

Preventing and Managing the Escalation of Behaviour in Children and Young People

A professional learning course for teachers



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Orton-Gillingham Classroom Educator Level OGCE/OGA

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About the author

Catherine Duffett has over twenty years' experience as a teacher in Australia. She has worked in Hobart, Darwin and Alice Springs in both public and private schools from different cultural backgrounds. She has over ten years' experience as a teacher librarian in both primary and high schools and currently works as a primary school teacher librarian. In 2013 she was awarded Tasmanian Teacher Librarian of the Year. Catherine has also taught Science and Mathematics to high school students. She is a qualified reading educator. Catherine is passionate about using high impact evidence-based strategies to improve the educational opportunities for children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and sharing her knowledge with others. Catherine works part time on a pro-bono basis as an educational consultant with NGOs in developing countries to improve the educational outcomes of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Her business name, Mshauri Education was given to her by her Tanzanian colleagues and *mshauri* is a Kiswahili word meaning *advisor* or *consultant*.

How to use this course

While this course can be used by educators undertaking solo professional learning, it is recommended that, where possible, educators work collaboratively through it to enable deep discussion and reflection regarding the research described. To facilitate this, the course is divided up into a number of units that provide discussion questions for teachers to reflect on. *The Final Word protocol* (Faddis, n.d.) is a good approach for structuring professional learning, as it fosters collaboration and deeper thinking about the text. It works as follows:

1. Teachers are organised into groups of three or four and each teacher in a group is assigned A, B, C or D.
2. The teachers have an opportunity to read the text or a section of it, select a piece of text or quote that resonates with them, and record their selected quote on a sticky note.
3. Teacher A reads aloud their statement or quote to their group and has 3 minutes to explain to their group the reason behind their choice.
4. Teachers B, C & D then have one minute to respond to their teacher A during which time they might express their own perspective, clarify Teacher A's comment or even question Teacher A's assumptions.
5. Teacher A summarises what has been said and also makes a comment about whether they have changed their own thoughts about the topic.
6. Teacher B discusses their selected quote or section that they found pertinent, including whether the discussion of teacher A's quote has affected their own views on their own sticky note and the whole process is repeated with teachers A, C and D responding to Teacher B's ideas.
7. Finally, Teachers C and D have their turns at sharing the section of the text that resonates with them.
8. The different groups then come together to share their ideas with each other.
9. To further consolidate the learning, time is allocated for teachers to either reflect with a partner, journal their new understandings or plan some action they will take using their newly acquired knowledge.

Acknowledgments: Thank you to Prince Caleb Oyewumi from Nigeria for reviewing this program. This program is based on the practice guide *Escalated behaviour Creating calm, focused classrooms* developed by the Australian Education Research Organisation, but has been adapted to suit schools in developing countries.

