



SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL,  
& BEHAVIOR ACADEMY



# Practical Classroom Strategies to Help Reduce Escalation

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# Introduction



Let's get ready...



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CfUGpJE1D9o&t=1s>

De-escalation 

# What is de-escalation?

De-escalation is the process of helping students manage emotions and preventing a challenging situation from becoming worse.

- All students, including students who require more intensive support, can benefit from universal practices that provide consistent response to escalation by all staff.
- Educators benefit from learning and regularly practicing strategies for regulating their own emotional responding during times of stress and crisis.



<https://www.pbis.org/resource/strategies-for-de-escalating-student-behavior-in-the-classroom>

# You can support de-escalation by...

- Regularly acknowledging the prosocial behavior we want to see our students display
- Redirecting and/or reteaching when behavioral errors occur.
- One of the main points is that we have to change **OUR (adult) behavior** before we can expect student behavior to change.

This presentation we will focus on student AND staff behavior.



# Prevention and De-escalation Strategies



# Ever experience a scene like this?

Riley, please turn in your assignment.

What assignment?

The assignment you didn't finish during class.

I finished it.

Great, please turn it in now.

I don't have it with me now.

You have a choice.....turn it in or do it again.

You never believe me.

I guess you've made the choice to do it again.

Make me.

That's disrespect...go to the office.

Shut up! Get away from me!

Moves closer...& puts hand on Riley's shoulder

Pulls away, glares, & raises fist as if to strike.

# Key Prevention Strategies

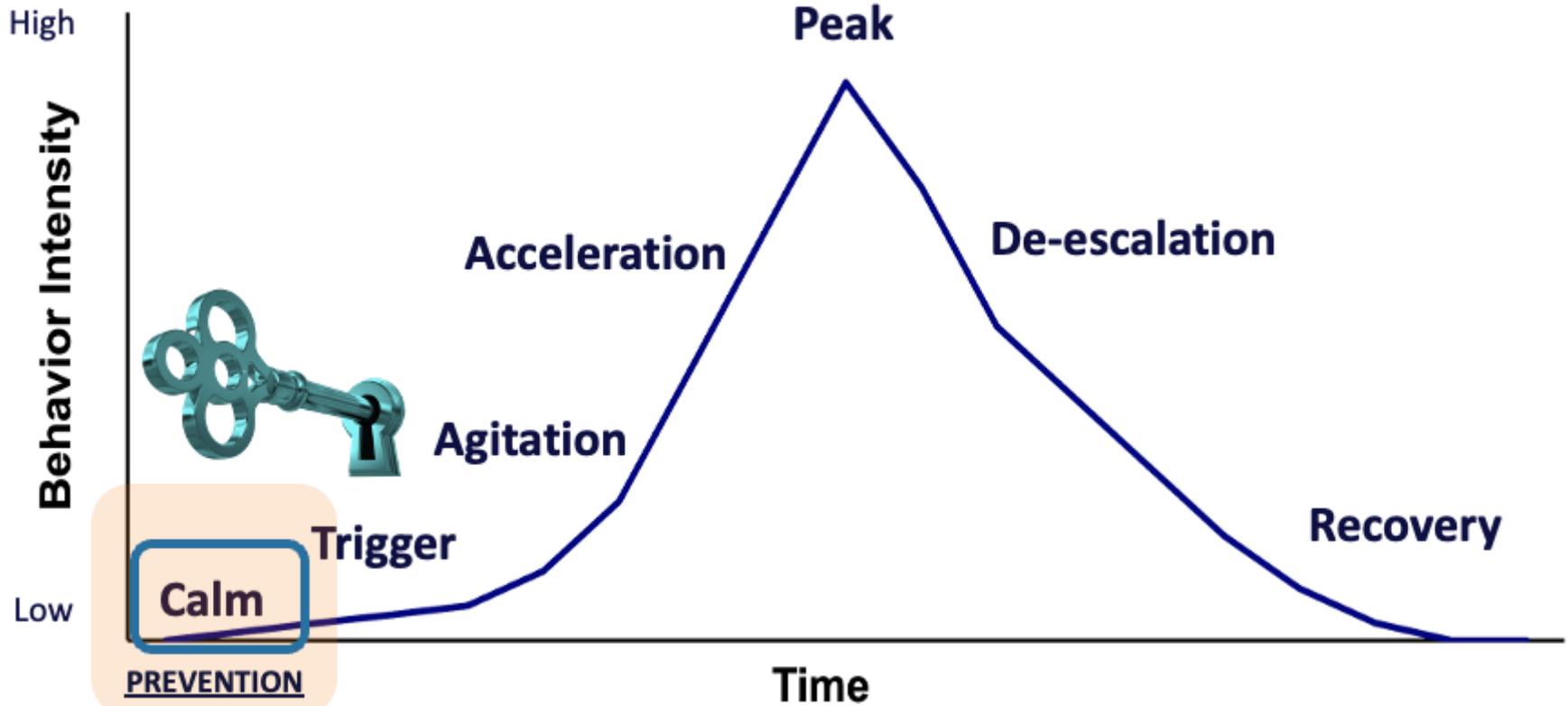


- Identify how to intervene early in an escalation.
- Identify things in the environment that you can change.
- Identify replacement behaviors that can be taught (& serve same function as problem).

When Riley claimed to not have the assignment, the teacher could have said...

I'm glad you completed it, but sorry you don't have it with you.  
You have a choice....you can try to find it and turn it in, or you can do it again during review time.

