



Intro To Trauma Responsive De-Escalation

Externalizing and escalating behaviors such as classroom outbursts, verbal jabs, or even physical attacks not only derail instruction, but can compromise the safety of students and educators. As such, issues of externalizing classroom behaviors are at the top of most educators' concerns. Our sequenced set of micro-learning emails on Trauma Responsive De-Escalation will equip you with a toolbox of de-escalation strategies that have been shown effective in addressing challenging student behavior.

If the underlying cause of outbursts and escalating behavior is trauma and the resultant internal dysregulation, what educators' see as intentional disruption of the learning environment, may actually stem from the student feeling a lack of emotional, psychological, or physical safety. Punitive discipline will only make the student feel more unsafe and the intensity of the behavior is likely to escalate, as these students often have an overly sensitive perception of threat.

Common educator reactions to challenging student behaviors such as calling out the student's name, public reprimands, or threat of punishment, ultimately escalates rather than de-escalates student behavior. To counter this, a trauma responsive educator recognizes a student's pattern of acting-out behavior and escalation and intervenes early, to support the student with self-regulation, calming strategies, and by offering ways to separate, physically or emotionally, from the triggering situation.

We don't get to decide whether we have challenging students in our classes, but we can certainly decide how we respond to them. -Carol Ann Tomlinson

Students who have had a history of frequent engagement with unsupportive environments outside of school often also have a history of defeating experiences inside of school. Such difficulties with defeating experiences at school compound overtime resulting in mutually reinforcing negative relationships and expectations between educators and students.

When educators and schools provide consistent, positive support to students, this cycle can be broken.

Such support is provided incrementally through the day-today interactions that students have with their educators. When educators understand and respond to classroom behavior in positive and proactive ways, students with historical patterns disruptive behavior will begin to re-orient their relationships with educators and with school.

*Trauma Responsive de-escalation is preventative de-escalation. Preventative de-escalation begins **BEFORE** the emotional outburst and is centered on educators' abilities to recognize the signs of early escalation.*

BENEFITS OF PREVENTATIVE DE-ESCALATION

Benefits for the Student

- Preventative De-escalation helps build educator-student relationships. Done well, students will feel heard and respected, and may also come away from the experience having learned self-regulating behaviors they can use when feeling agitated in the future.
- When successful, students stay in the classroom, are quickly re-engaged in learning, and are kept out of a punitive cycle that may decrease their school belonging.

Benefits for the Classroom Community

- De-escalation serves as a lesson for all students in the classroom. Being witness to an interaction where an educator listens to and responds to the needs of a fellow student builds trust and feelings of safety throughout the entire classroom community.

Benefits for the Educator

- Engaging in preventative de-escalation can improve your overall effectiveness, minimize workload, and promote personal well-being. By building trust, teaching expected behaviors, and establishing an emotionally supportive classroom with students, you will be able to spend less time on behavior management.

Respond With Emotional Neutrality

(Immediately Implementable Practice)

De-escalation strategies are most effective when you are able to express emotional neutrality while implementing the strategies. But very rarely do educators receive any training on the meaning and actions that would enable them to "go cold" in ways that are supportive for students who are struggling to manage an emotional outburst.

Emotional neutrality involves not taking the behavior personally. It takes an understanding that often the **escalation** that is happening in front of you and involves you **is often about much more than just you**, especially when you know that the student is coping with trauma. Because of their decreased frustration tolerance, the small momentary agitation is the pressure that broke the already cracked dam that leads to an outpouring of emotion.

To respond with emotional neutrality...

Maintain self-awareness

of your emotional (thoughts and feelings) and physical state (heart rate, clenched muscles, etc.).

Ask yourself questions

about what may have triggered the student or may be the underlying cause to help yourself get out of your emotional brain and into your thinking brain.

Breathe slow and deep

and put your hands on your chest if needed so that you can be aware of your breathing. Deep breathing tells your brain and emotions to calm down.

Talk to yourself

using planned calming mantras to remind yourself of what you know you need to do to demonstrate calm during student outbursts.

- "I know this is not a personal attack against me."
- "I will remain calm while trying to help him/her."

Each micro-learning brief will be archived on our webpage, so you can easily access and review each brief when needed: www.TREPEducator.org/deescalation