

# De-escalation Strategy Toolkit

Crisis prevention and response for educators

From *Classroom Pulse* - [www.classroompulse.io](http://www.classroompulse.io)

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## Part 1: Escalation Stage Indicators

### The Escalation Cycle - Quick Reference

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Stage	Signs	Your Response
1. CALM	Relaxed, engaged, cooperative	Build relationship, teach skills
2. TRIGGER	Subtle changes, slight tension	Remove trigger if possible, redirect
3. AGITATION	Restless, anxious, off-task	Offer support, reduce demands
4. ACCELERATION	Rapid escalation, threatening	Focus on safety, minimal talking
5. PEAK/CRISIS	Maximum intensity	Ensure safety, wait it out
6. DE-ESCALATION	Intensity decreasing	Stay calm, minimal interaction
7. RECOVERY	Returning to baseline	Re-establish routine, later processing

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### Detailed Warning Signs Checklist

**Physical Signs** -  Increased motor activity (pacing, fidgeting) -  Clenched fists or jaw -  Flushed face or pale complexion -  Rapid breathing -  Dilated pupils -  Sweating -  Trembling or shaking -  Rigid posture

**Behavioral Signs** -  Voice changes (louder, higher, faster) -  Non-compliance with simple requests -  Withdrawal from activities -  Increased repetitive behaviors -  Staring or avoiding eye contact -  Invading personal space -  Making threats (verbal or gestural) -  Destroying materials

**Verbal Signs** -  Repetitive questioning -  Argumentative responses -  Profanity or verbal aggression -  Threats to self or others -  Irrational statements -  Scripting or echolalia increase -  Refusal statements (“I won’t,” “You can’t make me”)

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## **Part 2: Verbal De-escalation Scripts**

### **Validation Statements**

- “I can see this is really hard for you.”
- “It makes sense that you’re frustrated.”
- “You’re having a tough time right now.”
- “I hear you. This isn’t easy.”
- “Your feelings are valid.”

### **Calm-Down Offers**

- “Would it help to take a break?”
- “Do you need some space?”
- “Would you like to go to the calm corner?”
- “Can I get you some water?”
- “Would it help to take a walk?”

### **Choice Statements**

- “Would you like to sit here or over there?”
- “Would you prefer to work alone or with me nearby?”
- “You can take 5 minutes or 10 minutes.”
- “Would you like to talk now or in a few minutes?”
- “You can write it down or tell me.”

### **Reassurance Statements**

- “We’re going to figure this out together.”
- “I’m not going anywhere.”
- “You’re safe here.”
- “This will pass.”
- “I’m here to help, not to punish.”

### **Refocusing Statements**

- “Let’s focus on right now.”
- “We can talk about that later. Right now, let’s...”
- “The most important thing right now is...”
- “Let’s take this one step at a time.”

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### **Statements to AVOID**

Don't Say	Why	Try Instead
"Calm down!"	Feels dismissive, rarely works	"I can see you're upset."
"You're overreacting"	Invalidating	"This is clearly a big deal to you."
"I don't have time for this"	Feels like rejection	"Let's figure this out."
"If you don't stop..."	Threatens, escalates	"When you're ready, we can..."
"What's wrong with you?"	Shames	"What do you need right now?"
"You always/never..."	Generalizes, attacks character	Describe specific behavior
"Because I said so"	Power struggle	Explain briefly or delay explanation

### Part 3: Environmental Modification Checklist

#### Immediate Environment (During Escalation)

- Remove audience (other students)
- Clear pathway to exit
- Remove potential weapons/projectiles
- Dim lights if possible
- Reduce noise
- Create physical space (3-6 feet minimum)
- Position yourself near exit
- Have another adult nearby/aware

#### Proactive Environment (Prevention)

- Designated calm/break space available
- Sensory tools accessible
- Visual schedule posted
- Clear expectations posted
- Organized, uncluttered space
- Natural lighting when possible
- Noise-reducing options available
- Fidget tools accessible

#### Classroom Setup for Safety

- Clear sightlines throughout room

- No blocked exits
- Heavy objects secured
- Sharp objects stored safely
- Communication device accessible
- Crisis plan visible to staff

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## Part 4: Post-Incident Reflection Template

### Incident Documentation

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Student:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Location:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Staff Involved:** \_\_\_\_\_

### What Happened?

**Antecedents (What happened before?):** - Setting events: \_\_\_\_\_

- Immediate trigger: \_\_\_\_\_

**Behavior (Objective description):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Interventions Attempted:** | Intervention | Student Response | | \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ | | | | | | | | | |

**Duration of Incident:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Resolution:** \_\_\_\_\_

### Reflection Questions

1. What warning signs did I notice? \_\_\_\_\_
2. At what point could I have intervened earlier? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What worked well? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What would I do differently? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What support does the student need going forward? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What support do I need? \_\_\_\_\_

### Follow-Up Actions

- Debrief with student (when appropriate)
- Update behavior support plan if needed
- Communicate with family
- Debrief with team

- Self-care/support for staff
- Review/update crisis plan

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## Part 5: Crisis Prevention Plan Template

### Student Crisis Prevention Plan

Student: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Team Members: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Known Triggers

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

#### Early Warning Signs (Specific to This Student)

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

#### Effective De-escalation Strategies

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

#### Strategies That DON'T Work/Make It Worse

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_

#### Staff Roles During Crisis

Role	Person	Responsibilities
Primary Responder		Stay with student, de-escalate
Secondary Support		Remove other students, get help
Administrator Contact		Decision-making, parent contact
Documentation		Record incident details

**Safety Procedures**

If student attempts to leave: \_\_\_\_\_

If student becomes physically aggressive: \_\_\_\_\_

If other students are at risk: \_\_\_\_\_

Emergency contacts: \_\_\_\_\_

**Recovery Protocol**

Immediate (0-30 minutes after): \_\_\_\_\_

Short-term (same day): \_\_\_\_\_

Follow-up (next day): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Part 6: Quick Reference Card**

**The DE-ESCALATE Acronym**

D - Distance: Give physical space (3-6 feet)

E - Eye contact: Soft, not staring

E - Expression: Calm, neutral face

S - Stance: Relaxed, non-threatening, angled

C - Communicate: Low, slow voice

A - Acknowledge: Validate feelings

L - Listen: More than you talk

A - Allow time: Don't rush

T - Trust: Build relationship

E - Exit: Know your way out

\_\_\_\_\_

**Do's and Don'ts Quick List**

DO	DON'T
Stay calm	Match their energy
Give space	Corner them
Speak slowly and softly	Yell or raise voice
Validate feelings	Argue or lecture
Offer choices	Issue ultimatums

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DO	DON'T
Wait it out	Rush the process
Focus on safety	Focus on compliance
Model regulation	Take it personally

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*This toolkit is provided by Classroom Pulse for educational purposes. For behavior pattern tracking, visit [www.classroompulse.io](http://www.classroompulse.io)*