

De-Escalation Strategies

To Defuse Challenging Behavior

New Lenox School District #122
Parent Night

About Me



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The Escalation
Cycle

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Safety During
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Emotional Regulation
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Strategies to
De-Escalate



INTRODUCTION

If you are here, you or someone you know has been involved with a child engaging in challenging behavior.

Look around... you are NOT alone!



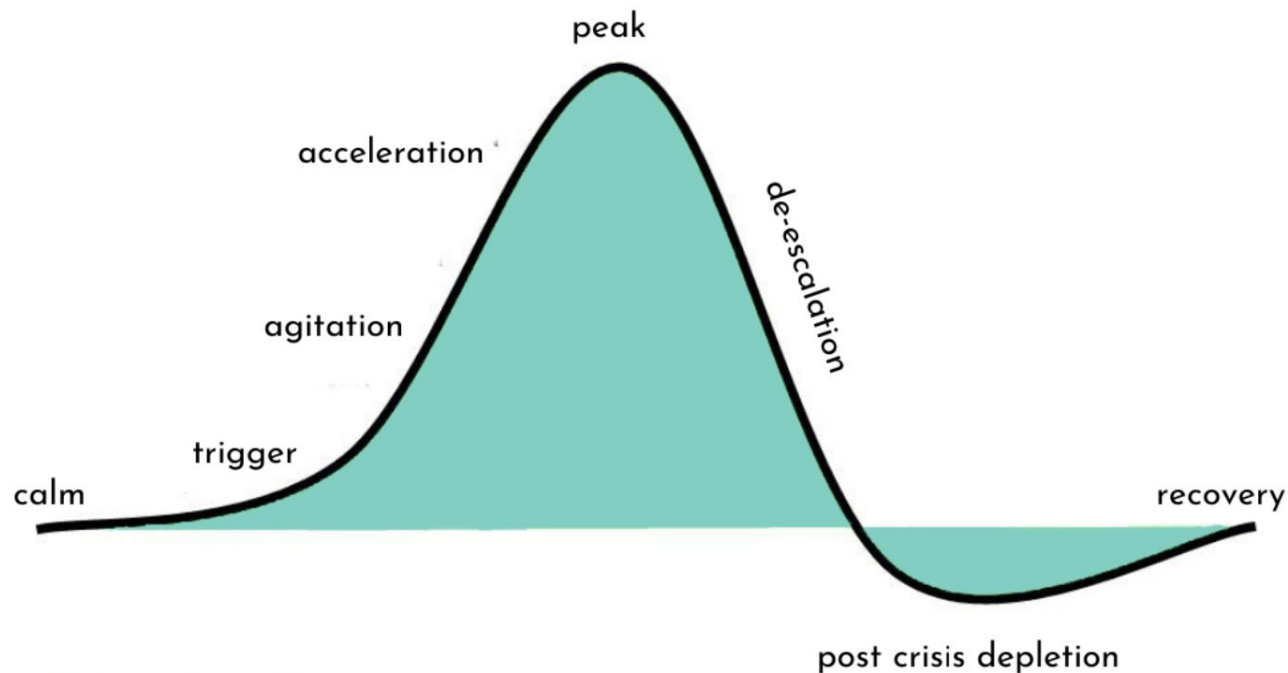
The Escalation Cycle

01



THE ESCALATION CYCLE

pattern occurring before, during, and after a meltdown



Why does it matter?

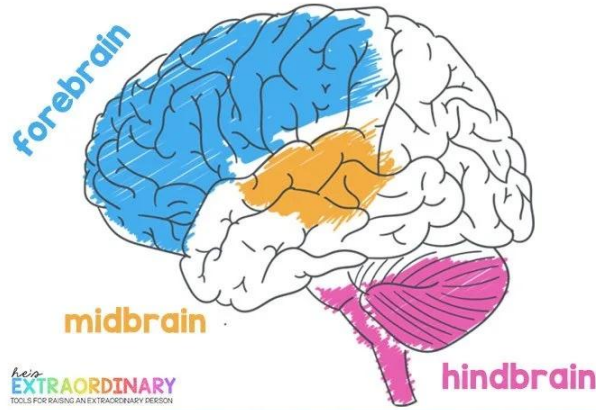
Understanding each phase of the cycle will help you respond better in the future and ideally prevent crises from occurring at all.



Emotional Regulation and the Brain

02

EMOTIONAL REGULATION & THE BRAIN



forebrain

THE PREFRONTAL CORTEX - The thinking part of the brain. Controls executive functions, reasoning, problem solving, etc. When regulated your child's forebrain is engaged and ready to learn.

midbrain

THE LIMBIC SYSTEM - The feeling part of the brain where emotions are experienced. When engaged there is less connection with the forebrain. Your child will seem emotional, needy, demanding, uncooperative, nervous, etc. Help them regulate their emotions.

hindbrain

BRAIN STEM & AMYGDALA - The survival part of the brain. Controls fight or flight instinct. When engaged there is no connection to the forebrain. Your child may hit, bite, scream, spit, run away, shut down. They need to feel safe. You cannot teach or discipline right now.





