

Escalated behaviour

Creating calm, focused classrooms

February 2026

Teachers play a key role in creating safe, supportive and inclusive learning environments, which includes preventing and responding to escalation. Many factors influence students' emotional regulation, and some students may require targeted support from their teachers to help them regulate their emotions and behaviour. This practice guide will assist you with creating calm learning environments, helping to prevent emotional and behavioural escalation, and supporting students when it does occur.

The way you interact with and respond to students can have a positive or negative influence on their behaviour. This practice guide acknowledges the key role you play in:

- fostering calm, supportive learning environments
- helping students build emotional and behavioural regulation skills
- recognising signs of emotional and behavioural escalation
- guiding and supporting students when it occurs.

Creating calm classrooms and supporting students during times of escalation is complex and, at times, challenging. You can use this guide to identify your strengths and prioritise the area for refinement you'll focus on first. Supporting your own wellbeing is essential as it helps you feel more confident and respond effectively.

This guide is part of the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO)'s suite of classroom management resources and guidance for supporting students' diverse needs, which support teachers and school leaders in establishing learning environments where all students can thrive and achieve. These resources can be used individually to reflect on and refine your own practice, or as shared resources to support mentoring and a whole-school approach to classroom management and supportively responding to student behaviour. They're designed to inform and complement rather than replace existing school and system policies, procedures and guidance.

Proactive and preventative approaches to creating calm and learning-focused classrooms

All students deserve to learn in safe and supportive learning environments where expectations are clearly defined and understood. In these environments, all students are supported to meet these expectations, with reasonable adjustments made as they develop their skills.



Effective classroom management and high-quality instruction are key to students' learning, engagement and emotional regulation.

When considering how to prevent and respond to escalation, it's important to begin by reviewing how you use preventative and proactive approaches to set up a calm and learning-focused classroom. These approaches are foundational for students' engagement in learning: they help prevent disruption and disengagement and they support students' regulation.

Use [Appendix A: Proactive and preventative approaches to creating calm and learning-focused classrooms](#) to reflect on how you establish safe, supportive and inclusive learning environments for all students.



Using this guide to create calm classrooms and support students during times of escalation

This guide is designed to assist you with:



promoting calm learning environments and supporting emotional and behavioural regulation using universal and targeted proactive and preventative approaches



supporting students experiencing difficulty regulating their emotions and behaviour, using appropriate responses for the phases of escalation



supporting students, staff and parents/primary caregivers following times of escalation



caring for your own wellbeing while supporting students

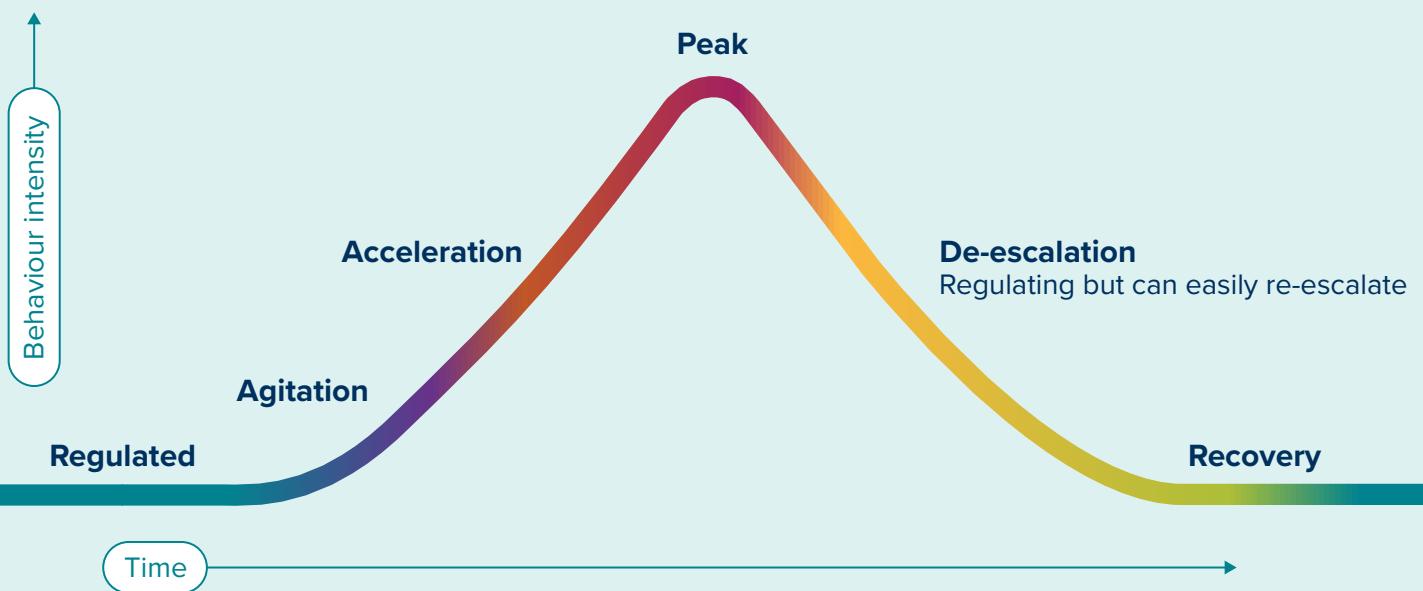
Understanding the phases of emotional and behavioural escalation

Emotional escalation is a process where a trigger leads to heightened emotions that, if not effectively managed, can intensify. These strong emotions are often – though not always – accompanied by observable behaviours, which may also escalate.