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1

The Behaviour Escalation Model

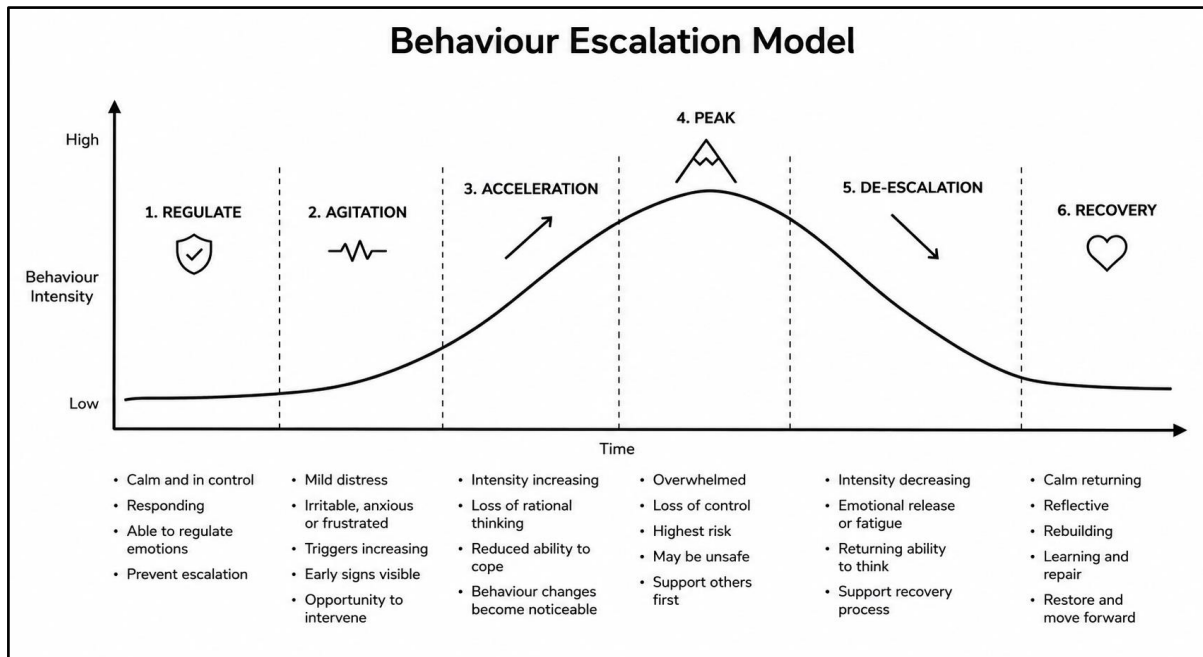


Figure 1: Behaviour Escalation Model. Produced with the assistance of Artificial Intelligence

Conditions such as trauma, anxiety, and some learning disorders can cause some children and young people to have great difficulty regulating their own emotions, causing their emotional response to escalate to a point where they become completely overwhelmed. This can lead to difficulty with relationships with their family and peers. Teachers can play a significant role in helping such children and young people understand and manage their own emotions while creating a calmer classroom environment in the process.

This program uses the Behaviour Escalation Model (Figure 1) to explain how teachers can effectively help individual students (or a group of students) whose behaviour can escalate as a consequence of the overwhelming emotions they experience.

Figure 1 illustrates the different stages an individual might experience when

their emotional response to a particular trigger escalates. Escalation can happen rapidly, and it is possible for students to reach the peak without displaying outward signs of distress. Escalation may not necessarily be linear, a student may fluctuate between the different phases and not demonstrate the characteristic bell curve shown in Figure 1

Emotional regulation can be defined as *the ability to recognise and understand our own emotions and use a range of strategies to manage them* (AERO, 2025).

Students with difficulties regulating their emotions

These students are more likely to:

- Be impulsive
- Have frequent mood swings
- Have a persistent negative mood
- Have difficulty returning to a calm state

- Experience intense emotions that manifest as frustration and anger
 - Have difficulty processing information
 - Have difficulty articulating their thoughts
 - Have difficulty responding to directions
 - Engage in avoidance, withdrawal and isolation
 - Engage in self-harm and risky behaviours
 - Have difficulty expressing emotions in a safe way
 - Have an emotional response that seems disproportionate to the situation
 - Have difficulty relating to friends and maintaining friendships
- are encouraged to select the most appropriate strategies for their circumstances.

Supporting students who have difficulties with emotional regulation

When students are supported by others to regulate their emotions, they are more able to:

- Identify and articulate why they are feeling a particular way
- Focus on the task at hand
- Solve problems
- Interact positively with others by sharing and taking turns
- Reduce impulsivity
- Be able to behave in a way that is conducive to learning
- Calm themselves when they are feeling angry or anxious
- Use strategies for reducing stress
- Reflect on the way they react to stressful situations

(AERO, 2025).

The remainder of the program discusses the different rent stages of the Behaviour Escalation Model (Figure 1) and how teachers can effectively support students whose behaviour escalates due to feeling overwhelmed. It is acknowledged that some of the strategies described in this program may be difficult to implement when teaching very large classes. In these cases, teachers

Remember to take care of your own wellbeing!

It can be challenging to navigate students' emotional outbursts, so self-care is important.

- Make time to rest and relax
- Maintain reasonable working hours
- Do what you can to help, but you aren't responsible for solving your students' problems.
- Work with your colleagues to create some strategies for supporting each other
- Check in with your co-workers to see how they are going, and encourage them to do the same for you.
- Without divulging confidential information about students, seek support from friends and family regarding your own wellbeing

(Psychological first aid: Guide for field workers, n.d.).

Reflect and Discuss

1. Which behaviours listed in the reading are most commonly observed in your classroom or school?

2. What strategies do you currently use to help students recognise and manage their emotions?4. How might some behaviours be misunderstood as deliberate defiance or poor behaviour?

