



De-Escalation Phase: **Restore Calm and Feelings of Safety**

Following a peak emotional or behavioral outburst, during which time there was an intense rush of agitation and stress hormones throughout a student's brain and body, the student may become somewhat disoriented or confused about what has taken place. They may withdraw or attempt to escape the eyes that are on them.

Despite the shock of the peak behavior, it is important that you don't re-trigger the student by outwardly expressing anger and displeasure or publicly doling out consequences. Consequences should teach the skills necessary for the student to meet the expectations. Consequences can wait until a private conversation, when you and the student are calm and able to hear each other in a discussion about the incident. Summon compassion in this very difficult moment, by remembering that when the student does not immediately follow your directives, it is not that they are simply refusing to make more positive choices, it is that they need your support and step-by-step guidance to calm down and self-regulate.

When you repeatedly engage in de-escalation, students will feel heard and respected, and may come away from the experience having learned behaviors they can perform when feeling agitated in the future. By building trust, teaching expected behaviors, and establishing an emotionally supportive classroom with your students, over time you will spend less time on classroom management. Witnessing you listen to and respond to the needs of a fellow student builds trust and a feeling of safety throughout the entire classroom community.

De-Escalation Do's and Don'ts

DO use short and simple language. Keep your instructions clear and short. Repeat them calmly to ensure they do not sound threatening. Traumatized students have difficulty processing complex instructions when in an aroused state.

DO ask questions. Identify what the student needs and what they are feeling. Traumatized students may have trouble identifying or expressing their emotions, so questions and prompts can help you calm them.

DON'T provoke greater escalation

Keep a calm and level voice, even when being disrespected. Never humiliate or challenge a student with agitated behavior. Becoming aggressive teaches students that this type of behavior is acceptable and that they are in control, because they can alter your behavior

DO set limits and reiterate rules. Setting limits moves the conversation forward and sets expectations. "We can talk, but only if you stop swearing" is preferable to ultimatums such as "sit down or you're going to the office."

DO offer choices. Ultimatums can make students feel silenced and belittled. Affirm students' autonomy by providing options. Feeling respected can improve a student's mood and feelings of belonging.

DON'T argue

Instead, acknowledge your understanding of the point the student is making. You don't have to agree. The point is to make the student feel heard. This tactic shows students that they are heard. This is empowering, as the student feels respected and understood as an individual.

Do get on the same page. Recapping throughout the conversation shows the student that you are an engaged listener. Follow with asking if the student agrees with your interpretation.

DON'T give emotionally based consequences. Consequences should match the student's actions. Be consistent from day to day and from student to student. Think through potential interventions and consequences in advance, so that you have an idea of what is warranted in most cases.

Sequenced Process for Effective De-Escalation

Attend to Bodily Cues	Watch the student's body for cues. Allow their physiological response to begin to subside. Following a loud sigh, dropping of the shoulders, or the slowing of a heaving chest, invite the student to take slow calming breaths. Limit communication to simple verbal cues, hand signals, and visual aids.
Attempt to Guide	Throughout this process, model calm voice, tone and body language. Acknowledge the student's feelings and remind them they are safe. Coach them through strategies like deep breathing or a body scan to release tension.
Provide a Calming Space	Give the escalated student time and space to calm down. Engaging in low frustration activities, such as drawing about their thoughts in a quiet area of the classroom, can help reorient a student. This moves their thinking from the emotional to the thinking part of their brain, where they can calm down and process their feelings.
Ask for Support, IF...	<p>If the student is not responding to de-escalation attempts or if they are continually re-triggered, reach out to designated support staff who can push-in or briefly pull the student out to a calm, private space such as a calming room or center with tools to assist in de-escalation. Ensure this staff member can be quickly, easily, and discretely contacted. Don't make this contact a threat. Designated "safety" trained staff members should be trained in de-escalation best practices. If everyone's safety is at risk, remove all other students to ensure safety and eliminate the "audience."</p> <p>Note: The number of "safety" trained adults in the building should reflect the number of student incidents, the size of the school campus, and the availability of those adults.</p>
Re-establish Class Safety	It is important to establish safety and control for the whole class as quickly as possible. This can be done through a short mindfulness practice which also gives the educator an opportunity to de-escalate.
Acknowledge the Event	Take a few minutes to process what happened with the class. This adult-supported processing is helpful for other students who might be feeling anxious or triggered, rather than leaving them to process alone.
Re-engage Agitated Student	It is important to return students to the learning environment as quickly as possible to ensure minimal loss of instruction. It is equally important to ensure that students are de-escalated, calm, and ready to be successful in the learning environment. Without this, a student is even more easily triggered than before the incident. Provide them with a learning task at which they can be independently successful in order to prepare them to rejoin the class.
Debrief with Agitated Student	Debriefing about the incident is trauma-responsive and helps prevent repeat behavior. However, wait to have a debrief conversation until the student is calm, feeling safe, and can have a rational discussion to ensure the conversation is productive. The brain can take up to 24 hours to fully recover, so you may need to debrief the following day.

De-escalation briefs are archived at [TREPEducator.org/deescalation-microlearning](https://www.trepeducator.org/deescalation-microlearning). Please access and review as needed.