



Examples of de-escalation techniques – Elementary

When in a situation where a student is upset/overwhelmed and escalating in their reaction:

- If the student displays a **freeze response** and tends to shut down and not respond to the adult, it is suggested to give them some space, not force them to interact beyond their ability, and honouring their rhythm.
- If the student displays a **flight response** and tends to run away and hide, it is suggested to set up a predetermined alternate safe space in the school where the student can go to and cocoon.
- If the student displays a **fight response** and externalizing/explosive behaviours (e.g. kicking, hitting, throwing objects, destroying property, etc.), it is suggested to remove any audience. If possible, taking the student, who is willing, for a walk or accompanying them to a safe and private space (being careful about not forcing them – taking them by the wrist when they are not willing to follow is considered to be a hold).
- Honouring the student's personal space – keeping a safe and respectful distance that feels comfortable for the student (needing to consider individual differences in terms of tolerance for physical proximity) – asking if you can sit next to them (if they say no, maintain a greater distance). No need to be in close proximity; however, must be able to see them well to ensure safety and supervision.
- Being mindful of being neutral and non-threatening in our verbal, non-verbal and paraverbal cues (e.g., triggering language, tone/volume of voice, speech rate, body positioning, facial expression, sudden gestures, walking fast towards the student, etc.)
- Being aware of our own level of stress, affect, emotional intensity, and type/level of energy reflected - remaining calm and reflective (having another adult help out if needed).
- Avoiding intense eye contact (this can feel quite threatening to some students). Sitting side-by-side or standing at an angle can help with this.
- Demonstrating active listening; reducing the amount of talking and allowing for moments of silence. Modeling deep breathing techniques, naming as something that helps you (no need to pressure them or put too much attention to it; students often mirror what we do).
- Being empathetic and non-judgmental; focusing on the emotion(s) experienced by the student rather than their behaviour.
- Offering support or a pause; trying to accommodate and reassure the student.
- If possible/available, providing a space for them to let off steam in a safe manner.
- Avoiding getting caught in a power struggle, anticipating potential refusal from the student and perceiving their challenging questions/comments as needing to vent.
- Moving away from trying to teach a lesson or reason with the student, especially when their behaviour appears erratic and irrational - waiting until a more appropriate time to address the situation (when the student is regulated/calm and receptive/open to the adult).
- Setting simple, concise, and realistic limits by offering options/alternatives in a supportive manner; being careful to not overload with too many directives. Only offer options that are viable.
- Allowing time for decision making and choosing wisely what is insisted upon. Keeping conversation simple and clear, avoid overtalking as this can be both confusing and frustrating.



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- Coming alongside the student's frustration, by naming and validating it – focusing on co-regulation (not expecting the student to regulate their emotions on their own).
- Sometimes, when appropriate, using playfulness and humour (being careful with sarcasm), can be helpful to diffuse the situation.
- Not taking the behaviour personally; being careful to not overreact.
- Having another adult support or step in if the situation is not defusing.
- Following the event, it is suggested for the adults involved to:
 - o debrief on what happened and whether things could have been done differently
 - o review the school guidelines around preventative practices and alternate measures in place
 - o ensure the practices are well adapted to the student's needs and individual differences. Being mindful of the differences between the student's profile and challenges at each Tier.
- If available, referring to the student's safety plan for suggestions on:
 - o the proper adult posture
 - o the practices to avoid at each level of stress
 - o the post-debrief practices with the student
- Please note that if any adult involved in the event had to resort to a hold for safety purposes (as a last resort in a situation of eminent danger), the steps listed in the school board protocol on restraints and isolation must be followed.