5. Think of a student you have taught who struggled with emotional regulation. What behaviours did they display?

2

When Students Are Regulated

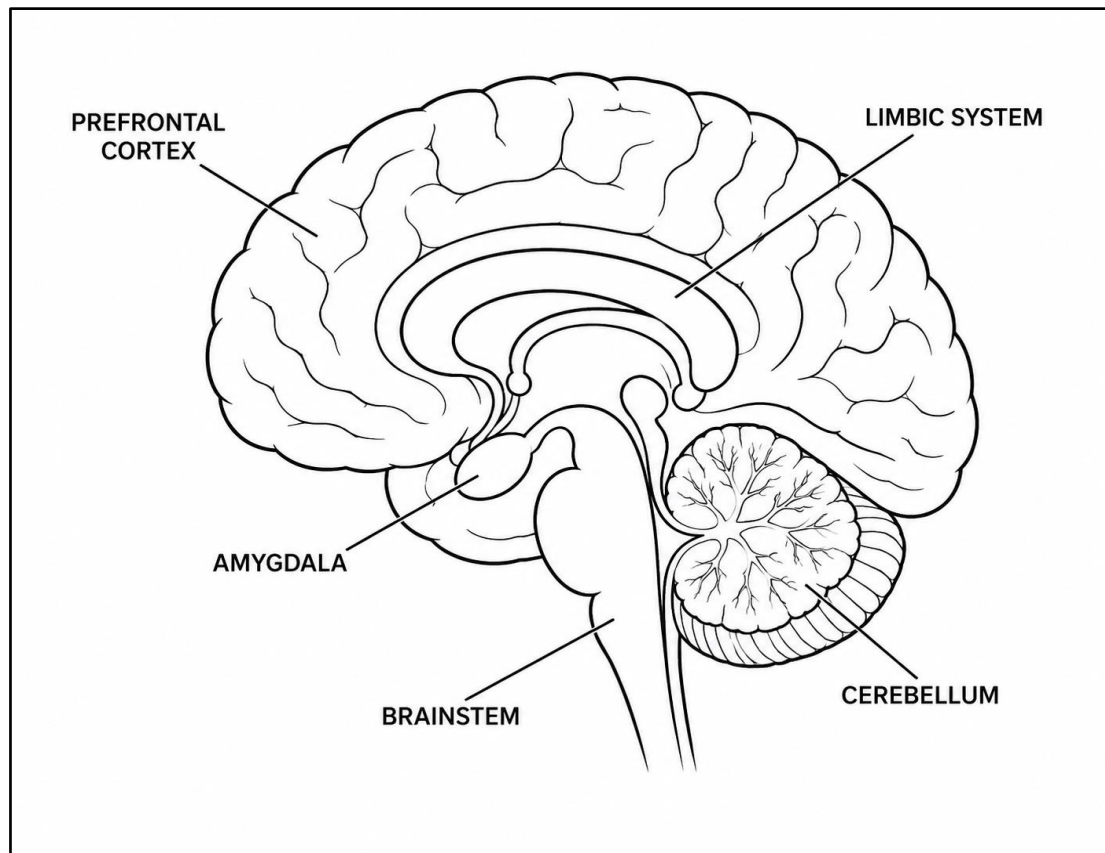


Figure 2: Diagram showing the transverse section illustrating the major parts of the human brain (created with the assistance of Artificial Intelligence)

By creating a calm, orderly, and welcoming classroom environment, teachers can help ensure that students remain in a regulated state. The professional learning program *Children's Wellbeing in Developing Countries*, produced by Mshauri Education, provides comprehensive information on creating a culture where students feel valued and where teachers build positive personal relationships with their students.

When students are regulated

- Regularly check in with students who appear less engaged in learning or less connected to others, as well as with their parents or guardians.
- Provide students with brief breaks from difficult tasks to help maintain focus and build connections. Such breaks might include standing and stretching, playing a game, taking a walk, or alternating the work with a less demanding task.
- Establish the purpose, routine, expectations, and timing for breaks with students, and monitor them during these times.
- Explicitly teach students how to keep themselves safe when others display escalated behaviours. For example, teach students to give a peer displaying escalated behaviour some space and to seek help from an adult.

Establish and Maintain a Calm and Predictable Learning Environment

Proactive and preventative approaches that make the classroom predictable and behavioural expectations that are explicit will help all students regulate their emotions.

Setting clear behavioural expectations

To establish a predictable learning environment for students:

- **Acknowledge or praise** students who are meeting or exceeding expectations before responding to behaviours that do not meet expectations.
- **Provide positive, immediate, and explicit feedback** about what students have done well. For example: *“I could see you were starting to get stressed. I’m glad you asked for a break straight away.”*
- **Offer private** acknowledgement or praise for students who dislike being singled out.
- **Explicitly model, teach, and practise classroom routines** such as entry and exit routines, transitions between activities, accessing materials, seeking help, completing learning tasks, and moving within the classroom and around the school.
- **Remind students of expectations** before activities begin.
- **Respond calmly** when students do not meet expectations. Respect their personal space when interacting with them. Give them time to process and respond to directions. Focus on the behaviour, not the student. For example: *“Saying hurtful things to others is not okay.”*
- **Identify changes to expectations and routines** and discuss these with students before they occur, including the reasons for the changes, what to expect, and what is required of them.
- **Encourage students to identify their emotions** and the reasons behind them, then use self-calming strategies to increase their tolerance of uncertainty when changes or unexpected events occur. Students can use self-talk, such as: *“I’m feeling anxious because I am not sure what will happen. I don’t need to know exactly what will happen. The other students are here too, so I’ll just focus on getting this task done.”*
- **Regularly pause, scan, and circulate to monitor students** and recognise signs that they may be finding it difficult to regulate their emotions (e.g., appearing tense or anxious). Intervene early, when emotions are less intense, and support students in expressing their emotions and needs and/or using self-regulation strategies.
- **Emotional coaching approaches can help students manage emotions** before they become overwhelming. For example: *“I can see you are getting tense. Have a stretch and move on to the next question. I will help you when I finish helping this student.”* Some students may prefer this support to be offered discreetly to avoid embarrassment. You can also ask students whether something else would help.
- **Explicitly teach and model social skills**, such as asking to borrow materials or asking to join a game.