While behavioural escalation is often associated with verbal or physical aggression or violence, it can also involve behaviours ranging from mild restlessness to withdrawal, refusal to follow instructions or self-harm.

Some students are more at risk of emotional and behavioural escalation due to factors that affect their physical and psychosocial health, learning and behaviour.

Models of behavioural escalation (see [Figure 1](#)) help teachers and school leaders understand student behaviour in different phases of escalation, from regulated to agitation, acceleration, peak, de-escalation and recovery.

Figure 1: Behavioural escalation model

Source: Adapted from Colvin, G. T., & Scott, T. M. (2014). *Managing the cycle of acting-out behavior in the classroom*. Corwin Press, with permission from Corwin Press Inc through the Copyright Clearance Center, Inc.

This guide provides practical suggestions for strategies that support student safety, wellbeing and focus on learning, tailored to when students are regulated and each phase of escalation.

Regulated

- Use proactive and preventative approaches to create calm classrooms
- Support students' regulation

Agitation

- Reduce the impact of triggers
- Monitor students for signs of agitation
- Respond to signs of agitation

Acceleration

- Prevent further escalation and support de-escalation

Peak

- Support safety and de-escalation

De-escalation

- Support de-escalation and regulation

Recovery

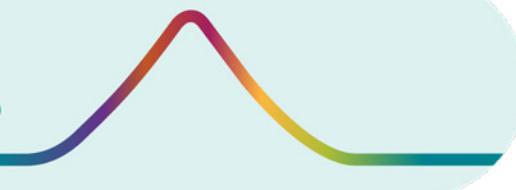
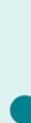
- Debrief with those involved
- Support the student to return to class
- Complete the follow-up

Escalation can happen rapidly, with students sometimes reaching the peak phase without outwardly showing earlier signs of agitation. It can also fluctuate between phases, without necessarily following a linear path.

Models of behavioural escalation guide proactive and preventative approaches when students are regulated, as well as responses during times when they're not. The aim is to ensure everyone's safety and wellbeing, and support students to refocus on learning. By understanding the phases of escalation and responding intentionally and supportively, teachers and school leaders can better support students, reduce the risk of further escalation and increase the likelihood of successful de-escalation.

Creating calm classrooms and supporting students during times of escalation

When students are regulated



Support students' regulation

During the regulated phase, focus on maintaining emotional and behavioural regulation and preventing escalation by creating a welcoming, supportive and compassionate environment.

In addition to using the actions outlined in the proactive and preventative approaches section of this guide, you can:

- Proactively check in with students who appear less engaged in learning or connected to others, as well as their parents and primary caregivers, to strengthen positive connections. This might be as students arrive at or leave class, during transition times, during independent tasks and at break times.
- Provide clear instructions and prompts to help students manage their behaviour, especially in situations where this might be more difficult. For example, ‘Remember to keep to the left and use quiet voices so we don’t disturb other classes’, ‘If you and your partner disagree, you can resolve this by following these steps – [list steps].’
- Provide students with short breaks, particularly from difficult or non-preferred tasks, to help maintain focus and build connections. Breaks might include standing and stretching, a quick activity, game or walk, emotional regulation exercises, or switching learning tasks from high cognitive load to low.
 - Establish the purpose, routine, expectations and timing for breaks with students, and monitor them during these. If students are taking a break in another location, ensure they’re accompanied and supervised throughout.
- Build ‘behaviour momentum’ with students who sometimes find it difficult to start learning tasks by beginning with tasks you know they can complete before introducing more challenging ones. Scaffold learning and praise their effort as they progress.

- Explicitly teach students to keep themselves safe when others display escalated behaviours. For example, you can teach students to give a student displaying escalated behaviour some space and seek help from an adult.
- For some students, and in some circumstances when needed, consider offering some limited options for starting and completing learning tasks. When doing so, ensure expectations remain high, aligned with learning objectives and responsive to students' strengths and needs. This can help support engagement in learning and can be particularly useful for students who experience difficulty following instructions or completing learning tasks.
Choices can include the order they complete tasks and questions, the materials used and how students present their learning, as long as these choices don't affect them achieving the learning objective. Assistive technology may help students get started and complete tasks. For example, using speech-to-text software to dictate ideas or having one student take notes on discussion points.
- Identify supervised spaces in your classroom and school where students can go to regulate their emotions, along with calming techniques and activities they can use while there. Also, consider which staff members are available to provide support during times of escalation and how you can quickly access their help when needed.
- Conduct a sensory audit to identify elements of the classroom environment (such as noise, light, visual stimuli, seating arrangements, movement pathways, crowding, textures, smells and temperature) that may contribute to sensory difficulties. Use this information to adjust the environment and support students' sensory needs.

Even when these proactive and preventative approaches are in place, at times, some students may still need support and guidance from teachers and school leaders during times of escalation. Intervening early, using de-escalation strategies and helping students regulate their emotions will help keep them and others safe.



Case example: Supporting students when regulated

Ms Taylor understands that the regulated phase is the ideal time to set her students up for success by revising and reinforcing expectations, building strong relationships and proactively supporting engagement.

