Responding to Problem Behavior in a PBIS Classroom

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De-escalation strategies help teachers to:

1. identify the stages of behavior escalation for both internalizing and externalizing student behaviors
2. implement techniques to reduce negative interactions with students who exhibit a variety of challenging behaviors

Externalizing or Internalizing

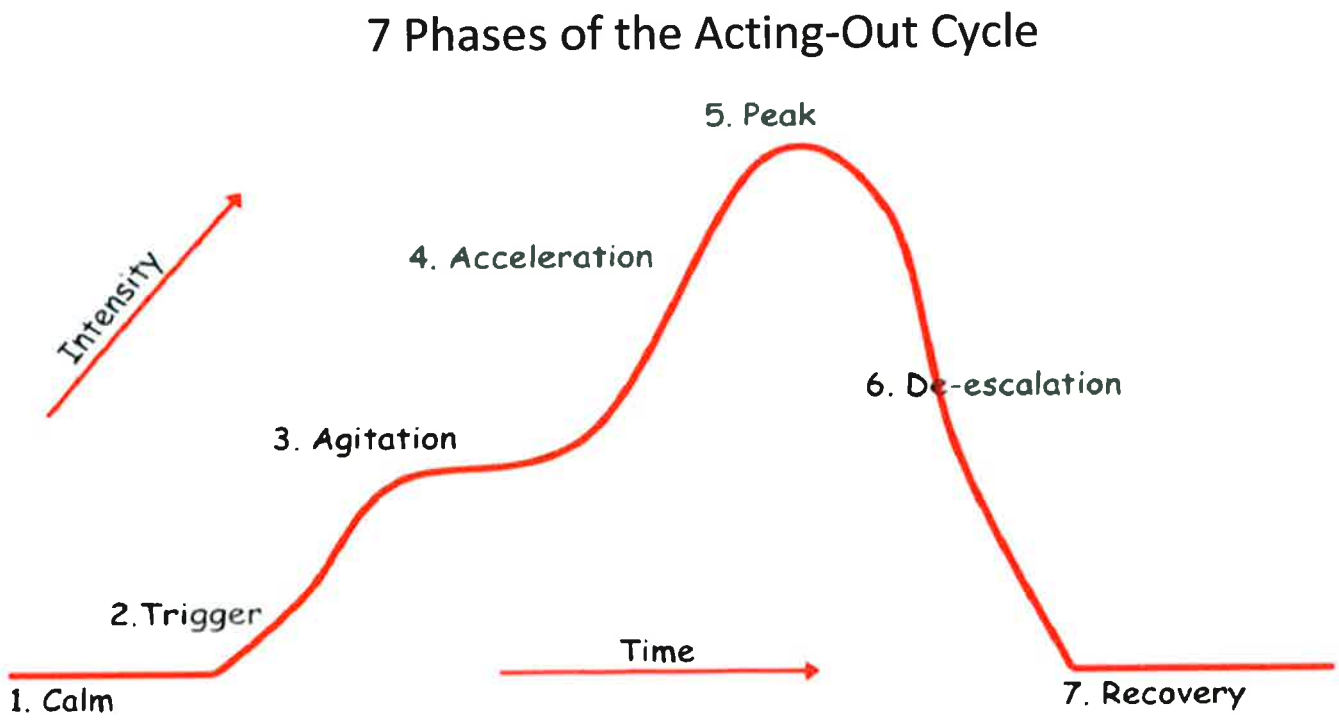
Emotional and behavioral problems may be manifested as externalizing or internalizing. Externalizing behaviors, generally easily identified by teachers, are problematic student behaviors that are externally directed. Internalizing behaviors may be more difficult to recognize in students. As the name suggests, internalizing behaviors are inward patterns of negative thinking and behavior which may stem from depression and anxiety.