Incorporating Mental Health Literacy and Social and Emotional Learning into the Curriculum

WHO, UNICEF, and UNESCO (2022) recognise the importance of embedding mental health literacy within the curriculum alongside social and emotional learning. Where the curriculum permits, there are numerous opportunities for students to learn

about the physiological effects of stress and become more aware of their own emotions and wellbeing. For example, a text can be analysed through an emotional lens.

Reflect and discuss

1. What signs of emotional distress or disengagement do you notice most frequently among your students?
2. How do you ensure that every student feels valued and connected within your classroom?
3. What is one strategy from this reading that you would like to strengthen in your own practice?
4. What is one action you will take in the next two weeks to support student regulation and wellbeing?

5. Think of a student who has recently struggled with emotional regulation. What proactive strategies from this reading could have supported that student before the situation escalated? What could be implemented differently next time?

Teachers should always display calm, consistent and well-managed emotions and behaviour. This models safe emotional expression and behaviours and helps to create a supportive learning environment.
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3

The Agitation Phase

While teachers are able to employ different strategies to keep students in the regulated phase, there will be inevitably be moments when something triggers an overwhelming emotional response in a student and it is important to know how to manage this and support them to return to their regulated state.

Identifying possible triggers

Identifying possible triggers is an important step in reducing the number of times a student enters the agitation phase (Figure 1). Below is a list of possible triggers that are worth considering.

Environmental triggers

- The following are examples of triggers that might cause students' emotional response to escalate.
- Unexpected changes or disruptions to routine, including during transitions
- Sensitivity to, or sensory overload from noise, lighting, visual environment, temperature, smell or touch
- Physical discomfort

Social and interpersonal

- A change in teachers who usually supports that student
- Conflict with others including friends, family, teachers
- Bullying
- Social isolation including when a supportive peer is absent
- Discrimination based on sex, disability or personal characteristics
- Conscious or unconscious reminder of a past negative experience which may have occurred at home, before school or may be connected to past trauma

- Feelings of shame

Classroom or instructional

- unclear, inconsistent or unachievable expectations
- Publicly addressing student's behaviour
- Raising your voice at a student
- Perceived or actual lack of fairness towards a student
- Teaching practices that aren't consistent with the way students learn
- Requests to start or complete non-preferred tasks or to stop unfinished tasks
- Perceived lack of control over learning or lack of support with tasks
- Lack of recognition for effort to meet expectations
- Making frequent errors or feeling their work isn't satisfactory.

Cognitive or emotional

- Feeling threatened or unsafe, including due to misinterpreting others' behaviour
- Experiencing difficulties with learning, organisation, concentration
- Positive or negative emotions, such as sadness, excitement or frustration
- Worrying about a situation, including assessments or exams
- Poor self-esteem or lack of confidence in abilities
- Feeling overwhelmed by demands or expectations
- Previous traumatic experiences or stress outside of school

Reducing the impact of triggers on students

- Develop a **whole-school approach** to create a calm classroom environment

- **Inform students** in advance of any changes in routines or changes in staff members
- If a student's usual peer support is absent, teachers can **increase their interactions** with them
- **Regularly revise and prompt students** to use the social, emotional, communication, academic and behavioural skills explicitly taught and provide additional support as needed.
- **Pre-warn students** if there is an unavoidable trigger that will be occurring, how they might handle it and the supports they could use.
- Make time to **observe and interact with students**.

Building positive relationships with students is key to supporting them when they are agitated. The program *Children's mental health and wellbeing in developing countries* available from Mshauri Education's website provides detailed information on developing such relationships with students.

Monitor for signs of agitation

Observing students for the early stages of agitation enables teachers to provide timely support and make the appropriate adjustments to prevent further escalation. Agitation may appear differently in different students, but may present as:

Physical changes:

- Looking tense, frowning, slouching or putting their heads on their desk
- Appearing dazed, lost in thought, zoned out, fatigued or sleepy
- Shallow or fast breathing
- Increased restlessness, looking around, fidgeting, shifting in their seat.
- Clenching fists, blinking rapidly or tightening their jaw

- Complaining of headaches, stomach aches or other physical symptoms
- Changes to repetitive behaviours, such as tapping that becomes stronger and more frequent.