At the beginning of the learning task, Ms Taylor clearly outlines the learning goals and expected behaviours, using visual supports and modelling to ensure all students understand. She reminds the class of the routines, such as raising hands to seek assistance and moving calmly and quietly to access support resources.

As students complete the learning task, Ms Taylor actively monitors students by scanning the room and circulating to check in with different groups. She notices that Ethan, who sometimes experiences difficulties maintaining focus, is on task and contributing to his group discussion. She walks over and quietly praises him: 'Ethan, I love how you're sharing your ideas with your group. Keep it up!'

A few minutes later, she notices Amie tapping her pencil loudly on her desk and looking around instead of completing the task. Instead of ignoring this disengaged behaviour and risking it escalating, Ms Taylor walks by and gives a gentle reminder: 'Amie, remember our focus strategy – take a deep breath and try writing down your first idea. Can I help you with something?' When Amie shifts her attention back to her work, Ms Taylor acknowledges the correction with a smile and a thumbs up.

By consistently reinforcing expectations, providing support and adjustments, monitoring engagement and responding to behaviours with a calm and supportive approach, Ms Taylor helps create a positive learning environment where students feel supported and ready to engage.

Ms Taylor is building:

- **safety and predictability** – By modelling and teaching expectations, routines and rules, Ms Taylor helps students know what's expected and how to demonstrate that, which can reduce anxiousness and help students feel secure.
- **trust and understanding** – By scanning and checking in on students regularly, Ms Taylor shows them that she's there to support and guide them.
- **relationships** – This is a great time for Ms Taylor to build positive connections through positive interactions. Modelling and teaching expectations, and then acknowledging and praising students for following expectations, helps Ms Taylor strengthen relationships and create a supportive classroom.

The agitation phase

The agitation phase begins when a trigger causes an emotion that a student finds difficult to manage.

For a variety of reasons, some students can have unique triggers and experience more frequent agitation, and seemingly minor triggers can cause significant distress. Students with neurodivergence or unmet physiological needs, such as hunger or tiredness, or those experiencing or who have experienced mental health challenges, adversity or trauma may be more susceptible to emotional distress. It's important to understand students' triggers and how to support them. Students and their parents or primary caregivers may be able to provide information about what triggers cause agitation and what helps in those moments.

Examples of possible triggers

The following provides a non-exhaustive list of trigger examples. It's important to note that not all of these potential triggers are inherently negative or need to be avoided in a school environment. For example, while a change in seating may be a trigger for some students, teachers may still make such changes to better support learning. The key is that, by understanding how these triggers affect students, teachers can plan ahead and provide appropriate support.

Environmental

- unexpected changes or disruptions to routine, including during transitions
- changes to seating arrangements
- sensitivity to, or sensory overload from, noise, lighting, the visual environment, temperature, smell or touch
- physical discomfort, including pain, hunger, thirst, fatigue and illness.



Social and interpersonal

- a change in teacher or the absence of a teacher or other trusted staff member who supports the student
- conflict with others, including peers, family or adults in the school, bullying or social isolation, including when a supportive peer is absent
- peer pressure or the need to conform to group norms
- racism and other forms of discrimination, such as those based on sex, gender identity, disability or other personal characteristics



- a conscious or unconscious reminder of a past negative experience. This may relate to recent events outside of the classroom, such as something that happened at home, before school or during breaks, and may also be linked to past trauma.
- real or perceived inconsistent or unfair treatment or lying
- experiencing feelings of shame.



Classroom or instructional

- unsupportive classroom management practices. This can include unclear, unknown, inconsistent or unachievable expectations, publicly addressing students' behaviour, raising your voice at a student or a perceived or actual lack of fairness towards one student's behaviour and not another's
- teaching practices that aren't aligned with how students learn or focused on building curriculum knowledge in a logical and sequential way. This can include teaching that is too fast or too slow, using undefined complex or discipline-specific vocabulary, using unclear or overly long explanations and instructions, and providing tasks that are too difficult, too easy or seem meaningless to students.
- requests to start or complete non-preferred tasks or to stop unfinished tasks
- students feeling they don't have any control of their learning or that they lack support or help for engaging in instructional activities
- lack of recognition for effort to meet expectations
- making frequent errors, successfully completing learning tasks less than 80% of the time or feeling their work isn't good enough.



Cognitive or emotional

- feeling threatened or unsafe, including due to misinterpreting others' behaviour
- experiencing difficulties with learning, organisation, concentration, literacy or numeracy
- positive or negative emotions, such as sadness, excitement or frustration
- worrying about a situation, including assessments or exams, or experiencing uncertainty
- low self-esteem or lack of confidence in abilities
- feeling overwhelmed by demands or expectations
- previous traumatic experiences or stress outside of school.



Reduce the impact of triggers

Getting to know students well and understanding their individual triggers can help you support them and prevent escalation.

To reduce the impact of triggers on students:

- Review and follow the whole-school approach and any established plans, including individual plans.
- Take time to observe and interact with students, listen to staff who have worked with them before.
- Make adjustments to minimise known triggers that may cause agitation, while also supporting students in developing the skills they need to manage their emotional and behavioural responses.