INTERNALIZING	EXTERNALIZING
Withdrawn behavior	Ani-social behavior
Avoidance of peers and adults	Verbal aggression
Refusal to speak	Physical aggression
Shutting down/crying/hiding face	Arguing
Head down, pencil down-refusal to follow directions	General non-compliance

ACROSS TYPES

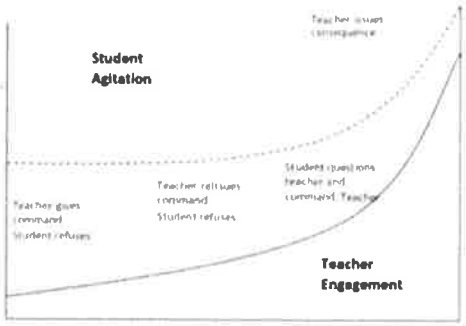
Substance misuse or abuse, anxiety disorders and depression, suicidal thoughts or attempts, dropout of school, poor post-school outcomes

Student behaviors can also be characterized as distracting (e.g., calling out, tapping pencils, side-talking with peers) and disruptive (e.g., arguing, non-compliance, cursing) to the instructional environment. Problem behavior often follows a fairly predictable pattern called the Acting Out Cycle. The teacher's response to student behavior at each stage of the Acting Out Cycle can prevent problem behaviors from occurring or reduce the intensity of the student's behavior.



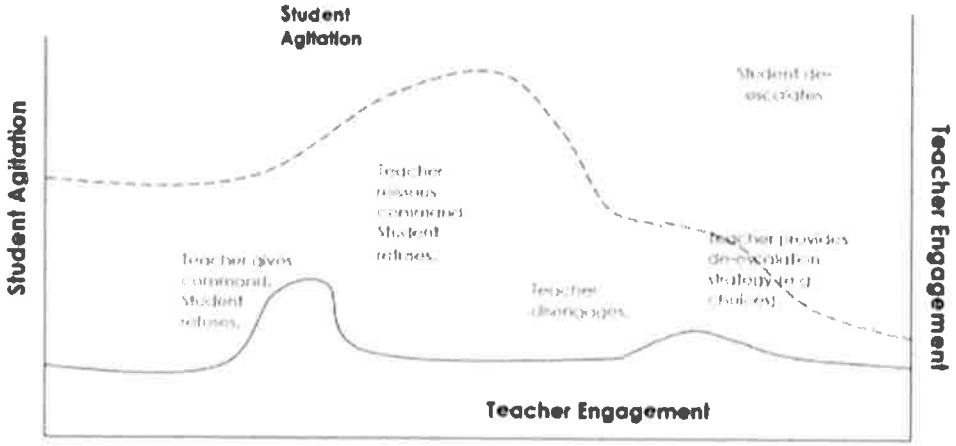
Ineffective Teacher Response

The teacher responds to student disruption by engaging with the student (i.e., giving direct instruction). When the student refuses to comply, the teacher continues to engage by reissuing a direction, asking questions, or arguing with the student; which may be perceived by the student as nagging or helping. Both student agitation and teacher engagement accelerate until the student behavior peaks and/or the teacher issues a consequence for the refusal to follow directions; such as, directing the student to leave and go to the office. These patterns of interaction interrupt instruction and may leave both teacher and student feeling frustrated and angry, damaging the student-teacher relationship.



Effective Teacher Response

When the student refuses to comply with the teacher's initial and re-issued directions to the disruptive non-compliant behavior, the teacher temporarily disengages. The strategic reengagement by the teacher to offer a de-escalation strategy like choice or use of a calming strategy results in decreased student agitation. This interaction pattern minimizes interruption and preserves valuable student-teacher rapport. Furthermore, teacher frustration may be reduced.



Teacher Engagement

When the student refuses to comply with teachers initial and reissued directions to the disruptive and/or non-compliant behavior, the teacher temporarily disengages. The strategic re-engagement by the teacher to offer a de-escalation strategy such as choice or calming strategy results in decreased student agitation. This interaction pattern minimizes interruption and preserves valuable student-teacher rapport along with reducing teacher frustration.

