



The Peak Phase: Focus on Safety for All

If a student reaches the peak phase of the acting out cycle, your **primary goal is to ensure the physical and emotional safety of everyone in the classroom.** You can best do this by remaining calm, managing your own emotions, and responding logically.

When students are at the height of their “fight or flight” mode, it is difficult for them to access their “thinking brains” and make the best choices in emotionally charged situations. Their behavior may become more escalated if you try to force them to have a logical discussion about the situation, try to get them to see how their behaviors may be making things worse, or give them complex instructions while they are in the midst of an emotional outburst or escalating interaction. **However**, you can help the student de-escalate while ensuring safety for all.

Rely On Co-Regulation

When a child’s dysregulated behavior is met with co-regulation—consistently calming, regulating responses from a trusted person—they can begin to learn how to self-regulate their thinking, emotions, and behaviors. Co-regulation includes 3 components, each component is beneficial for building self-regulation, but providing all three together results in the best outcomes: (1) Building Warm Responsive Relationship, (2) Structuring the Environment, (3) Coaching Self-Regulation Skills.

	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
	Provide...	Provide...	Provide...
Build Warm Responsive Relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent positive regard • Support and empathy in times of distress • Responsivity to needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide... • Consistent positive regard • Support and empathy in times of distress • Responsivity to needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide... • Consistent positive regard • Validation of emotional experiences • Responsivity to needs
Structure The Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time and space to relax and calm down • Clear rules and consequences • Scaffold complex academic, behavioral, and social situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time and space to relax and calm down • Monitoring to limit risk • Rules and consequences that incentivize good behavior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time and space to relax and calm down • Limiting risk opportunities • Expectations and consequences that incentivize good behavior • Collaboration to identify supportive environments
Coach Their Self-Regulation Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model conflict resolution • Calm-down strategies • Relaxation • Positive self-talk • Social flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal-setting • Problem-solving • Managing stress • Managing time • Organization • Planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complex decision making and problem solving support • Skills for health relationships • Healthy stress management • Long-term goal-setting

Decision-Making During the Peak Stage

If a student's behavior becomes unsafe, you will need to make some decisions about the severity of the behavior and have some strategies to know how to best to respond to keep the student and others safe.

If...	Then...
The student is defiant, loud, and disrespectful, but will still engage with you...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer suggestions of familiar tools they can use to calm themselves. • Use simple, direct language that even the agitated brain may be able to understand • Set clear, simple, and enforceable limits to remind the student of boundaries and let them know they are safe. • Offer a safe space such as reminding the student that the calming center is available • Communicate a point of agreement with student while reinforcing Allow space for silence, which slows things down and allows for reflection, calming, and regaining composure. When a student is upset, they may not be able to think clearly. A few moments of silence can help them process the choices you have offered and help the student feel less out of control.
The student is disruptive, obstinate, appears to unable to process input from the adult and no one is at risk of harm...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak calmly and very little to repeatedly let student know they are safe or do not speak • Send for a non-reactive staff member who can come help student become emotionally present before taking the student out of the room ONLY for the purpose of helping them to calm themselves. Make sure the adult knows that they are not to discuss consequences until you have had a chance to process the situation and determine the best "logical consequence."
The student is displaying behavior that may become or is harmful for themselves...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak calmly, but very little. • Send for a counselor or administrator. Once they arrive, verbally disengage and allow them to take the lead. This prevents mixed messages and keeps the student from being on the defense. • Express care and concern for the student's well-being • If the scene is potentially traumatizing for other students, remove the class. • If an object is involved in the threat of harm, ask for or remove the tool they are using when appropriate, applicable, and possible. • Try to get the student to look at your eyes. Make your words, tone, and posture cal. • Coach them through breathing and relaxing their body, along with you. • Later, report the incident per your school / district guidelines, if applicable.
The student is displaying behaviors that may become or are harmful to others...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak calmly, but very little. • Send for a counselor or administrator. • Give the student physical space. • Remove the class. Direct students to calmly line up outside of the room. Follow your classroom procedure for occupying the dysregulated student's attention while you send for a counselor or administrator. This may include having students go into another room or the hall, where they can sit quietly. Have a student lead a mindfulness and breathing activity, followed by a familiar, student-led silent game. • If severity is great enough, follow your district's policy on emergency restraint. Only specially trained adults should use restraint. The need for this level of intervention is EXTREMELY rare. It is rare that this is the best course of action for you or the agitated student.

De-escalation briefs are archived at TREPeducator.org/deescalation-microlearning. Please access and review as needed.