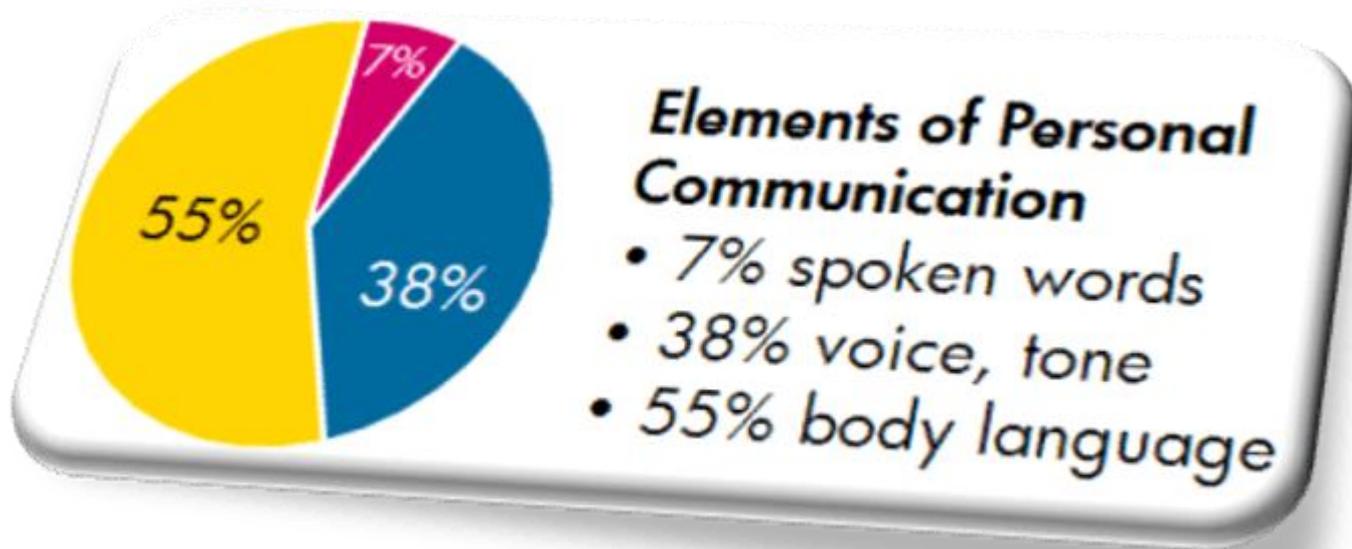
# Escalation & De-Escalation



“We learn in moments of calm connectedness.”

- Universal prevention strategies minimize the likelihood of Social-Emotional-Behavior challenges arising in the classroom and across school settings by creating...
- positive
- predictable
- engaging learning environments

# Communication



# Proactive Prevention

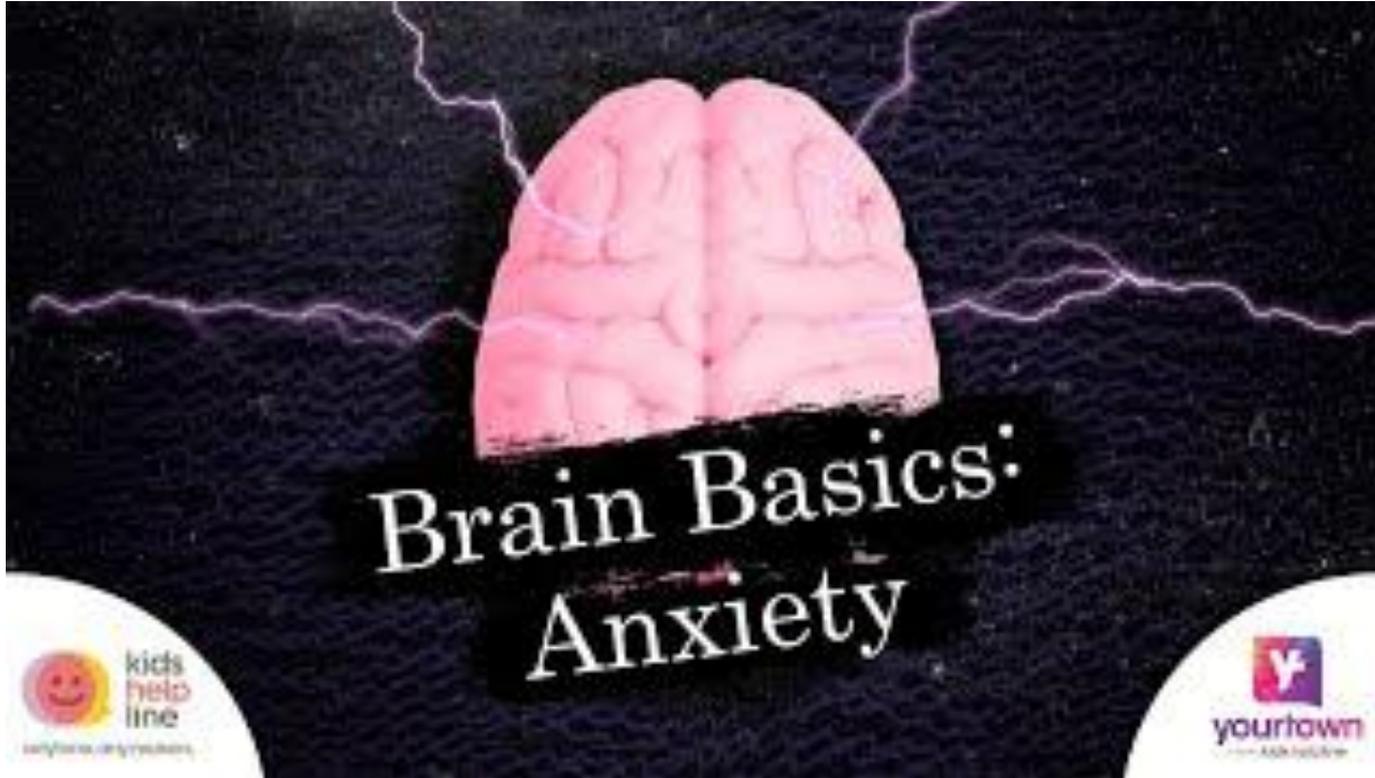
## Staff Strategies

- Greeting & welcoming students at the door upon arrival
- Checking in with students (and teachers check in with families) builds relationships and trust
- Identifying individual student interests and strengths
- Try to facilitate authentic peer relationships
- Helping to create safe and inclusive environments where all students feel like they belong.
- Help to teach social, emotional, behavioral skills like working in groups, solving disagreements, asking for help to all students.