Safety During Escalation

03

Safe Environment

Challenging behavior may include using objects dangerously, so one component of incident prevention is to manage access to such items.



Dangerous Objects

Some examples may include:



Dangerous Substances

Some examples may include:

Remove or secure items that are considered too unsafe.

Be aware of the potentially dangerous items and remove from the immediate area when appropriate.

Safety Habits

- Stay alert to what's going on around you.
- Know where your exits are.
- Pay close attention to body language, tone of voice, and other signals of potential aggression.
- Don't surprise the person by approaching or touching unexpectedly
- Avoid crossing the midline in front of the person's body (100% of all bites come from the mouth!)
- Don't get trapped in a tight spot.
- Maintain a balanced, comfortable posture that allows you to move in any direction.
- Stay out of arm's reach except when necessary to approach.

Blocking if necessary



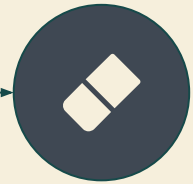
Beanbags

If your child is at risk of hurting themselves or you, a beanbag may be a good option to block.



Pillows

Consider using pillows to protect your child and yourself if needed



Positive Interaction Strategies

Facial Expressions

Respond to challenging behavior with a confident, **NEUTRAL** facial expression

Posture should be confident, but not challenging. Avoid crossing your arms, staring, or making angry gestures.

Posture

Distance

Avoid moving into personal space unexpectedly. Give about 2 of their arm's length (or more if safe).

Move at a moderate pace to communicate **CALM**.

Movement



BRING THE CALM

I know this is HARD!!! Especially when they are:

Irritating

Insulting

Provoking and/or


Intimidating





De-Escalation Strategies

04





Goals in De-Escalation

Safety

Maintain the safety of the
agitated person and everyone
else

Maintenance


Avoid making the situation any
worse or making the person
more agitated

Decrease

Help the person to decrease
the intensity of crisis
behaviors

Future

Avoid reinforcing crisis behaviors,
so they do not become more
likely in the future



Strategies

HELP

The challenging behavior may be expressing a want or a need

PROMPT

Telling someone to “__” is usually not helpful. Better to ask them to do something specific

WAIT

In some situations the best intervention is to monitor the situation and give TIME!

HELP

- Just like it sounds... we are simply seeing how we can HELP the individual.
- This can only be used EARLY in the escalation cycle.
- Ask the person to say what he or she wants using one of the following:
 - Cue the person to make a specific request (i.e. Say, I want to take a walk.”
 - Give the person 2-3 acceptable choices (i.e. “Do you want to take a break or get a drink of water?”
 - Ask the person to tell you what he or she wants (i.e. “What do you want? How can I help you?”)
 - Avoid using yes or no questions
- Allow TIME to process the request (AT LEAST 5-10 seconds)
- If they make a request
 - Praise and acknowledge it. If it is something you can reasonably provide, do so. If you cannot, try to address some component of the request as closely as possible.
- If they become more agitated, consider switching to a different strategy.

HELP

- For individuals who are unable to vocally communicate at that point due to communication difficulties or due to being upset, then utilize alternate communication such as:
 - Picture choices
 - White boards
 - pen/paper
- If they are impolite or inappropriate, now is not the time to address that. Respond to the request and address that once they are back to calm.

HELP

- Use during early signs of escalation when you think they may want something you can provide.
- Don't use it when they are highly agitated and likely to ask for something you can't or won't deliver to them at that point.
- Goal is to help your child to learn to communicate instead of using crisis behaviors to get needs met.
- Be helpful and responsive to appropriate requests. Make sure you don't become MORE cooperative once the person is agitated than you would if they were calm.
- Before a situation occurs that may be a trigger for your child, remind them of their communication options.

PROMPT

- Don't say CALM DOWN!
- What should you prompt the person to do?
 - Incompatible behavior: Ask the person to do something that is incompatible with the challenging behavior he or she is engaging in (i.e. if the person is banging on the table- prompt them to walk across the room, if the person is yelling- prompt them to take a sip of water, etc.)
 - High probability behavior: Ask the person to do something simple that he or she is likely to cooperate with. Make sure the behavior you prompt is something the person already knows how to do, a simple and brief action that the person can do right now, and an activity that is not extremely reinforcing. (i.e. sit down, put an item away, hand you a safe object, move to the other side of the room, etc.)
- Use a calm, neutral tone.