Behavioural changes:

- Increased distraction or interrupting
- Avoiding class participation or tasks, or reduced work effort or quality
- Speaking louder, complaining, making negative comments, being short-tempered with others or swearing
- Staying quiet or isolating from themselves from friends
- Excessive laughing or joking
- Lack of enthusiasm for things they usually enjoy
- Increased requests to leave the classroom or lateness after breaks
- Damaging or defacing items, such as scribbling on or tearing up paper
- Offering increased assistance to the teacher or being near them more often
- Being overly generous or excessively helpful

Emotional changes

- Eye rolling, sighing or showing impatience
- Tearing up or crying
- Expressing feelings of overwhelm or hopelessness such as 'I can't do this' or 'what's the point?'

Responding to signs of agitation

Agitated students may not have developed the skills to return to their regulated state and may require support to do so. Ignoring signs of agitation, raising your voice or making threats regarding punishments at this stage could potentially lead to escalation of emotions and behaviour.

When responding to a student showing signs of agitation:

- Consider whether the **agitation may be linked to their surroundings**, such as sensitivity to noise, lighting, visuals, temperature, smell, taste or touch, or to an unmet physical, emotional, social, communication or academic need. For example, they may be hungry or thirsty.
- **Approach the situation with compassion** to consider how you might manage it or support them to do so. For example, you might reduce the level of noise in the classroom or prompt students to speak kindly to each other.
- **Crouch down beside the student** and, with a calm and supportive tone, quietly check in with them about what's bothering them and help them manage the situation. For example, you might ask, 'Are you ok? How are you feeling?' or 'What can I help with?' or 'What do you need right now?' You might prepare them for this conversation by saying, 'Hi, it looks like there's something bothering you. I'll be back in a second to see if I can help.'
- **Maintain personal space** and an exit path for them. Avoid crowding them.
- **Use non-confrontational body language**, such as standing side-on rather than directly facing them.
- **Crouch down** or sit on a seat beside them, rather than standing over them.
- **Use a normal to quieter voice** and consider their communication skills and capacities to avoid overloading them during this time.
- **Demonstrate genuine care** for their emotions by actively listening, acknowledging their feelings and concerns, giving them your full attention and paraphrasing their

words to check understanding. For example, 'It sounds like you feel angry. Is that right?'

- **Reassure** the student that you're there to help them, such as by saying, 'Thank you for letting me know. Let's work this out together', 'It's okay, we'll get this sorted' or 'I'm here to help you', rather than telling them to 'Calm down' or 'You need to [action].'
- **Model and prompt the skills** the student has been taught to regulate their emotions and solve problems.
- **Open a window for fresh air** and avoid crowding by spacing students out.
- **Co-regulate with the student** – a process where a more regulated individual, such as a teacher, provides calm guidance, cues and strategies to help a student to regulate their emotions and behaviour responses. For example, you might say, 'It looks like you're feeling frustrated. Let's breathe together and think with a calm mind about how to resolve this.'
- **Offer a safe space** in the classroom and calming techniques and activities to support the student in regulating their emotions.
- **Offer a brief regulation break**, not as a punishment but to help them think more calmly and clearly. Finding ways to safely offer a break while maintaining duty of care for all your students will depend on your specific school context, so you should develop these methods in collaboration with leaders in your school. Methods could involve teaching the student to use a break card or another signal, or discreetly suggesting a break, such as by offering a drink or toilet pass. If a number of students are agitated, have them take separate breaks. While the student is taking a break, you might meet them outside the

classroom to discuss the problem and offer support, while continuing to supervise the rest of the class.

- **Use visual supports**, such as an 'emotional thermometer' that shows different levels of emotion along with matching strategies, to help the student identify and manage their feelings.
- **Re-explain concepts** or break tasks into smaller, manageable steps. For example, 'Let's focus on just the first thing we need to do.'
- Provide choices for how the student might approach the situation. For example, 'Would you like to take a break/work at the desk at the back of the room, or would you prefer to talk about it now?'
- **Connect the student with a staff member** they trust for support. You can also connect them with a trusted peer, provided the peer is willing and able to help, and that the level of responsibility is appropriate and manageable. Provide clear guidance, resources and scaffolds to increase the likelihood that help from peers is effective
- **Provide time** for the student to respond to assistance and reinforce their positive responses using acknowledgement or praise. For

example, 'I see how you're trying to work through this. That shows you're great at persevering when things are tough.'