- Teach students about how the brain reacts to stress and how it might feel for students.
- Teach students regulation strategies when they are calm and gradually practice in situations or settings that lead to dysregulation
  - Examples Include: Feelings thermometer/scale, deep breathing, mindfulness, requesting breaks, gentle movement

# Teaching Students How Stress Affects the Brain

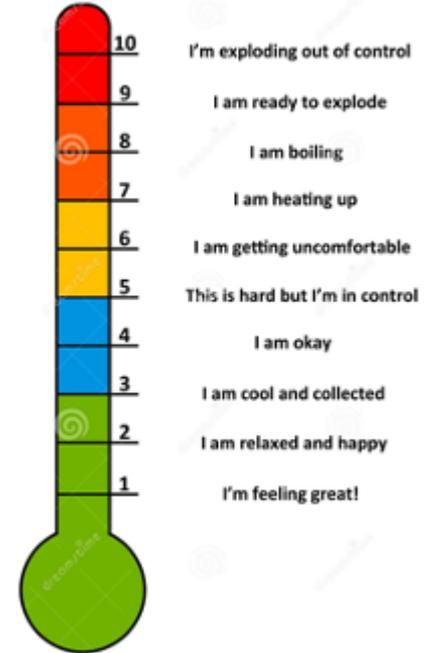


# Feeling Thermometer

<b>5</b>	<p><u>I can't stand this and ready to explode.</u> I want to hit or kick someone, or throw something. I need help from an adult.</p> 
<b>4</b>	<p><u>I am getting too angry.</u> My face feels hot. I need to go to my safe spot to calm down.</p> 
<b>3</b>	<p><u>I am getting frustrated.</u> I will tell an adult. Take deep breaths.</p> 
<b>2</b>	<p><u>I am doing OK.</u> I am not happy. I can stay where I am and keep working. I can control myself.</p> 
<b>1</b>	<p><u>I am doing great.</u> I feel good about myself and about what is going on around me.</p> 

<b>5</b>	<p><u>I feel...</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> angry</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> out of control</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> nervous</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> unsafe</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> enraged</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> explosive</li> </ul> 
<b>4</b>	<p><u>I feel...</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> mad</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> overwhelmed</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> irritated</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> fearful</li> </ul> 
<b>3</b>	<p><u>I feel...</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> annoyed</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> sad</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> frustrated</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> exhausted</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> embarrassed</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> anxious</li> </ul> 
<b>2</b>	<p><u>I feel...</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> okay/fine</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> bored</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> confused</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> worried</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> tired</li> </ul> 
<b>1</b>	<p><u>I feel...</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> happy</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> relaxed</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> excited</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> motivated</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> energetic</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> joy</li> </ul> 

## Feelings thermometer



# Incorporate SEL Skills into Expected Behavior Matrix - Teach and practice the skills

Teaching Matrix		INCORPORATE Coping Strategies for Managing Stress						
		All Settings	Hallways	Playgrounds	Lunch	Library/ Computer Lab	Assembly	Bus
Expectations	Respectful	Be on task. Give your best effort. Be prepared.	Walk.	Have a plan.	Invite those sitting alone to join in	Study, read, compute.	Sit in one spot.	Watch for your stop.
	Achieving & Organized	Be kind. Hands/feet to self. Help/share with others.	Use normal voice volume. Walk to right.	Play safe. Include others. Share equipment.	Have a lunch plan and choose quiet or social lunch area	Whisper. Return books.	Listen/watch. Use appropriate applause.	Use a quiet voice. Stay in your seat.
	Responsible	Recycle. Clean up after self.	Pick up litter. Maintain physical space.	Use equipment properly. Put litter in garbage can.	Use my breathing technique Listen to my signals	Push in chairs. Treat books carefully.	Pick up. Treat chairs appropriately	Wipe your feet.

# Breathing Techniques to Teach Students

## Square / Box Breathing

Square or Box breathing is a breathing technique. It can heighten performance and concentration while also being a powerful stress reliever.



[https://youtu.be/8Fq9Zi61-w4?si=MkHM1vL\\_qziZTDd7](https://youtu.be/8Fq9Zi61-w4?si=MkHM1vL_qziZTDd7)

Teaching Box Breathing

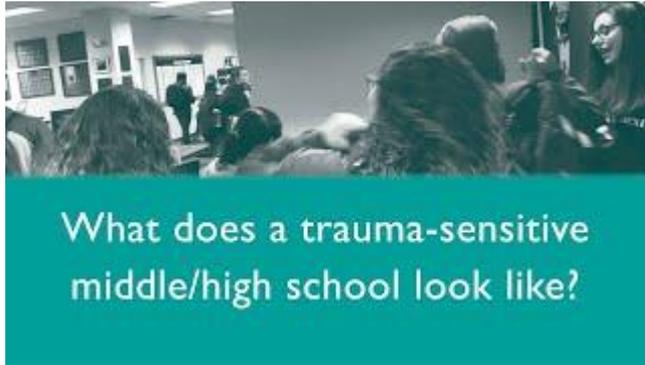


<https://youtu.be/CfUGpJE1D9o?si=Va4bbui2VmCukp0c>

Guided Box Breathing

# Dedicate spaces for emotional regulation

## Calm Corner / Zen Den



What does a trauma-sensitive middle/high school look like?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4aatVFmR3is>



<https://youtu.be/DQbuu5ufHyA>

- Teach all students how to use it
- Give time to practice
- Have a variety of manipulatives
- Have a timer

# Choice Board

<p><b>Dump the Worries</b></p>  <p>Write down your worries on a paper. Crumple and throw it out. Tell yourself you're letting your worries go.</p>	<p><b>Think Positively</b></p>  <p>Shine a light on positives. Think about two positives about your situation.</p>	<p><b>Write About It</b></p>  <p>Make an entry in your journal. Write a friend or family member a note. Make a list.</p>
<p><b>Stretch It Out</b></p>  <p>Stretching yoga pose.</p>	<p><b>Puzzle It Out</b></p>  <p>Engage your brain with puzzle tasks or word searches. (non-electronic)</p>	<p><b>Breathe It Out</b></p>  <p>Take a deep breath. Hold 4 seconds. Breathe out. Repeat.</p>
<p><b>Oodles of Doodles</b></p>  <p>Draw a picture or color a page of a coloring book. Focus on details.</p>	<p><b>Activate Your Senses</b></p>  <p>What are 5 things you see? 4 things you feel? 3 things you hear? 2 things you smell? 1 thing you taste?</p>	<p><b>Give Gratitude</b></p>  <p>Make a gratitude list for a person, a favorite thing, an experience, etc.</p>