For example, you might:

- Reduce noise, bright lighting, visually busy or distracting displays, extreme temperatures, unpleasant smells or unnecessary touch.
- Inform students of changes in advance, ideally before class or the day before, including changes to seating arrangements, routines or staff members. Involving a parent or primary caregiver in discussing the change may be helpful.
- If the student's usual peer support is absent, increase your interactions with them and consider asking another responsible student to offer support.
- Regularly revise and prompt students to use the social, emotional, communication, academic and behavioural skills explicitly taught and provide additional support as needed.
- Let students know when an unavoidable trigger will be occurring, how they might handle it and the supports they could use.
- Ensure other staff members are aware of students' triggers and how they can support them. Document this information for relief teachers.



Monitor students for signs of agitation

Observing students for early signs of agitation enables you to provide timely support and make adjustments that may help prevent further escalation. However, it's important to acknowledge that some escalation may still occur due to the complexity or severity of a student's underlying health condition or experiences. These may be beyond the control of the teacher or school and, if so, professional support and intervention will be required.

Building relationships with students and being aware of how each student presents when they are regulated and when they are agitated, as this can vary from student-to-student, will help you recognise signs of agitation in specific students. For example, look out for:

- physical changes, such as:
 - looking tense, frowning, slouching or putting their head on their desk
 - appearing dazed, lost in thought, zoned out, fatigued or sleepy
 - shallow or fast breathing
 - increased restlessness, looking around, fidgeting, shifting in their seat or aimlessly pacing the room
 - clenching fists, blinking rapidly or tightening their jaw
 - complaints of headaches, stomach aches or other physical symptoms
 - changes to repetitive behaviours, such as tapping that becomes stronger and more frequent.
- behavioural changes, such as:
 - increased distraction or interrupting
 - avoiding class participation or tasks, or reduced work effort or quality
 - speaking louder, complaining, making negative comments, being short-tempered with others or swearing
 - staying quiet or isolating from friends
 - excessive laughing or joking
 - lack of enthusiasm for things they usually enjoy
 - increased requests to leave the classroom or lateness after breaks
 - damaging or defacing items, such as scribbling on or tearing up paper
 - offering increased assistance to the teacher or being near them more often
 - being overly generous or excessively helpful.
- emotional changes, such as:
 - eye rolling, sighing or showing impatience
 - tearing up or crying
 - expressing feelings of overwhelm or hopelessness, such as 'I can't do this' or 'What's the point?'

Respond to signs of agitation

Students prefer not to be agitated but may not yet have developed the skills to return from agitated to regulated independently and so require support and adjustments. Ignoring signs of agitation, raising your voice or making threats regarding consequences during this stage could potentially result in further escalation of emotions and behaviour.

To reduce the potential for escalation and reinforce skills for managing difficult emotions, support students experiencing agitation with regulating their emotions and problem-solving.

To respond to a student showing signs of agitation:

- Consider whether the agitation may be linked to their surroundings, such as sensitivity to noise, lighting, visuals, temperature, smell, taste or touch, or to an unmet physical, emotional, social, communication or academic need. For example, they may be hungry or thirsty. Approach the situation with compassion to consider how you might manage it or support them to do so. For example, you might reduce the level of noise in the classroom or prompt students to speak kindly to each other.
- Crouch down beside the student and, with a calm and supportive tone, quietly check in with them about what's bothering them and help them manage the situation. For example, you might ask, 'Are you ok, Sam? How are you feeling?' or 'What can I help with?' or 'What do you need right now?' You might prepare them for this conversation by saying, 'Hi Sam, it looks like there's something bothering you. I'll be back in a second to see if I can help.'
- Based on your knowledge of the student:
 - Maintain personal space and an exit path for them. Avoid crowding them.
 - Use non-confrontational body language, such as standing side-on rather than directly facing them. Crouch down or sit on a seat beside them, rather than standing over them.
 - Use a normal to quieter voice and consider their communication skills and capacities to avoid overloading them during this time.
 - Demonstrate genuine care for their emotions by actively listening, acknowledging their feelings and concerns, giving them your full attention and paraphrasing their words to check understanding. For example, 'It sounds like you feel angry. Is that right?'
 - Reassure the student that you're there to help them, such as by saying, 'Thank you for letting me know. Let's work this out together', 'It's okay, we'll get this sorted' or 'I'm here to help you', rather than telling them to 'Calm down' or 'You need to [action].'