DE-ESCALATION STRATEGIES

Student Behavior	Teacher Strategies
Calm Uses skills in classroom routines matrix, for example likes to help pass out lab books or equipment, eager to work with a partner, enjoys collecting materials at the end of class. Uses positive language and helps others. Is a role model for expected behaviors.	**Calm** Acknowledgement; ask to be lab or group work team leader; prompt/pre-correct for routine matrix behaviors; pair up with a pre-assigned peer; teach, prompt, pre-correct for classroom routines established in the classroom-wide teaching matrix (i.e., how to ask for help). High rates of positive acknowledgements
Triggers Making errors on assignments-difficult assignment Running late from previous class Change in classroom routines When incomplete work added to homework assignment Directions to long-term project	**Triggers-Focus on Prevention and Redirection** For errors, pull the student aside, show items needing correction and give the student a chance to fix for full or half credit Running late-have an entering class and agenda routine (so the student knows where you're at and what to do next) taught in your classroom matrix: re-teach, prompt, pre-correct as needed.
Agitation Taps fingers, eyes dart around the room Heavy breathing, excessive movement Provokes peers	**Agitation-Focus is on Reducing Anxiety** Prompt the student to ask for help following the classroom routine on the classroom PBIS matrix Remind the student of the task expectations
Acceleration Argues, refuses to follow directions, complains about assignments, rips up materials	**Acceleration-Focus is on Safety** Provide choice to work independently at alternative work space or to work with peer or adult (a pre-determined strategy) Privately prompt the student to problem solve outside the room
Peak Kicks trash can, storms out of the classroom Uses obscenities toward teacher/peers Pushes materials off desk	**Peak-Focus is on Implementing the Safety Plan** Establish room clear procedures and teach the class Inform all students of the school-wide discipline policy/practices as established on the school discipline flow chart
De-escalation Refuses to accept responsibility for his/her actions	**De-escalation-Focus is on Removing Attention** Remove from getting attention-give low level preferred activity-walk away Determine if removing from class or staying to re-group-Planned ignoring strategy Student uses problem-solving sheet to develop self-control-independent work Prompt self-management strategies and walk away
Recovery Eager to move on to business-as-usual Friendly, tries to do favors for the teacher	**Recovery-Focus on Debrief/Problem Solving** Help the student get back into routine by having the student work on a preferred or easy task by him or herself for 10-15 minutes Remind the student that he/she can make positive progress when they learn to communicate their wants/needs before exploding Use problem solving sheet to de-brief the situation and make a plan for next time – what to do before exploding

Step	Phase	Characteristics of Student Behavior		Teacher Response
		INTERNALIZING	EXTERNALIZING	
1	Calm	Cooperative, follows directions, able to receive corrections		Positively reinforce for following expectations and routines (e.g., praise) Plan engaging instruction with multiple opportunities to respond
2	Trigger	Student experiences an unresolved internal or external conflict: School-based triggers: Conflicts with teachers or peers, changes in routine, transitions, provocation from peers, academic pressure, continued errors, ineffective problem-solving, teacher corrections. *Other triggers: Conflicts at home, health problems, irregular sleeping patterns, substance use, gang activity.*		NOTE: Student trigger(s) may not always be observable. The trigger(s) may have occurred in another class or outside of school. If you observe a trigger, then: Problem-solve privately with student Engage student in lesson or activity
3	Agitation	Withdraws emotionally and physically; stares off; makes limited eye contact; short responses; complains of stomach ache or headache; mopes	Easily distracted; taps/drums hands or feet; hums, talks to peers	Engage student in lesson or activity Maintain calmness, respect, and detachment Remind student of expectations; then disengage temporarily to allow student time to comply Provide de-escalation strategy: Offer choice of activity, seating Prompt a short break Suggest relaxation activity (e.g., deep breaths) Provide positive reinforcement (e.g., praise) when student is back on task
4	Acceleration	Avoids eye contact; puts head down; does not respond to teacher prompts or questions or prompts	Argues, questions; uses verbal abuse to intimidate; attempts to escape; may rip or throw objects	Maintain calmness, respect, and detachment Provide short, clear direction; then disengage temporarily to allow student time to comply Provide positive reinforcement (e.g., praise) when student is back on task OR Follow hierarchy of response if student does not comply
5	Peak	Shutting down; crying; curling up on the floor or in a corner; Does not respond to directions	Out of control behavior; Physical abuse toward objects or people; Does not respond to directions	Maintain safety of other students (e.g., room clear) Follow school procedures Call counselor or school mental health professional
6	De-escalation	Will respond to concrete directions; Attempts to reconcile; withdraws; Denies serious behaviors; Blames others; Attempts to justify behavior; Complaints of body pain		Complete paperwork required by school Allow student time to cool down
7	Recovery	Engages in non-interactive activities, Reluctance to address the peak behaviors		Prompt student to restore environment providing support if necessary De-brief incident with student and plan alternative student responses Return to original activity or next class Use high rates of reinforcement for appropriate behavior