# Techniques to Support Students

## 60 Beats Per Minute Music

Because a person's heart will naturally entrain to the beat of music, you want to keep this in mind. The relaxed heart rate is 60-80 beats per minute (bpm). Therefore, when you use music for concentration, this rate is best. This type of music has been shown to activate areas of the brain involved in attention and memory. Ideally, the students listen first for up to 10 minutes and then turn it off and work.



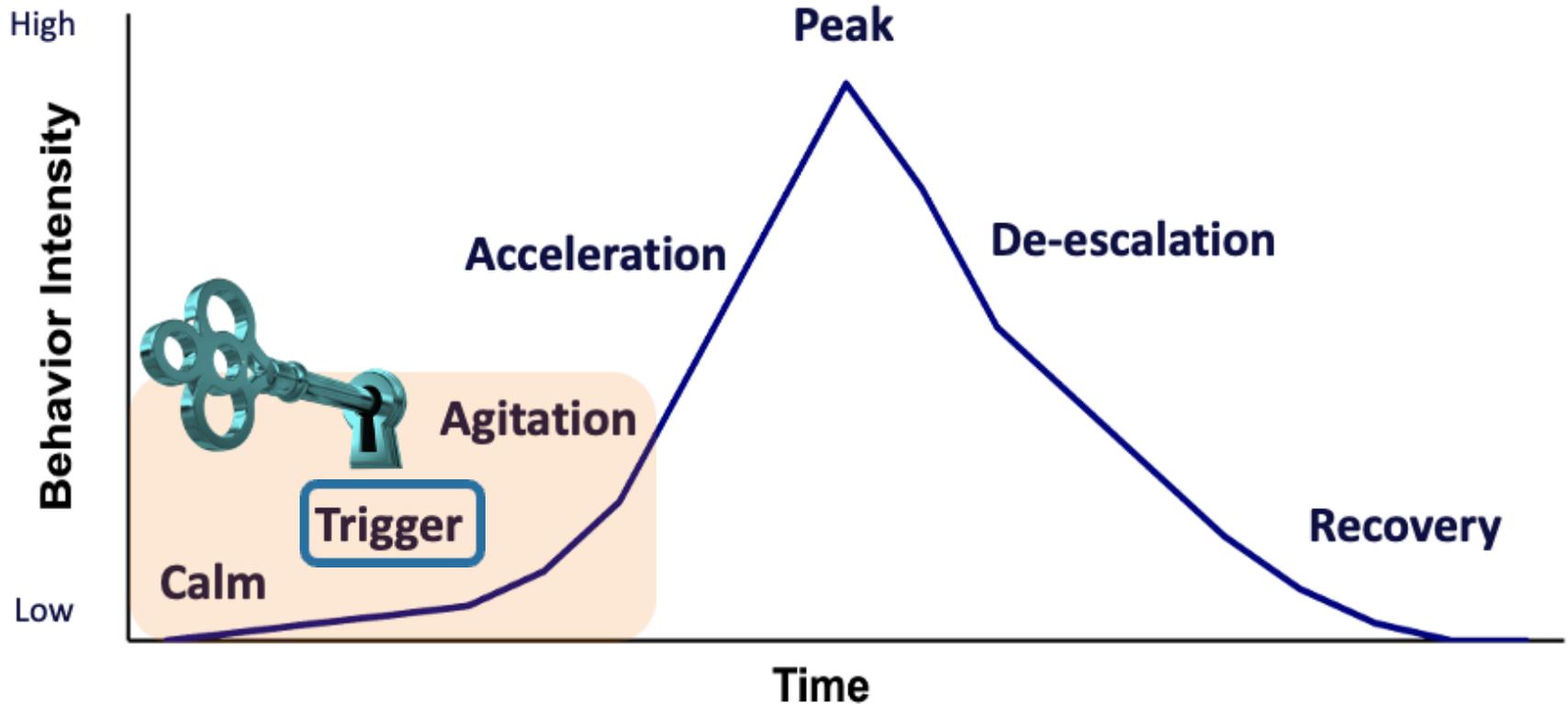
<https://youtu.be/dadisjciqtk?si=uQUsDj9wk4jLaQlp>



<https://youtu.be/JOKgggYYpaY?si=ua6UK017rW-nxP2i>

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLeIC\\_yzumQrrv2IJmcEKy3LXOM8-vnwwl](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLeIC_yzumQrrv2IJmcEKy3LXOM8-vnwwl) – Play List for 60 BPM Music

# Escalation & De-Escalation - Staff Trigger



Remember that  
adults have a  
role to play...

When students are  
overwhelmed by  
**BIG EMOTIONS,**  
it's our job to share  
**OUR CALM,**  
not to join their chaos.  
- L.R. Knost.

# Prevention - Regulation Strategies for Adults

- Model for students the regulation routines being used/taught.
- Become aware of triggers for dysregulation and what your vulnerable decision points might be. (times of the day, activities, behaviors, or students that can be stressful for you as the adult)
- Use self-prompting strategies to prompt use of regulation strategies

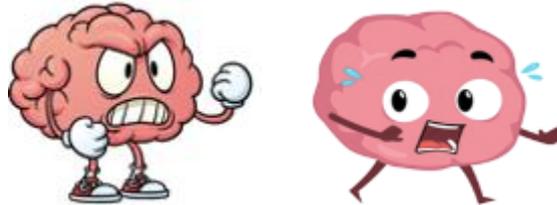


# Self Management/Control

We all need a plan to **maintain self-control** during a crisis or power struggle (and other times too).