- Offer practical help, scaffolds and support to reduce agitation:
 - Model and prompt the skills the student has been taught to regulate their emotions and solve problems.
 - Consider minimising sensory triggers such as bright or flickering lights, crowded or cramped spaces, or unpleasant or overwhelming noises, textures or smells. For example, you might dim the lights; use natural light where you can; reduce background noise by asking students to lower their noise level, closing doors or turning off unused equipment; provide noise-cancelling headphones; open a window for fresh air; and avoid crowding by spacing students out.
 - Co-regulate with the student – a process where a more regulated individual, such as a teacher, provides calm guidance, cues and strategies to help a student to regulate their emotions and behaviour responses. For example, you might say, ‘It looks like you’re feeling frustrated. Let’s breathe together and think with a calm mind about how to resolve this.’
 - Offer a safe space in the classroom and calming techniques and activities to support the student in regulating their emotions.
 - Offer a brief regulation break, not as a punishment but to help them think more calmly and clearly. Finding ways to safely offer a break while maintaining duty of care for all your students will depend on your specific school context, so you should develop these methods in collaboration with leaders in your school. Methods could involve teaching the student to use a break card or another signal, or discreetly suggesting a break, such as by offering a drink or toilet pass. If a number of students are agitated, have them take separate breaks.
 - » While the student is taking a break, you might meet them outside the classroom to discuss the problem and offer support, while continuing to supervise the rest of the class.
 - Use visual supports, such as an ‘emotional thermometer’ that shows different levels of emotion along with matching strategies, to help the student identify and manage their feelings.
 - Re-explain concepts or break tasks into smaller, manageable steps. For example, ‘Let’s focus on just the first thing we need to do.’
 - Provide choices for how the student might approach the situation. For example, ‘Would you like to take a break/work at the desk at the back of the room, or would you prefer to talk about it now?’
 - Connect the student with a staff member they trust for support. You can also connect them with a trusted peer, provided the peer is willing and able to help, and that the level of responsibility is appropriate and manageable. Provide clear guidance, resources and scaffolds to increase the likelihood that help from peers is effective.
- Provide time for the student to respond to assistance and reinforce their positive responses using acknowledgement or praise. For example, ‘I see how you’re trying to work through this. That shows you’re great at persevering when things are tough.’

When a student starts to appear agitated, rehearsed scripts may help you support them to appropriately express their worries or concerns. See Appendix B: Example scripts for supporting students.



Case example: Supporting a student during the agitation phase

During a maths lesson, Mr Johnson notices that Jordan has started cutting up his eraser, sighing heavily and looking frustrated. Recognising these as signs of agitation for Jordan, Mr Johnson chooses to intervene early to prevent further escalation.

Rather than calling Jordan out in front of the class, he approaches him quietly and, keeping his voice calm and neutral, says, 'Hey Jordan, you look like you're feeling frustrated. Would you like to talk about it?'

Jordan shrugs and mutters, 'This is boring.'

Mr Johnson acknowledges Jordan's feelings: 'I hear you, but we still need to get this done. I can give you a hand after I help Michael. Take a break and I'll come back, then we can break it down together.' Mr Johnson gives Jordan time to process that the task needs to be finished while knowing Mr Johnson will help him to complete it.

After allowing Jordan processing time, Mr Johnson offers practical help, breaking the task into smaller parts and giving Jordan the option to use a calculator, knowing that strategies like this can help build confidence.

Jordan still seems tense, so Mr Johnson provides a choice: 'We think better when we're hydrated. Would you like to take a break and grab a drink, or would you like to try working on the first problem with me?' Jordan chooses a short break and steps outside for a drink before returning to the task. Mr Johnson is ready to help him when he returns and acknowledges the good choice Jordan made to have a break.

Mr Johnson considers how he could prevent future instances of this behaviour by ensuring that he checks Jordan's understanding before he moves on to independent practice. This will help Mr Johnson ensure that appropriate pedagogical supports are in place to support Jordan's learning, in addition to supporting him to regulate his emotions.

By recognising Jordan's agitation when he has difficulty with a learning task (the trigger) and responding with support rather than correction, Mr. Johnson is helping Jordan learn important regulation and help-seeking skills and is building:

- **early support** – Watching for signs of agitation (like being restless, sighing or looking frustrated) allows Mr Johnson to respond early, helps Jordan learn to regulate his emotions and re-engage with lessons and prevents further escalation. Mr Johnson supports Jordan by speaking in a quiet, calm, neutral voice and giving him the opportunity to take a break.
- **safety and predictability** – When Mr Johnson understands what may trigger Jordan's agitation, he can either (a) reduce or remove those triggers or (b) help Jordan learn new ways to respond. This makes the classroom feel more predictable and supportive, helping Jordan feel safe and less anxious.
- **trust and understanding** – Every student has different triggers. By acknowledging this, Mr Johnson shows he cares, helping Jordan feel respected and understood. Speaking with Jordan privately and recognising his feelings further supports him and helps him feel heard and supported.
- **choice** – Offering choices such as small breaks or breaking tasks into smaller steps helps Jordan learn to regulate his emotions and stay engaged, and feel more in control and confident. Minimising talk on emotions and offering clear, actionable options can help shift the focus away from the emotional trigger and support Jordan in making practical, task-focused decisions.

The acceleration phase

Acceleration is when the student's behaviour continues to escalate past the point of agitation. The student may already be in the acceleration phase before you recognise there's a problem, or move into the acceleration phase very quickly. In this phase, distress and agitation increase rapidly, and the student may experience increasing:

- difficulty speaking or responding to instructions
- 'fight' responses in the form of aggression or defiance, such as not following directions, breaking rules or verbal or physical aggression, including using words or actions to provoke a reaction from peers, yelling, arguing, making threats or throwing objects
- 'flight' responses in the form of avoidance or withdrawal, such as avoiding tasks or situations, covering their ears or head, hiding, moving away or leaving the classroom
- 'freeze' responses in the form of shutting down or not responding, such as not participating, answering questions or moving.

If the student has previously demonstrated unsafe behaviours, it may be appropriate to seek additional support at this point.