PROMPT

- Praise any cooperation. Then begin again with another incompatible or high-probability behavior
- If uncooperative, then try a different behavior to prompt.
- If signs of agitation increase, stop and move to the WAIT strategy.
- If they are unable to respond to verbal instructions (due to receptive communication difficulties or agitation), you may need to prompt non-verbally.
 - Consider using pictures or gestures such as pointing

PROMPT

- Use this strategy
 - When HELP strategy was not effective or not appropriate.
 - When crisis behaviors are severe or have been happening for a long time
 - When you think it is likely they will follow your request



WAIT

Why Am I Talking?

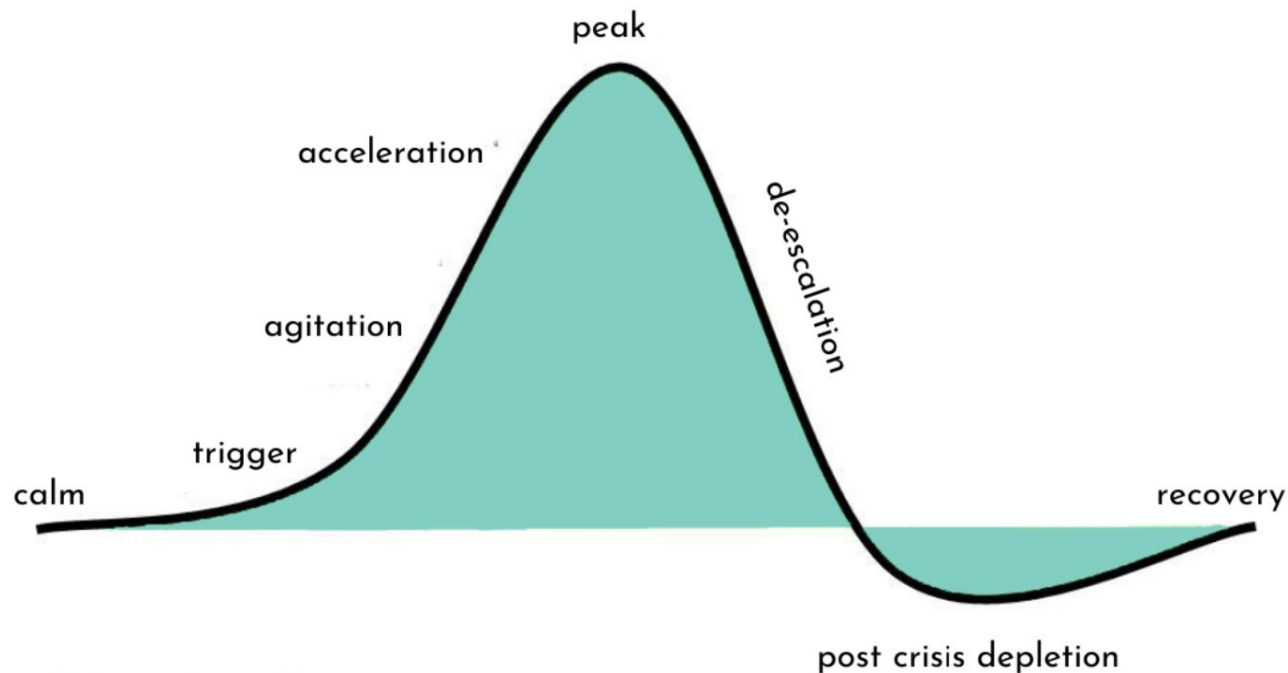


WAIT

- If you know your child tends to become less angry if given time to settle, or if tried the other strategies and everything you do seems to increase their agitation, then this is your best option.
- If your child is telling you to go away, you would use this strategy.
- When they start to take steps down in escalation/behave more calmly, you can try switching to the Help or Prompt strategy.
- This could be quick or it might take an inconvenient amount of time.

THE ESCALATION CYCLE

pattern occurring before, during, and after a meltdown



Reflective Listening

- *Trigger and Agitation stages*
- Let your child talk and focus on what they are saying
- Focus on their emotions, tone of voice, body language, etc.
- Restate to confirm what they are asking/saying
- Give short, concise answers, Remain respectful, supportive, and empathetic.

Backtalk and Attitude

- They are expressing their anger and may be trying to get you to be angry too. (Don't join in!)
- Remain calm and neutral.
- Remember those safety habits - maintain distance.
- Talk slowly and civilly.
- Explain expected behavior in a way your child understands.
- Limit unnecessary talking.

Offering Choices for Refusal

- *Agitation, early acceleration*
- Give two clear choices that are reasonable and appropriate. (Controlled choices)
- Acknowledge your child's right for refusal
 - "You're right, I can't make you clean your room..."
- Explain the consequences/outcomes of each of the choices.
 - You can clean your room then we can watch a movie together, or you can go to bed early. You decide.
 - OR We can't play outside until your room is clean. The choice is yours."