Typically, your body reacts to a crisis in a **“fight or flight”** response.

Our goal is to counteract that response by remaining calm and regaining **“emotional balance.”**



# Two-Step Neutralizing Routine:

When you see **contextually inappropriate behavior**  
or the **start to a power struggle...**

**stop and ask yourself...**

**1** **Am I triggered or agitated?**

By this student/situation?

By an outside factor (e.g., not  
feeling well that day)?

**2**

If so, use an agreed-upon, predetermined  
**alternative response**

# Neutralizing Routine Examples - When you are triggered or agitated, you can...

## Delay decision until you can think clearly



- “See me after class/at the next break”
- ask the student to reflect on their feelings/behavior
- am I acting in line with my values?

## Reframe the situation



- “I respect you, but that behavior is not ok”
- “How do we do that at school?”
- assume student’s best effort at getting needs met
- respond as if the student was physically injured

## Take care of yourself



- take two deep breaths
- recognize my upset feelings and let them go
- model class wide cool-down strategy

# Sample Neutralizing Routine

## T-R-Y

### For Adults:

*Take* a deep breath

*Reflect* on your emotions

Youth's best interest

"Let's **TRY** that again."

"Let's **TRY** it a different way."

"Let's **TRY** it how we do it at school."

### For Students:

*Take* three deep breath

*Reflect* on your emotions

You got this!

### **Social-Emotional Theme**

"Mistakes are part of the learning process."

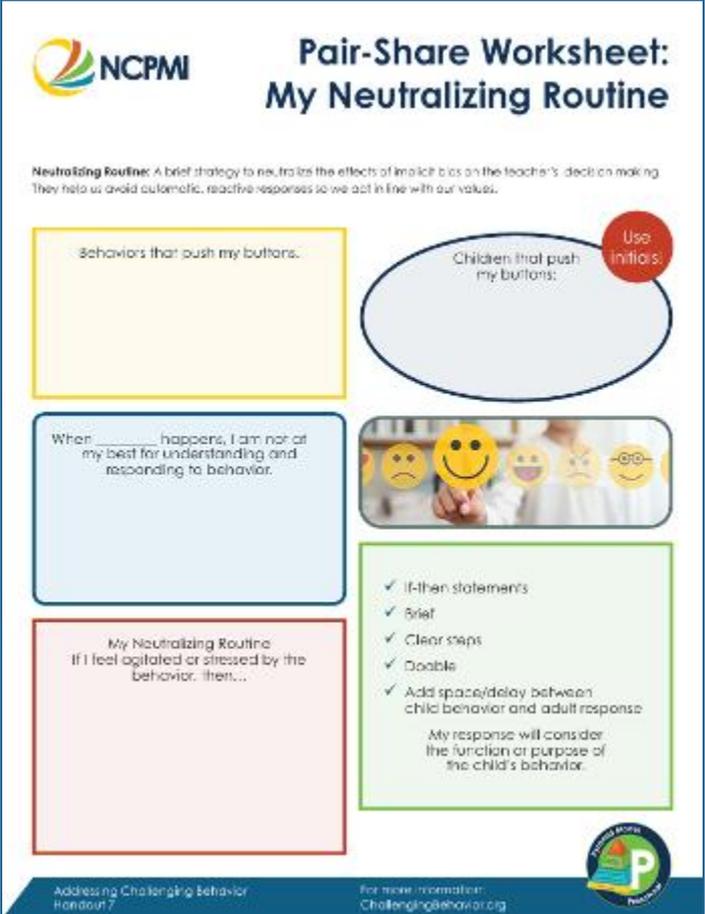
"We won't always do it right the first time."

"We can't succeed unless we **TRY**."

# Activity

## Neutralizing Routine

- Take a moment to read through and complete each prompt to help identify students or moments that trigger your reactive response.
- Next brainstorm some possible ideas for a routine you can use to regulate your emotions and avoid escalating the student or the situation.
- Discuss your answers with the people at your table. Please be prepared to share one Neutralizing Routine from your group.



**NCPMI**

### Pair-Share Worksheet: My Neutralizing Routine

**Neutralizing Routine:** A brief strategy to neutralize the effects of implicit bias on the teacher's decision making. They help us avoid automatic, reactive responses so we act in line with our values.

Behaviors that push my buttons.

Children that push my buttons.

Use initials:

When \_\_\_\_\_ happens, I am not at my best for understanding and responding to behavior.

My Neutralizing Routine  
If I feel agitated or stressed by the behavior, then...

- ✓ If-then statements
- ✓ Brief
- ✓ Clear steps
- ✓ Doable
- ✓ Add space/delay between child behavior and adult response

