
- Know the triggers and work to reduce or eliminate them
- When conflict arises, focus on **reducing anxiety**
- Provide options and choices, what I like to call providing an “out” for the student
- Reinforce calm, on-task behavior
- Use positive reinforcement 4x more than negative comments and reprimands

Questions and Answers



Q. What age group is this intervention appropriate for?

A. Verbal de-escalation can (and should) be used with any age group, even adults!

Q. What is the most important thing to remember when implementing verbal de-escalation?

A. You need to self-monitor your words, tone of voice, and body language. Do not argue or insist on getting the last word.



Questions and Answers



Q. How long does it take to see the results of implementing verbal de-escalation?

A. Results of this practical intervention are immediate. As the student begins to calm down, the teacher has the opportunity to further de-escalate, offer non-judgmental listening to the student's explanation, and use non-confrontational guided questions to help the student recover (Duggan & Dawson, 2004).



Questions and Answers



Q: Should I attempt to use verbal de-escalation with a person who has become violent?

A: No. Verbal de-escalation should only be used with a person who is not physically violent.

Q: What are the long-term effects of using verbal de-escalation in the classroom?

A: Like other positive behavior support interventions, the effects of using verbal de-escalation have been proven to promote student growth and development and ultimately, to further student learning.

Teachers find success when offering students constructive, corrective feedback to address students' inappropriate behavior instead of criticizing or punishing students.

Questions



References



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