Prevent further escalation and support de-escalation

To prevent further escalation and support safety, wellbeing and de-escalation:

- Remove or reduce demands on the student and known or possible triggers.
 - Provide sensory support by lowering noise levels, dimming the lights, removing or reducing unpleasant or overwhelming textures or smells, providing space and discreetly asking other students to move away unless they're effectively supporting the student experiencing escalation.
 - Offer and encourage the student to use a safe, quiet, low-stimulation area where they can begin to regulate.
 - Avoid discussing consequences, making threats and arguing with the student as that may escalate them further.
 - Avoid asking questions or commenting on behaviours as that may also escalate the student further. For example, some students may respond in unexpected ways, such as laughing or smiling inappropriately.
- Allow the student more time and space than usual to process information.
- Stand slightly to the side rather than directly facing the student. In some instances, it may be better to avoid direct eye contact if it could be perceived as threatening. Don't touch the student.
- Slow down your communication and movement by pausing and taking deep breaths, keeping a neutral facial expression, and using a low, steady voice and slightly slower pace.
- Tailor your communication to the student. Some students in the acceleration phase may benefit from supportive and soothing verbal reassurance. Others may respond better to minimal verbal communication and clear, concrete, simple language or visual communication tools, as they may process non-verbal cues more effectively.
 - Rather than engaging in back-and-forth discussion or lengthy instructions, say 'Let's take a moment' and provide a break from discussion.
 - Use gestures, such as a flat palm to signal 'slow down' or 'breathe' or pointing to a quiet space where the student might move.
- Tell the student where you'll be when they're ready. For example, 'I'm going to be [location where you can still monitor them]. When you're ready to talk, I'll be right there.'
- Rather than reacting impulsively, say 'I'm going to take a moment to think about how to respond.'
- Be ready to move away and send other students out of the room if the student escalates further and becomes dangerous, such as attempting to hit, kick, grab or throw objects. Look for signs of increasing escalation to begin moving yourself and other students away.
- Acknowledge and provide positive feedback if the student shows signs of de-escalation or co-operation.



Case example: Supporting a student during the acceleration phase

Ms Carter notices that Ava is visibly distressed. She clenches her fists, breathes heavily, swears and yells, 'This is stupid. I'm not doing this!' before shoving her workbook off her desk. Her classmates turn to look, and a couple start to laugh and make rude comments. Ms Carter tells them to stop, and then says, 'We treat each other with respect and kindness, thank you. Please focus on your work,' as she moves towards Ava.

Recognising that Ava is in the acceleration phase, Ms Carter stays calm, keeps her body language non-threatening and speaks in a low, steady voice. Instead of reacting to the disruption, she minimises verbal communication and gently says, 'Ava, I can see you're frustrated. Remember, you can take a break with the welfare officer in the support hub.'

Ava ignores her, crosses her arms and looks away, muttering and swearing quietly. Rather than pressuring her to respond, Ms Carter gives Ava time and space by stepping back and turning slightly to the side with her arms relaxed at her sides instead of crossed. She scans the rest of the class while discreetly monitoring Ava.

After a brief pause, Ava turns and loudly states, 'I'm not going. She doesn't even help.'

Ms Carter calmly responds, 'Fair enough. Is there someone you do want to talk to?'

Ava grunts, 'No.'

Ms Carter calmly provides an alternate option while acknowledging Ava's behaviour: 'I'm hearing you don't want to talk. Remember, you don't have to talk to anyone – you can just use the space. Would you like me to call ahead and let them know to leave you alone?'

Ava gets up and storms out of the room, slamming the door on the way out. Ms Carter follows school procedures to notify the administration office that Ava has left the classroom in an escalated state and may be heading to the support hub or elsewhere. Someone needs to check her location to ensure her safety and provide support.

By responding with patience, removing demands and offering a safe space to regulate, Ms Carter provides Ava an opportunity to escape the situation, reduce the impact on her peers and begin to de-escalate, preventing the situation in the classroom from escalating further. Following the school debriefing processes, Ms Carter will follow up later when Ava is more receptive.

To support Ava in the acceleration phase and prevent further escalation, Ms Carter is:

- **staying calm and supportive** – Using a steady voice, neutral body language and minimal talking helps Ms Carter prevent further agitation and support Ava in regulating her emotions.
- **reducing triggers** – Redirecting other students, reducing demands and giving Ava space can also help prevent further agitation and support her to start to regulate her emotions.
- **providing safe options** – Offering an alternative space and reducing demands gives Ava the chance to regulate her emotions without feeling pressured. If a supervised place isn't available, Ms Carter could offer alternate options – for example, areas in or outside the room where Ava can be adequately supervised.
- **avoiding power struggles** – Focusing on safe de-escalation rather than ignoring or reprimanding helps prevent further escalation and keeps everyone safe.

The peak phase



In the peak phase, behaviour is at its most intense, and the student's thinking is often impaired by heightened emotions and stress. Their ability to regulate their emotions, manage their behaviour and make rational decisions is significantly diminished. The student may become reactive rather than thoughtful and struggle to listen, process information, follow instructions, focus and think clearly due to intense feelings such as anger, frustration or fear.

The peak phase is not the time to teach skills or engage in conversation. Rather, the focus is on assessing risk, ensuring safety for everyone and supporting de-escalation.