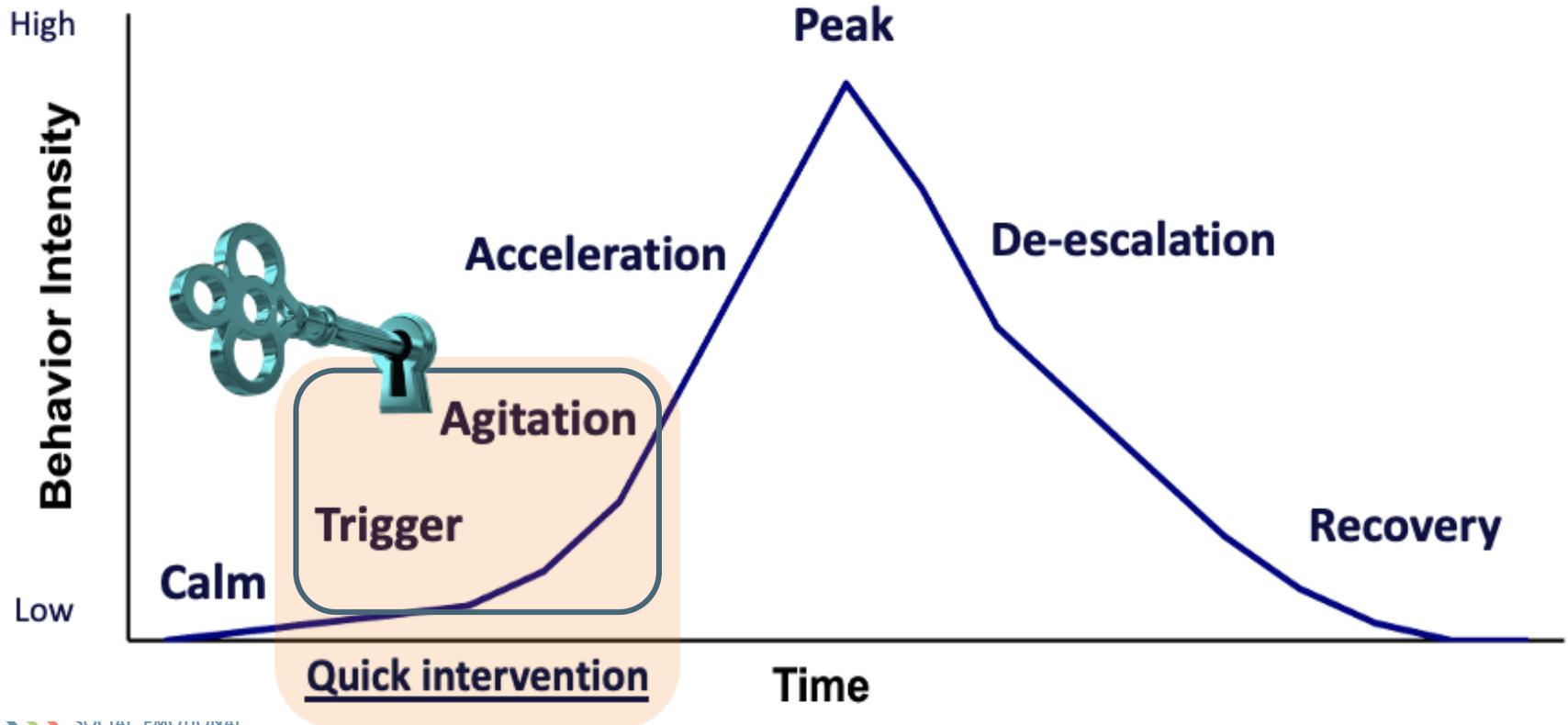
My response will consider the function or purpose of the child's behavior.

Addressing Challenging Behavior  
Handout 7

For more information:  
ChallengingBehavior.org



# Escalation & De-Escalation - Staff Trigger



# Create Predictability and Calm



C

## **Connect with the student**

- Before correcting negative behavior, we must connect to the student and the brain.

A

## **Affirm their feelings**

- “I know you are upset; I would be upset too.” “I would have big feelings about that situation as well—that seems really hard.”

L

## **Listen**

- Ask the student if they want to engage in conversation or if they need time and space. Using phrases or questions to cue to students that we are listening is crucial to creating that safe space: “Tell me more about that.”

M

## **My Plan**

- As students move back down from their amygdala response and can access some of the logic and processing of their prefrontal cortex, we can begin to prompt them to engage in a reflective process or plan forward. “What can we do differently next time?”

# Activity

## De-escalating the Brain, Not the Behavior

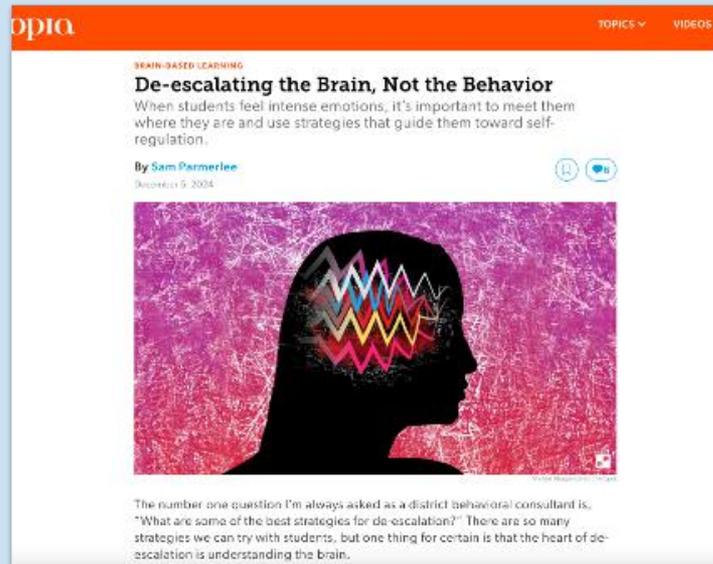
- Which strategies have worked for you?

Connect w/ the student

Affirm feelings

Listen

Make a plan



opia TOPICS VIDEOS

**De-escalating the Brain, Not the Behavior**  
When students feel intense emotions, it's important to meet them where they are and use strategies that guide them toward self-regulation.

By Sam Parmerlee  
December 5, 2014



The number one question I'm always asked as a district behavioral consultant is, "What are some of the best strategies for de-escalation?" There are so many strategies we can try with students, but one thing for certain is that the heart of de-escalation is understanding the brain.

<https://www.edutopia.org/article/emotional-deescalation-strategies>

# Strategies for helping students and ourselves



# Slow the Climb - Use Proactive Strategies

- Provide choices
- Offer help
- Co-regulate
- Re-direct
- Praise
- Give space
- Model
- Prompt known strategies

Student statement	Common Adult Response	Validating Response
I can't do anything right!	That's not true. You do many things right.	It must feel frustrating to feel like you never do anything right.
My parents are going to kill me!	I highly doubt they are going to kill you.	So, you're really feeling that your parents are going to be extremely upset with you because ...

Using Trauma-Informed Validation

# Trauma Informed Statements

## Alternatives to “Calm Down”

- I see you are having a difficult time. Let me try to help you.
- Take a deep breath.
- That can be so frustrating.
- Let's figure this out together.
- I can see you are mad. How does that feel in your body.
- Count to 10.
- Want to squeeze my hand?
- Let's focus on fixing the problem together.
- If you are feeling sad, you can tell me about it.
- I can see you seem really upset. What do you need from me to help get back to calm?
- You seem really agitated. What's really going on?
- How about I come back to you in five minutes? I want to make sure you are okay.
- We need to work together. What do you need from me so you will be okay, and we can continue with class?
- I can see this assignment is really hard for you. Is it okay if I sit with you and help you?

