Appropriate Responses to the Seven Phases of the Escalation Cycle

Managing the Cycle of Acting-Out Behavior in the Classroom (Colvin, 2004)

Phase 1: Calm
Classroom Structure & Quality Instruction
• Supervise, reduce distractions, and provide quiet space.
• Establish and teach CLEAR expectations and acknowledge and praise compliance.
• Establish routines to decrease downtime and disruptions.
• Plan ahead for starter activities, transitions, and entry and exit routines.

Phase 2: Triggers
• Identify the situation where the behavior is likely to occur.
• Use pre-correction to teach appropriate response. Rehearse the expectations, prompt or remind students as needed, provide specific praise and reinforcement.
• Work with all staff and faculty to teach and reinforce social skills.
• School and non-school triggers-- Group social skills, anger management, community services.

Phase 3: Agitation
• Show empathy: recognize the student’s problem and communicate concern.
• Redirect and help the student become engaged in activity, lesson or task (passive or movement).
• Provide choices.
• Provide space in a quiet area or allow students to disengage briefly or put their heads down.
• Use proximity or brief interactions; show acceptance.

Phase 4: Acceleration
• Pause and Assess- “Is this an emergency situation?”
• Avoid escalating the student’s behavior.
• Pausing rather than responding immediately shows students that while they may be out of control, staff are calm and controlled.
• Use a calm but serious tone.
• If the situation escalates, withdraw and follow school procedures for emergency situations.

Phase 5: Peak
• Focus on student and staff safety.
• Notify necessary staff of situations and provide directions for response.
• If needed, evacuate others.
• Contact appropriate assistance.
• If an ESI was used—Notify parents, document, debrief and learn from it.

Phase 6: De-escalation
• Monitor for health and safety.
• Once escalation is over, allow student space to calm down, under supervision.
• Avoid blaming—provide opportunity for non-judgmental discussion.
• Provide independent work that is fairly easy to complete to help regain focus.
• Debrief and document the incident to provide data for ongoing planning for safety.

Phase 7: Recovery
• Help student return to normal activities and engage in learning.
• Continue with planned consequence and do not discuss or negotiate.
• Acknowledge cooperative and appropriate behavior.
• Encourage and support student in changing problem behavior.

**Escalation Cycle** (adapted from Bounds, 2003)

*This is a tool teams can utilize to plan responses to each phase of the acting out cycle. This should be a part of a comprehensive positive behavior support plan.*

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<th>Specific Student Responses</th>
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<td>Agitation Unfocused</td>
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<td>Acceleration Focused/intense</td>
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Adapted from Bounds (2003)

Lewis, Kittelman & Wilcox (2011).