Reflect and Discuss

1. How do you currently prepare students for changes to routines, teachers, activities or expectations? What could be improved?
2. How can teachers distinguish between a student who is being deliberately challenging and a student who may be experiencing stress, overwhelm or a feeling of threat?
3. What early signs of agitation do you notice most frequently among your students?
4. Could any of your classroom practices unintentionally contribute to student agitation? Consider:
 - How you give instructions
 - How you respond to mistakes
 - How you address behaviour
 - How students experience fairness and choice
5. How do students know they have support when they find learning difficult?

4

The Acceleration Phase

Acceleration is when the student's behaviour continues to escalate beyond the point of agitation. The student may already be in the acceleration phase before you recognise there's a problem, or they may move into the acceleration phase very quickly. In this phase, distress and agitation increase rapidly, and the student may experience increasing:

- difficulty with speaking or responding to instructions
- 'Fight' responses in the form of aggression or defiance, such as not following directions, breaking rules, or displaying verbal or physical aggression, including using words or actions to provoke a reaction from peers, yelling, arguing, making threats, or throwing objects
- 'Flight' responses in the form of avoidance or withdrawal, such as avoiding tasks or situations, covering their ears or head, hiding, moving away, or leaving the classroom
- 'Freeze' responses in the form of shutting down or not responding, such as not participating, answering questions, or moving. If the student has previously demonstrated unsafe behaviours, it may be appropriate to seek additional support at this point.

Preventing Further Escalation and Supporting De-escalation

To prevent further escalation and support safety, wellbeing, and de-escalation:

- **Remove or reduce demands** on the student and eliminate known or possible triggers.
- Offer and encourage the student to **use a safe, quiet, low-stimulation**

area where they can begin to regulate.

- **Avoid discussing consequences, making threats, or arguing** with the student, as these responses may escalate their distress further.
- **Avoid asking questions or commenting on behaviours**, as this may also escalate the student further. For example, some students may respond in unexpected ways, such as laughing or smiling inappropriately.
- Allow the student **more time and space** than usual to process information.
- **Stand slightly to the side** rather than directly facing the student. In some instances, it may be better to avoid direct eye contact if it could be perceived as threatening. Don't touch the student.
- **Slow down your communication and movement** by pausing, breathing slowly, keeping a neutral facial expression, and using a low, steady voice at a slightly slower pace.
- **Tailor your communication to the student.** Some students in the acceleration phase may benefit from supportive and soothing verbal reassurance. Others may respond better to minimal verbal communication and clear, concrete, simple language or visual communication tools, as they may process non-verbal cues more effectively.
- Rather than engaging in back-and-forth discussion or giving lengthy instructions, **use brief, reassuring statements** and allow the student time and space to regulate.
- **Use gestures**, such as a flat palm to signal 'slow down' or 'breathe,' or point to a quiet space where the

student might move. Tell the student where you'll be when they're ready. For example, "I'm going to be [location where you can still monitor them]. When you're ready, I'll be right there."

- Rather than reacting impulsively, say, **"I'm going to think about the best way to help right now."**
- **Be ready to move away** and have other students leave the room if the student escalates further and becomes dangerous, such as attempting to hit, kick, grab, or throw objects. Look for signs of increasing escalation and begin moving yourself and other students to safety.
- **Acknowledge and provide positive feedback** if the student shows signs of de-escalation or cooperation.

reduce the likelihood of a similar escalation in the future?

Reflect and Discuss

1. What are the earliest signs that a student is moving from agitation into the acceleration phase?
2. Which of the strategies described above do you already use confidently? Which would you like to practise?
3. Why is it important to reduce demands rather than insist on compliance during the acceleration phase?
4. How can you maintain the safety of the rest of the class while also supporting the distressed student?
5. Think of a student you have taught. Which signs of fight, flight or freeze did they display when overwhelmed?
6. After a student has de-escalated, what should happen next to help

5

The Peak Phase

In the peak phase, behaviour is at its most intense, and the student's thinking is often impaired by heightened emotions and stress. Their ability to regulate their emotions, manage their behaviour and make rational decisions is significantly diminished. The student may become reactive rather than thoughtful and struggle to listen, process information, follow instructions, focus and think clearly due to intense feelings such as anger, frustration or fear.

The peak phase is not the time to teach skills or engage in conversation. Rather, the focus is on assessing risk, ensuring safety for everyone and supporting de-escalation. Follow your school's emergency and critical incident management procedures, as well as the student's individual plan if available, to prioritise safety and minimise the risk of harm to the student themselves (for example, preventing them from hurting themselves or putting themselves in danger) and to others (for example, avoiding being hit by the student or struck by thrown objects).