# Provide Choices



It looks like this writing assignment is frustrating...

- Would you like me to scribe your ideas as you brainstorm to get you started or use a graphic organizer?
- Would you like to sit at the back table where it's quieter?
- Would you like to type it on your tablet or hand-write it?
- Would you like to take 5 mins to draw the illustration first to get you started?

## Offer Help

Teach and remind how to access help in different circumstances:

- raise hand
- bring work to teacher
- ask a peer
- ask for tools (calculator, eraser, technology, etc.)

## Redirect



Sometimes distraction, if offered early enough, can reset a potentially challenging situation...

- Give a quick errand or chore the student wouldn't mind doing
- Bring up a topic or discussion that is positive and may be of interest
- Let's count to 10
- Let's put these items in the box
- Word search

# Co-regulate

Use deep breathing strategies

Take a walk together

Break out a fidget or putty to use together

Take a couple of minutes to doodle/color



# Praise



- Compliment the student on something they are doing right
- Don't expect perfection, but rather look for steps in the right direction
- Remind the student of past success that can be built upon
- Example: "Great job paying attention to your own work, even though others are talking"

# Model

We all get frustrated or anxious.  
I like to...

- Do some deep breathing. Let's practice together.
- Use my words to express myself. You can tell me \_\_\_\_\_.
- Use a calming tool together.
- Lower your voice and tone

# Give space strategies

## Prompt Known



Chill zone – with rules of course

Teach use of chill zone before behaviors occur

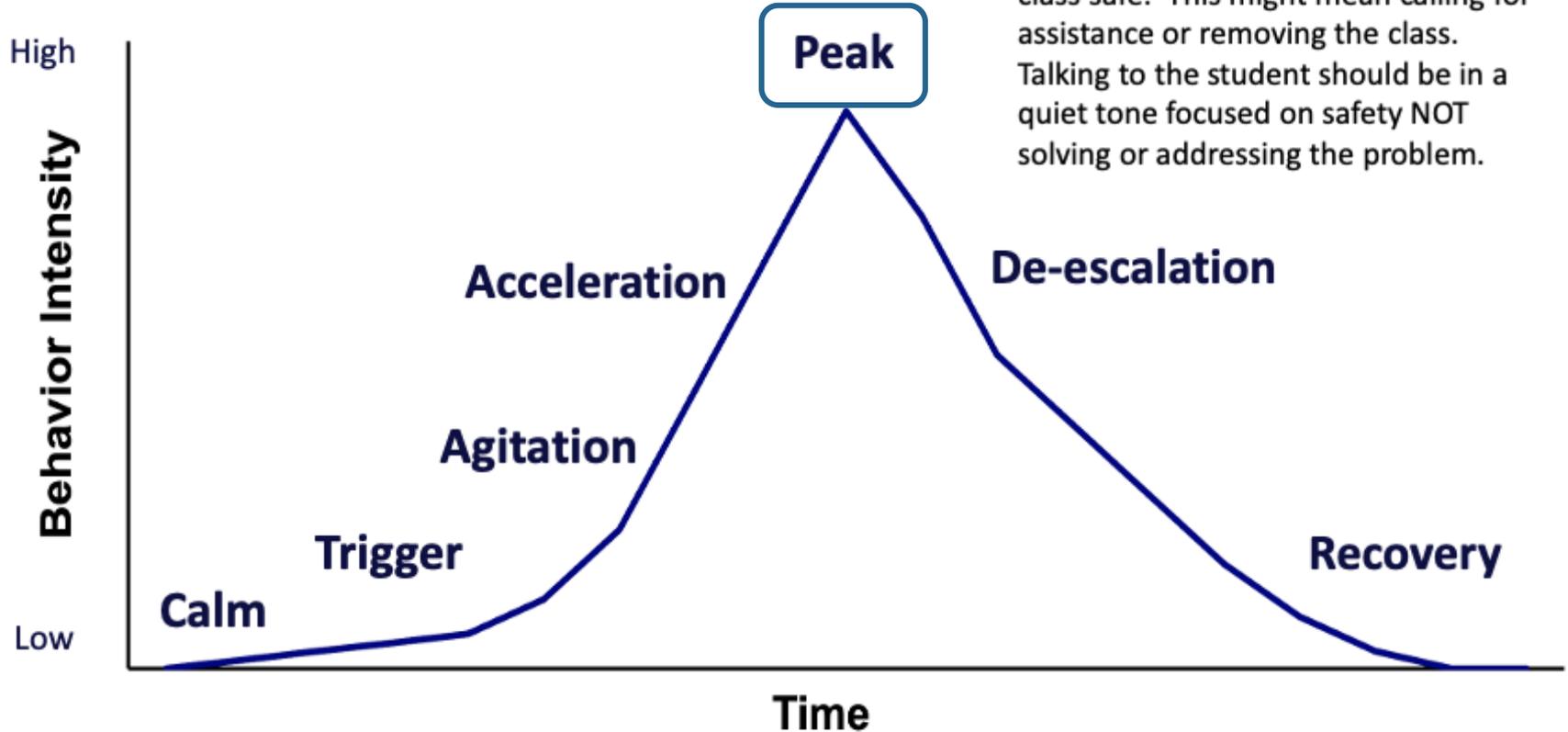
Example statements:

- "It looks like you need some space. I understand. I'll be back in a few minutes when you're ready"
- "Why don't you keep your head down and breath. I'll be back in a moment to check on you"

Remind the student of things you know they can do.