Follow your school's emergency and critical incident management procedures, as well as the student's individual plan if available, to prioritise safety and minimise the risk of harm to the student themselves (for example, preventing them from hurting themselves or putting themselves in danger) and to others (for example, avoiding being hit by the student or struck by thrown objects).

Support safety and de-escalation

To support student and staff safety and work towards de-escalation, continue to use the approaches and techniques from the acceleration phase, and also:

- Avoid touching, holding or forcing the student to respond or move, as this is likely to exacerbate the situation. Remain patient and avoid adding any additional triggers.
Practices that limit students' freedom of movement, such as forcibly moving students, blocking their exit or putting them in seclusion, are considered 'restrictive practices'. These practices are strictly regulated across Australia's states and territories and governed by legislation. It's important that school procedures are consistent with national and state or territory legislation, as well as your system or sector's policies, to ensure students' rights and dignity are respected and upheld.
- Enact the school's critical incident management plan and the individual student plan, if available.
- Calmly move other students to a different area, reassuring and supporting them to focus away from the escalated behaviour. This might be with a nearby teacher or outside the classroom so you can supervise the student and the rest of the class until help arrives. This is safer than attempting to move the student who is in the peak phase.

- Call for additional support from a support staff member or school leader. This person may help with the student in the peak phase or with other students.
 - Provide a brief summary of everyone's location and what students are doing, including what the other students are doing to ensure their safety.
 - If the student in the peak phase has left the classroom, provide details about the direction they've travelled and their location if it's known. If they're within sight, continue to monitor them.
- Adjust the environment to create a clear exit path for everyone and, if safe to do so, remove items that could be thrown or used to cause harm, such as scissors, books, furniture or heavy items.
 - If safe to do so, position yourself in a way that discreetly blocks access to unsafe areas, such as standing between the student and others or near structures that can be climbed. This can help guide students away from potential risks.
- Continue to:
 - Give the student plenty of space and observe from a safe distance.
 - Be patient, regulate your own emotions, co-regulate with the student if they're still with you and follow school and student plans.
- If they haven't already, a member of the school leadership team may need to discreetly contact the student's parents or primary caregivers for support.



Case example: Supporting a student and their peers during the peak phase

During an afternoon literacy lesson, Liam suddenly sweeps his books onto the floor, throws his chair backward and turns to his peers, swears and shouts, 'What are you looking at?!' His face is red, and he clenches his fists while pacing rapidly. Other students stand staring at him.

Recognising that Liam has reached the peak phase, Mr Davey immediately prioritises safety. He calmly and firmly instructs the rest of the class: 'Everyone, leave your things and move next door to Ms Chen.' The students quickly begin to move out while Mr Davey monitors them and Liam.

Liam sees the class exiting and begins to throw objects at them as they leave. Mr Davey maintains a safe distance and stands between Liam and the exiting students. He provides Liam with space while avoiding any actions that might seem threatening, and at the same time, tries to keep the other students safe.

Once the students have left, Mr Davey discreetly calls the school leadership team for additional support: 'This is Mr Davey. I'm in Room 12. My class has moved next door and I'm helping a student. Can you please assist immediately?'

While waiting for support, Mr Davey safely makes small adjustments to the environment, moving items that could be thrown, prioritising big, heavy or sharp objects and ensuring there's a clear exit path for himself and Liam. He then moves outside to monitor Liam from a distance while keeping himself safe. He avoids making eye contact with Liam and doesn't attempt to reason with him or tell him to sit down, knowing that he isn't in a state to engage. Liam continues to throw objects, pull down wall displays and tip over storage containers.

When the support teacher, Ms Dundar, arrives, she checks in with Mr Davey to see how he's feeling and what support he needs. After several minutes, Liam swears and screams, 'I'm going home' and leaves the room. Mr Davey phones the leadership team to let them know Liam has left the classroom and the direction he's heading so that they can clear his path, support everyone's safety and Liam's de-escalation, and contact his parents. Ms Dundar follows Liam from a distance. Mr Davey takes some time to regulate his emotions and then collects the class from Ms Chen.

Liam changes his direction and enters the student services building. Ms Dundar and the student services staff clear the hub of students and give Liam time to continue to calm. When the Deputy Principal, Ms Patel, arrives, Ms Dundar hands over to her, explaining what's happened.

Mr Davey and Ms Dundar are:

- **ensuring safety** – Keeping all students and staff safe is Mr Davey's and Ms Dundar's top priority. Moving others away from the situation and following school procedures helps minimise the risk of harm.
- **minimising additional stress** – Giving Liam space, avoiding demands and removing potential hazards helps prevent further escalation. Avoiding making Liam aware that additional support has been requested may also help prevent further escalation. Taking time to regulate their own emotions supports the wellbeing of Mr Davey and Ms Dundar.
- **seeking support** – Calling for additional staff support and involving parents and primary caregivers ensures that necessary help is provided.
- **staying calm and patient** – Avoiding confrontation and waiting for Liam to begin regulating acknowledges his emotional state and supports de-escalation.

The de-escalation phase

The de-escalation phase is when the escalation begins to reduce and the student is beginning to return to a regulated state. They may become more responsive to support. They may also feel disoriented or confused and not respond to support.