Support safety and de-escalation

To support student and staff safety and work towards de-escalation, continue to use the approaches and techniques from the acceleration phase, and also:

- Avoid touching, holding or forcing the student to respond or move, as this is likely to exacerbate the situation.
- Remain patient and avoid adding any additional triggers. Practices that limit students' freedom of movement, such as forcibly moving students, blocking their exit or putting them in seclusion, are considered 'restrictive practices' and there may be regulations in your country that dictate under what circumstances these practices are permitted.
- Calmly move other students to a different area, reassuring and supporting them to focus away from the escalated behaviour. This might be with a nearby teacher or outside the classroom so you can supervise the student and the rest of the class until help arrives. This is safer than attempting to move the student who is in the peak phase.
- Call for additional support from a support staff member or school leader. This person may help with the student in the peak phase or with other students.
 - Provide a brief summary of everyone's location and what students are doing, including what the other students are doing to ensure their safety
 - If the student in the peak phase has left the classroom, provide details about the direction they've travelled and their location if it's known. If they're within sight, continue to monitor them.
- Adjust the environment to create a clear exit path for everyone and, if safe to do so, remove items that could be thrown or used to cause harm, such as scissors, books, furniture or heavy items.
- If safe to do so, position yourself in a way that discreetly blocks access to unsafe areas, such as standing between the student and others or near structures that can be climbed. This can help guide students away from potential risks.
- Give the student plenty of space and observe from a safe distance.

- Be patient, regulate your own emotions, co-regulate with the student if they're still with you and follow school and student plans.
- If they haven't already, a member of the school leadership team may need to discreetly contact the student's parents or primary caregivers for support.

Reflect and discuss

1. Why is the peak phase not an appropriate time to teach, reason with or discipline a student?
2. What changes occur in a student's thinking and decision-making during the peak phase? How should this influence your response?
3. What are the first priorities when a student enters the peak phase? How do these priorities differ from those during the agitation phase?
4. How might your own emotions affect the situation? What strategies help you remain calm and think clearly under pressure?
5. What actions by adults are most likely to unintentionally escalate a student's behaviour during the peak phase?

6

Recovery Phase

Debriefing is an important step in helping everyone involved for those who escalated, those who contributed to the escalation, and those who witnessed it. It is important to reflect on what happened, repair relationships, and prevent future escalations.

Conducting the debrief

Identify who should be involved, including:

- a suitable person, such as a school leader or support teacher, to lead the debrief and ensure the conversation is conducted effectively and without interruptions
- other staff members
- the student who experienced the escalation and their parents and primary caregivers (where possible).
- Seek agreement on rules such as 'Speak only for yourself', 'Listen to others', 'Ask questions to understand' and 'Only speak if you want to'. Be mindful of the student's privacy and comfort in any discussions you have with and about them.
- Be prepared to take a break if anyone starts to have difficulty regulating their emotions.

Talk through the incident

- Discuss each person's actions, what they were trying to achieve, what worked or didn't, what they could do differently next time, and what support they might need.
- Discuss what happened, including what led to the escalation (trigger/antecedent), what occurred during it (behaviour), how they felt, and the outcome (consequence).
- The student may need help remembering what happened and

expressing their feelings. Reassure them that everyone is safe now.

Review, update and plan supports for the student

- Check whether school and student plans were followed effectively and if adjustments are needed. Discuss what might be updated in existing plans or incorporated in new plans, including:
 - triggers for agitation and what could be modified
 - signs of agitation, acceleration and peak escalation
 - the communication, social and emotional regulation skills that will be modelled, taught and practised when the student is regulated
 - Specify how staff can seek assistance during escalated incidents.

Discuss follow-up action

Some behaviours may require school leadership involvement. Where appropriate and safe, include the student in this process so they know what's being shared or discussed.

- Discuss and agree on reasonable, respectful actions to help make amends, repair relationships, and teach replacement behaviours. This might include apologising or checking on affected staff or peers.
- Encourage and support (but don't force) apologies, as forced apologies can be counterproductive. This may include, for example:
 - cleaning up any mess made (with help if needed)
 - other actions relevant to the behaviour and the student's developmental skills.

Plan the return to class

- **Discuss how and when** the student will return to class.
- **Help them practise** what they might say to peers or staff.
- **Address any feelings of shame or worry** about how others may have viewed the incident. For example, 'It's understandable to feel nervous about what others might think. One moment doesn't define you, and we know everyone is working on things.'
- to conduct with other students and adults who were involved, saw, or were impacted by the incident. This debriefing can involve:
 - ensuring that anyone who saw the escalation knows that appropriate follow-up has occurred, while maintaining the dignity and privacy of everyone involved
 - arranging appropriate support to help them process what they experienced
 - advising everyone involved that the student will be given the opportunity to move forward. You can encourage others to make deliberate efforts to interact positively with the student to help reinforce positive relationships.

