



Personalized De-escalation Strategizing for Students with Explosive Behavior

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Note: There are similarities and differences between the P.R.O.M.P.T. strategy (see additional PROMPT handout) to address off task and disruptive behavior and the techniques we use at each stage for students with histories of explosive, destructive, potentially harmful behaviors toward self and other. Similarities between this process and P.R.O.M.P.T. are found in the description below. We do not, however, prompt the student (second to the last correction in P.R.O.M.P.T.) to continue to face the trigger and comply with a direction in spite of the emotional behavior if they are at the agitation through De-escalation stages described below. Rather, other techniques described below should be used.

- 1.) **Calm Phase:** Every explosive student goes from calm to not calm. The calm phase is characterized by appropriate, cooperative behavior and responsiveness to staff directions. Maintaining this phase for students who are explosive is a high priority and it provides an opportunity for teaching strategies that will promote and maintain appropriate student behavior and a longer calm phase. During this stage there are several practices that can be implemented in order to prevent the occurrence of an explosive episode that will result in a crisis incident at school. The aim is to teach, precorrect, motivate, and enhance self-regulation.
 - a. Teaching replacements behaviors and emotion regulation skills (relaxation, distraction, positive self-talk, mindfulness, and self-soothing)
 - b. Precorrection (i.e., errorless learning) remind the student of potential triggers and the replacement behaviors and emotional regulation skills that can be used. Consider SUDS (subjective units of discomfort scaling) or "The incredible 5 point scale" to identify triggers
 - c. *Sampling the reinforcer:* this involves energizing the student's motivation to manage themselves in the face of triggers in order to gain later reinforcement. Sampling the reinforce has been shown to increase self-regulation and increase the probability the student will not become agitated in the face of the trigger(s).
 - d. Relationship strategies that either focus on establishing, maintaining, or restoring the relationship
 - e. Know what situations the student does find stressful and use that information to assess when the student may be able to confront the trigger and when it may be unsuccessful or unsuccessful without supports.
 - f. Within the PROMPT STRATEGY, use PROXIMITY CONTROL—move around the room but be sure to spend a few seconds in a friendly manner near the student

- 2.) **Trigger Phase:** Triggers are antecedent events representing certain situations, people, interactions, and/or directives/requests that provoke the agitation and potentially lead to more explosive behavior if certain practices are not implemented. Pathway charting is particularly useful to develop to visualize paths and strategies to use at this phase and identify replacement behaviors to teach in the previous phase which can then be cued for use as the student faces the trigger in this phase.
 - a. Remove or reduce contact with triggers
 - b. Use Time Away strategy (www.pent.ca.gov) or other self-selected removal to access time to self-soothe or avoid contact with the trigger
 - c. Prompt the student to use the replacement behaviors that have been taught, modeled, and rehearsed during the calm stage.
 - d. Reinforce the student for exhibiting the replacement behaviors.
 - e. Within the PROMPT STRATEGY, use REDIRECTION and ON GOING MONITORING

- 3.) **Agitation:** The agitation stage marks the point at which the trigger has provoked an emotional reaction and the previous strategies are insufficient to avoid potential further escalation. The aim here is not to set firm limits and enforce them as the explosive student will likely escalate to a point that is highly disruptive, dangerous, and/or destructive.
 - a. *Collaborative Problem-Solving* (CPS) is the methodology to effectively communicate with an agitated explosive student to generate mutually agreed upon solutions so the student does not feel the need to escalate.
 - i. CPS involves three sequential steps: 1. Empathy statement (validation, acceptance, and understanding of the student's feeling, motive, or reason); 2. Sharing the adult perspective; and 3. Negotiating or collaborating with the student to generate and enact a solution the student finds acceptable.
 - ii. In the PROMPT strategy, use a PROMPT not to sustain contact with the trigger, but rather a prompt to use the solution the student finds acceptable that you have predetermined for this student in this situation or are determining now.
- 4.) **Acceleration:** Students in this phase continue to escalate their behavior and are unwilling to communicate with the adult who is using CPS. They question, argue, and engage in confrontational interactions; they are defiant of teacher communication. The aim here is to set-up places where the student can go in order to engage in a preferred activity and potentially use emotion regulation strategies. Use non-verbal empathy messages, and do not engage in reasoning, cajoling or other interactions that will further escalate. Wait. Step away. Do not put fuel on the fire by explaining, demanding, warning and other corrective procedures. Consider gesturing toward a personalized spot in the room the student feels allow him to calm down in an inviting, non-demanding manner.
- 5.) **Peak:** At this point, the student has reached full escalation and there is potential for highly disruptive, dangerous, or destructive behavior if the situation is not handled appropriately. It is imperative that staff have a protocol in place.
 - a. It is imperative that the adults regulate their own behavior by using calm voice tone, decreasing the amount of words spoken, leaving spaces between words, and decrease voice volume. Making sure the student does not feel like he is being overwhelmed by the adults and forced to do something. Focus on controlling staff behavior, demonstrating compassion and tolerance to the student.
 - b. When necessary intrusive short-term interventions, such as removing either the student who is acting out or the other students from the classroom; crisis intervention and prevention techniques (CPI, PROACT, etc.), calling the student's parents, contacting the police, etc. may occur. Remember that restraint can only be used when there is imminent danger to the student or others.
- 6.) **De-escalation:** Once the behavior has left the Peak stage and calm is gradually returning to the student, use of techniques to restore relationships and assure the student that escalation is nearing an end can be used. In general do not add too much conversation yet. "Pretty soon you will be calm again and we can fix the problem, Jared. Can I get you a drink of water?" "Would you like to cool down further in our Coping Corner for a few minutes, etc.?"
- 7.) **Recovery:** At the recovered stage, the student is often more compliant than in the initial calm stage. Here is where restoring relationship is critical, and rational problem solving dialogues can be helpful for both staff and student to understand why the explosion continued. Forms such as "Thinking about My Inappropriate Behavior" can be used to debrief and restore relationships prior to reentry into tasks and performance requirements.