

## De-escalation Strategies for the Classroom

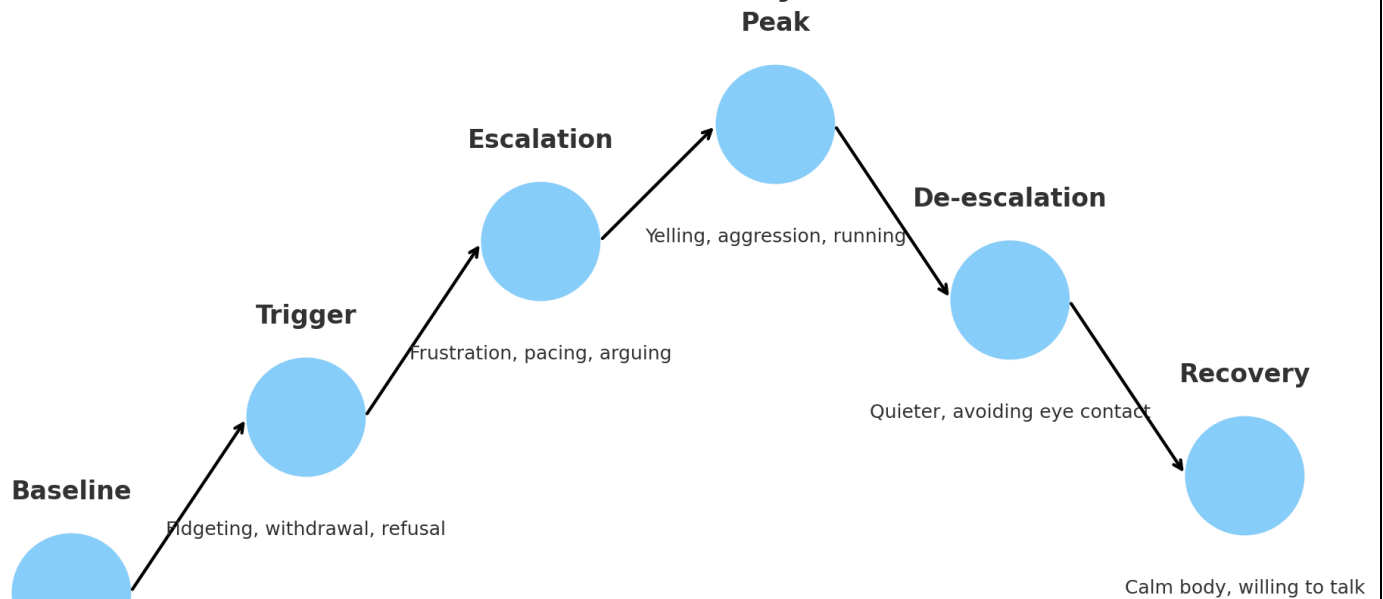
*Practical, stage-based responses for supporting students in moments of escalation*

### Purpose

This guide provides educators with clear, actionable strategies for recognizing and responding to escalating behavior. By understanding the escalation cycle, educators can intervene early, prevent crises, and maintain safety and dignity for all students.

Challenging behavior rarely happens without warning. Students often move through predictable stages before reaching a crisis point, and the way adults respond during these stages can either diffuse or intensify the situation. Having a structured framework equips teachers, paraprofessionals, and support staff with common language and consistent strategies, reducing stress in the moment and creating a safer, more supportive environment. Importantly, de-escalation is not about control—it is about connection, regulation, and preserving relationships so that students can return to learning.

### The Escalation Cycle



Calm, engaged, following expectations

## Understanding the Escalation Cycle

| Stage                | Observable Indicators                                     | Effective Responses<br>(Do)  | Ineffective Responses<br>(Avoid)                           |
|----------------------|---|--|--|
| <b>Baseline</b>      | Calm, engaged, following expectations                     | Build rapport, offer choices, reinforce positive behavior          | Ignoring student, withholding interaction                  |
| <b>Trigger</b>       | Subtle changes: fidgeting, withdrawal, muttering, refusal | Use calm, neutral tone; offer support; reduce demands if needed    | Raising voice, introducing new demands, public correction  |
| <b>Escalation</b>    | Raised voice, visible frustration, pacing, arguing        | Provide space, speak calmly, use simple directives, limit audience | Arguing back, cornering student, escalating tone           |
| <b>Peak</b>          | Yelling, property disruption, aggression, running         | Ensure safety, remove audience, use crisis team protocols          | Physically blocking without training, emotional engagement |
| <b>De-escalation</b> | Quieter voice, less movement, avoiding eye contact        | Offer space, minimal verbal engagement, short positive statements  | Rehashing incident, giving lengthy lectures                |
| <b>Recovery</b>      | Calm body, willingness to talk, possible shame or fatigue | Process briefly, re-establish routine, reinforce coping strategies | Punitive tone, over-processing, ignoring student entirely  |

### Key Principles for De-escalation

- Maintain a calm, neutral, and respectful tone at all times.
- Use the student's name and speak slowly with simple directions.
- Give physical space — avoid standing over the student.
- Avoid power struggles; focus on safety and regulation.
- Nonverbal cues (posture, facial expression) matter as much as words.

## **Sample De-escalation Scripts**

**Trigger Stage:** "I can see you're frustrated. Let's take a short break and then we can figure it out together."

**Escalation Stage:** "I'm here to help. Let's step over here where it's quieter."

**Peak Stage:** "I'm going to give you some space. I'll check back in a few minutes."

**Recovery Stage:** "Thanks for working through that. Let's get back to [activity]."

## **Quick-Access Calm-Down Strategies**

- Offer a drink of water or a safe sensory tool (fidget, stress ball).
- Provide access to a designated calm space.
- Suggest movement: walk in hallway, stretch, deep breathing.
- Use grounding techniques: name 5 things you see, 4 you hear, 3 you can touch.
- Offer short, low-stimulation tasks until the student is ready to rejoin.

## **Setting Up a Calm Space**

A calm space should be a supportive, non-punitive environment for students to regulate. It should be clearly introduced and practiced before it is needed.

- Comfortable seating (bean bag, chair, floor mat)
- Visuals for breathing exercises or coping strategies
- Low-stimulation lighting
- Safe sensory tools
- Timer for self-monitoring time in the space

## **Action Starter: Try Tomorrow**

- Identify 2–3 early indicators of escalation for a student you support.
- Practice one de-escalation script and use it when needed.
- Set up a small area in your classroom as a calm space and introduce it to the class.