Remove the Audience

- ***Acceleration, Agitation, Peak, Deceleration***
- Behavior may escalate faster when there is an audience because bystanders increases anxiety and may feel threatening.
- Have siblings, friends, other family members, etc move into another room.
- If the behavior has the potential to get violent have someone close by (out of sight) who can help if possible.
- Increase your distance from your child and be aware of your body language. Remain neutral with facial expressions.

Peak Outburst

- ***Use wait strategy - no verbal communication***
- If verbal outburst only
 - Keep space
 - Allow venting
 - Wait for them to take steps down in escalation
- If physical
 - Remove bystanders and yourself if possible but still visually monitor for safety
 - If they become dangerous, self-injurious, or destructive you may need to consider alternate interventions
 - Blocking techniques
 - Calling for assistance (this may include 911)

Other Considerations

- Some children might find certain strategies triggering while others find them calming.
- During a meltdown, you cannot discipline or reason with your child,
- You CAN set boundaries and maintain them
- You most likely can't, in one step, make a very agitated person completely calm.
- There are many factors you cannot control during a meltdown, but you can control your own behavior

Other Considerations

- Validate their feelings, but not their actions (i.e. It's OK to be mad, it's not OK to hurt someone).
- Avoid saying “no” (that doesn't mean you say yes!). No is a triggering word. Try, “we can talk about that when everybody is calm.”
- Debriefing may be able to happen right away during calm and sometimes it is more effective to be at a later time.
- Don't forget tools for YOURSELF!

Proactive Strategies to Practice when your child is CALM

- Have a safe, calming space where your child can go to remove themselves from a situation when they are overstimulated.
- Calming visual input
 - Calm down bottle
 - Videos that have calming visuals
- Deep breathing exercises
- Mindfulness games
- Guided meditation
- Sensory tools: Stress ball, putty, chewy, manipulative, etc.

Many believe parenting is about controlling children's behavior and training them to act like adults. I believe that parenting is about controlling my own behavior and acting like an adult myself. Children learn what they live and live what they learn.

-L.R. Knost



“ Respond to your children
WITH LOVE IN:

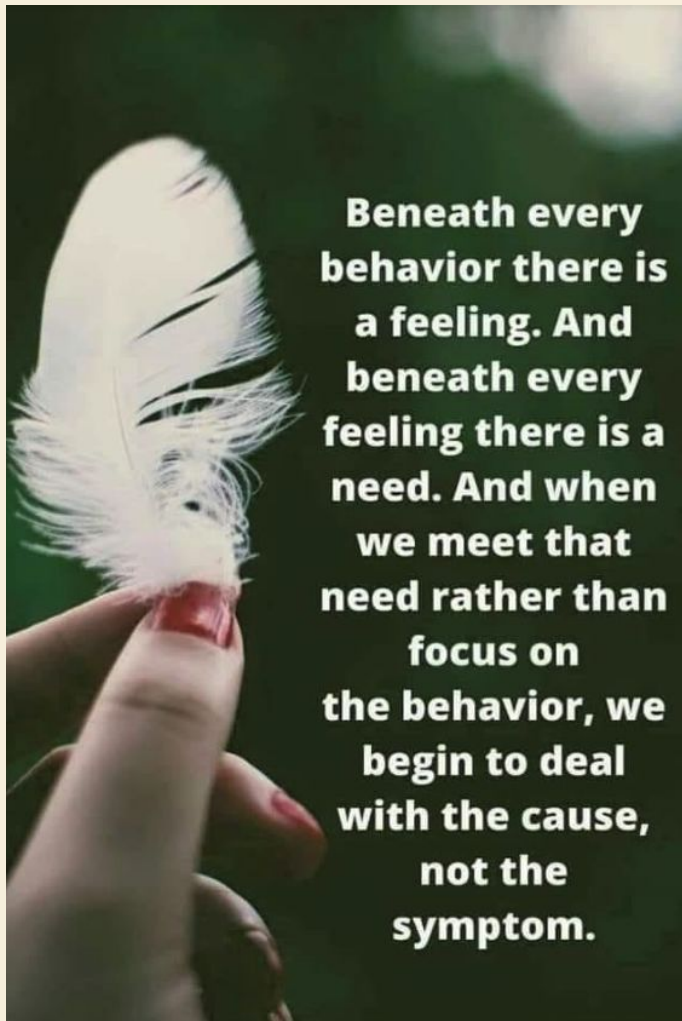
their *worst* moments
their **BROKEN** moments
their *angry* moments
their **SELFISH** moments...

...it is in their most
unlovable human moments
THAT THEY MOST NEED TO FEEL LOVED.

-L.R. Knost ❤️



such a little while



**Beneath every
behavior there is
a feeling. And
beneath every
feeling there is a
need. And when
we meet that
need rather than
focus on
the behavior, we
begin to deal
with the cause,
not the
symptom.**



THANKS!

Does anyone have any questions?

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