TeamTeach

Supporting Student Behaviour

A practical guide to de-escalation for teachers and school staff



What is De-escalation?

De-escalation is the the process of calming down a situation in which a student is becoming upset, frustrated, or angry. The aim is to prevent the situation from intensifying by offering timely and effective support.

This guide provides you with useful information and effective strategies you can implement in your school.

Why does it matter?

Supporting children and young people during times of distress is an essential part of creating a safe and positive school environment.

De-escalation strategies are key to reducing anxiety, avoiding times of crisis, and ensuring all students feel supported.

De-escalation helps to:

- ✓ foster a calm and supportive learning environment.
- ✓ create a safer environment for both students and staff.
- ✓ build trust between students and teachers.
- ✓ teach students how to recognise and understand their emotions.

How do you feel?

Before stepping in to de-escalate a situation, it's essential to take a moment to reflect on how you're feeling and ensure that you're in the right frame of mind to provide effective support. Our own emotional state has a significant impact on how we respond to situations and, in turn, influences how others react to us.

Ask yourself how you're feeling in the moment. Are you calm, composed, and focused, or are you feeling stressed, frustrated, or rushed? If you're feeling emotionally charged, take a few deep breaths and pause before engaging.

By taking the time to check in with yourself and ensuring you're emotionally and physically prepared, you set the foundation for successful de-escalation.

Your calm presence can act as a stabilising force, encouraging others to feel safe. Moving into a relaxed pose, smiling, and nodding, can all help communicate that you're there to help, not to judge or confront.

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Supporting De-escalation

When a student is distressed, they often need support from an adult to regain control of their emotions. This process, known as co-regulation, involves staying calm and using your presence and actions to guide the student to a more regulated state in a supportive and non-threatening way.

If the physical environment is contributing to their distress, reduce stimulation by moving to a quieter space, dimming lights, or asking others to give the student some space. A calmer environment can help the student settle more easily.

To avoid escalating a situation, use a calm, clear, and reassuring tone when speaking to the student. Loud or rushed speech can escalate their feelings of being overwhelmed, so keep your words simple and supportive.

Reassure them with phrases like, "We'll work this out together," and avoid bombarding them with too many questions or instructions.

Reflection questions:

- How do you know which de-escalation strategies work for different students?
- Is this knowledge recorded and shared between teachers and other school staff?

Some students benefit from calming activities such as quiet music, drawing, or reading, while others prefer physical activities like running, jumping, or kicking a ball to regulate their emotions. Co-regulation looks different for every student, so it's important to explore what works best for them.

Sometimes, your calm presence alone can provide reassurance. You don't always need to talk—just being there can help the student feel secure. Some students may need space to process their emotions, while others may feel comforted by knowing you're nearby. Pay attention to their cues and adapt your approach accordingly.

Give the student plenty of time to calm down. Emotional distress rarely resolves immediately, and pressuring them can escalate their feelings further. By staying calm, offering support, and providing a safe environment, you help them regain control and develop the ability to manage their emotions over time.

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De-escalation in Action

By taking a proactive and child-centred approach, we can create a supportive environment where students feel safe and respected, and where situations can be defused before they escalate.

Tips for effective de-escalation:

1. Establishing a calm and predictable environment with consistent routines and clear expectations is essential for helping students feel safe, supported, and ready to engage in learning.
2. Take time to understand each student's usual behaviour patterns and effective coping strategies. By recognising what is typical for a student, you'll notice when they may need support.
3. Pay close attention to subtle signs of anxiety, such as changes in body language, tone of voice, facial expressions, or fidgeting, as these can often indicate that a student is becoming upset.
4. If a student is distressed, use calm body language, and speak slowly and quietly to avoid escalating a situation further. Remember to check that you are feeling calm, too.
5. Let students know they are safe, supported, and heard. Acknowledge how they are feeling and suggest what to do next: "I can see you're feeling angry; let's go and..."

We're here to help

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