Support the student to return to class

- Arrange for and **support the student to re-enter the classroom** and regular routine in a dignified and supportive manner
- **Explain** what to do and help them with what they need.
- **Continue to monitor** them for signs of agitation and provide support where needed.
- If the student's parents or primary caregivers weren't involved in the debriefing conversation, **provide them**

with a summary of the incident and follow-up actions. questions, share information and contribute to the plan.

Later in the day or the next day

- **Check in with the student** to see how they're feeling, offer support and remind them of the strategies to use if they begin to feel agitated.
- Continue to make a deliberate effort to **have positive interactions** with the student to help reinforce positive relationships and encourage other staff and students to do so too.
- **Provide positive feedback** when you see the student engaging in learning, working well with others and using their plan to regulate their emotions and seek help.

Support your own wellbeing

It can be very challenging to manage escalation as, in these situations, students can say and do unsafe and hurtful things. Supporting your own wellbeing is essential.

- Try to regulate your emotions and responses by seeing the behaviour as a sign that the student is still developing the skills to manage difficult emotions, needs support but can't ask for it, or is reacting to overwhelming feelings
- Recognise that students may escalate for various reasons, some of which neither you nor they may be aware of or able to control. Reviewing student plans, debriefing and seeking others' assistance can help you support students and try to prevent escalation in the future.
- Remember that refining your classroom management and teaching practice can take time.

Work to improve your own practice

- Use this guide to plan, script and rehearse how to prevent and respond to escalation in ways that support de-escalation, regulation, recovery and planning for the future. This supports you to focus on your own regulation as you deliver planned responses, rather than trying to regulate and consider how to respond at the same time. You might do this independently or with the support of colleagues. You might focus on a student, a group of students or a class who sometimes experience difficulties with emotional regulation.
- Use this guide to identify your strengths and prioritise the area you'll focus on first. Work on one area at a time until you can confidently demonstrate it.
- Pause before responding to maintain your own emotional regulation and ensure you aren't reacting impulsively.

Take time to reflect

- Regularly reflect on your own and your students' strengths and successes, the effectiveness of approaches, areas for improvement and student needs requiring support.
- Take time to reflect on your own or debrief with the support of colleagues after times of escalation.
- Ask colleagues and students' support networks for strategies and suggestions on how to support students.
- Consider what resources, planning time and debriefing processes you need after escalation. Discuss with the relevant school leader how these might be arranged.

Build relationships

It's also helpful to keep in mind that building a positive classroom culture and developing student–teacher relationships take time. Your efforts may not be realised immediately, but there will be incremental improvements and, over time, you and your students will benefit from your persistence.

Discuss and Reflect

1. Why is debriefing an important part of the recovery phase, and what could happen if it is skipped after an incident?
2. How can teachers support a student's return to the classroom in a way that preserves their dignity and helps rebuild positive relationships with peers and staff?
3. Managing an escalation can be emotionally demanding for staff. What are some practical ways teachers can support their own wellbeing and continue to respond effectively to challenging behaviour?
4. What are the key differences between a debrief that promotes learning and one that feels punitive?
5. How can we ensure that the debrief focuses on understanding and problem-solving rather than assigning blame?

7

The De-escalation Phase

Support de-escalation and regulation

During this phase, the student can very easily re-escalate, so it's important to use similar techniques to those used in the agitation phase to promote calm, with consideration of the student's preferences and needs:

- Continue to give the student time and space to recover. The time needed for students to return to a regulated state will vary, and parent and primary caregiver support may be needed.
- Offer reassurance that helps them feel safe and supported.
- Offer them some simple supports such as having a drink or eating some of their lunch, having a rest or talking to you or a trusted adult.
- Remind them that there's a quiet space where they can continue to de-escalate or regulate their emotions
- Encourage them to engage in calming activities or techniques that have been taught when regulated, or an easy, preferred activity with a clear end point.
- Keep a close eye on the student to monitor them for any signs of re-escalation and be prepared to return to the escalation phase techniques if needed.
- Look out for triggers that may cause re-escalation, for example,

somebody coming into the student's space or commenting on what they're doing, loud noises or sudden movements or placing expectations on or making requests of them.

- Help the student maintain their dignity by keeping other students, and sometimes staff, away from them. Embarrassment and shame can be a trigger for re-escalation.
- Focus on reconnecting and avoid talking about consequences or imposing demands.
- Actively listen, acknowledge the student's feelings and allow for silence as they recover from the escalation

Reflect and Discuss

1. What signs might indicate that a student is beginning to return to a regulated state?
2. What are some phrases we can use to reassure a student during this phase?
3. What are some examples of adult responses that might accidentally increase a student's stress during this phase?
4. Think of a recent situation where a student escalated. What might have helped them return to regulation more effectively?

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