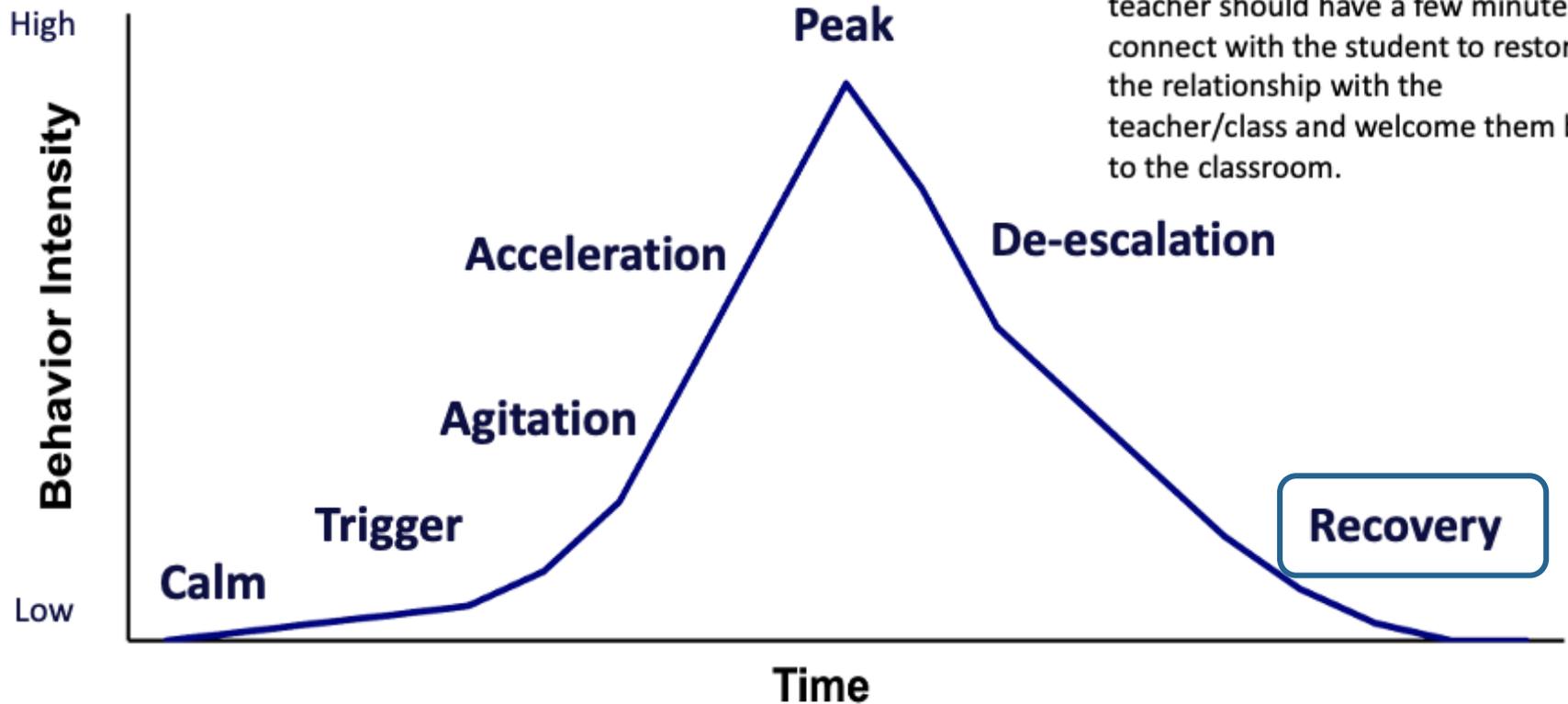
- Ask for help
- Ask for a break
- Express their emotions appropriately – "It's ok to tell me your mad"
- Do an easier assignment first to warm up

# Escalation & De-Escalation



When a student behavior is peaking our response should be to follow protocols that keep the student and class safe. This might mean calling for assistance or removing the class. Talking to the student should be in a quiet tone focused on safety NOT solving or addressing the problem.

# Escalation & De-Escalation



**Recovery** is the process of reentry back to the class setting. This should only be done when the student is back to a calm state and ready. The teacher should have a few minutes to connect with the student to restore the relationship with the teacher/class and welcome them back to the classroom.

# Restoration

## Restoration is:

- Debriefing with student and plan for reconnection
  - Brainstorm ways to prevent dysregulation in the future
  - Can be verbal or written down
  - If there are communication concerns, consult with SLP on ways to make process accessible

**THINK SHEET**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ CLASS \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

Circle or draw how you are feeling?

Happy Sad Calm Angry Neutral

I chose to...

I was not being:  Responsible  Responsible  Safe

Next time I will...

Do I need to apologize?  Yes  No

Who do I need to apologize to?

**THINK SHEET**

What I chose to do:

Who I chose to talk to:

What I chose to say:

Who I chose to talk to:

## Possible Questions

- Tell me what happened.
- What did you do? What did others do?
- What did you want or need in that situation?
- How did that work for you? How do you think it worked for the other people in class?
- If that's what you needed, what's another way we can get what you need in this class?
- What could the teacher do to help you in these situations?

# What the Reconnection Conversation:

## IS NOT...

- It is **NOT** something we should expect students to do on their own
- It is **NOT** an apology note
- It is **NOT** something that requires strong writing skills
- It is **NOT** a long, drawn out, groveling conversation

## IS...

- It **IS** something we practice with supportive adults
  - **\*\*Skills Coaching is necessary\*\***
- It **IS** something that requires lifelong skill development
- It **IS** a mechanism for sharing sensitive information
- It **IS** a tool that can vastly improve OR damage student-teacher relationships (our words and responses matter)

## Key Points

- Student regulation and adult regulation are intricately connected to de-escalation
- It is our responsibility to remain calm and regulated when a youth is dysregulated
- This requires systems work to understand the escalation cycle and ways to address adult and student escalation to reduce the use of exclusionary practices and rash decision making.



# Key Takeaway Preventative Practices:

- **Be Predictable:** expectations, routines, schedules
- **Be Engaging:** interactive, increase opportunities to respond, provide performance feedback
- **Be Welcoming:** greetings at the door
- **Be Instructional:** teaching coping skills when calm
- **Be Self-Aware:** use your own tools, model appropriate strategies and admit challenges



**KEEP  
CALM  
AND  
TEACH  
ON**

Thank you!  
QUESTIONS?



SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL,  
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> Thank You



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