Support de-escalation and regulation

During this phase, the student can very easily re-escalate, so it's important to use similar techniques to those used in the agitation phase to promote calm, with consideration of the student's preferences and needs:

- Continue to give the student time and space to recover. The time needed for students to return to a regulated state will vary, and parent and primary caregiver support may be needed.
 - Offer reassurance that helps them feel safe and supported.
 - Offer them some simple supports such as having a drink or eating some of their lunch, having a rest or talking to you or a trusted adult.
 - Remind them that there's a quiet space where they can continue to de-escalate or regulate their emotions.
 - Encourage them to engage in calming activities or techniques that have been taught when regulated, or an easy, preferred activity with a clear end point.
- Continue to minimise sensory input, such as keeping lights low or using natural light and minimising loud noises, strong smells and the number of people involved.
- Keep a close eye on the student to monitor them for any signs of re-escalation and be prepared to return to the escalation phase techniques if needed.
 - Look out for triggers that may cause re-escalation, for example, somebody coming into the student's space or commenting on what they're doing, loud noises or sudden movements or placing expectations on or making requests of them.
 - Help the student maintain their dignity by keeping other students, and sometimes staff, away from them. Embarrassment and shame can be a trigger for re-escalation.
 - Focus on reconnecting and avoid talking about consequences or imposing demands.
- Actively listen, acknowledge the student's feelings and allow for silence as they recover from the escalation.
- Follow the school's systems for checking the wellbeing of all involved.



Case example: Supporting a student during the de-escalation phase

After reaching the peak phase and being given time and space, Sunny's breathing becomes less erratic, her fists unclench and her body appears less tense, but she looks exhausted and avoids eye contact.

Recognising that Sunny is now in the de-escalation phase, Mr Bonner remains calm and continues to give her space, sitting nearby but not too close. He doesn't rush her or try to force a conversation, knowing that she still needs time to regulate her emotions.

Speaking in a gentle tone, Mr Bonner offers, 'Sunny, I've just put some water on the desk next to you. Feel free to have a drink if you want to.' He places a bottle of water on the desk within reach and waits. After a few moments, Sunny reaches for it and takes a sip.

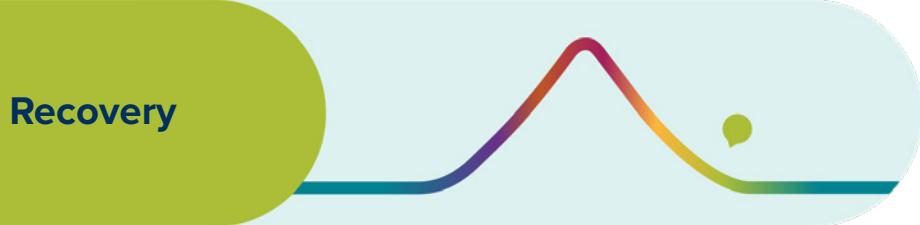
Mr Bonner continues to minimise verbal interaction, allowing silence to help Sunny recover.

After a few minutes, he says softly, 'I'm here if you want to talk.' Sunny doesn't respond immediately, but after a while, she quietly says, 'I just got really mad.'

Instead of questioning or problem-solving, Mr Bonner acknowledges her feelings: 'It looked like you were really frustrated. That must have been hard.' Sunny nods but remains mostly quiet. Mr Bonner doesn't press her to talk further.

When Sunny seems more settled, Mr Bonner offers choices without imposing demands: 'Would you like to stay here or come up to my office?' Sunny shrugs but eventually chooses to go to Mr Bonner's office.

By maintaining a calm presence, offering simple supports and allowing Sunny to process her emotions at her own pace, Mr Bonner helps ensure that she doesn't re-escalate. Once Sunny is regulated, they'll be able to discuss the incident in a supportive and constructive way.



Recovery

In the recovery phase, the student has returned to a regulated state and is ready to reflect, help plan preventative strategies and restore relationships and routines. This may not be immediately after the escalation – it could be after a break or the next day.

Debrief with those involved

Debriefing is an important step in helping everyone involved – those who escalated, those who contributed to the escalation and those who witnessed it – reflect on what happened, repair relationships and prevent future escalations. Follow your school's debriefing and follow-up procedures and involve relevant staff members to ensure consistent and appropriate support.

To conduct the debrief:

- Identify who should be involved, including:
 - a suitable person, such as a school leader or support teacher, to lead the debrief and ensure the conversation is conducted effectively and without interruptions
 - staff members involved
 - the student who experienced the escalation and their parents and primary caregivers (where possible).
- Establish a safe, supportive environment. If appropriate, hold joint conversations. If there's a risk of re-escalation, debrief separately.
 - Seek agreement on rules such as 'Speak only for yourself', 'Listen to others', 'Ask questions to understand' and 'Only speak if you want to'. Be mindful of the student's privacy and comfort in any discussions you have with and about them.
 - Be prepared to take a break if anyone starts to have difficulty regulating their emotions.
- Talk through the incident, including each person's actions, what they were trying to achieve, what worked or didn't, what they could do differently next time and what support they might need.
 - Discuss what happened, including what led to the escalation (trigger/antecedent), what occurred during it (behaviour), how they felt and the outcome (consequence). The student may need help remembering what happened and expressing their feelings.
 - Reassure them that everyone is safe now.
 - A reflection sheet can help the student and staff think through what happened before, during and after the escalation, and can then be used to guide the debriefing conversation. Ensure the student has the literacy skills to use the reflection sheet, or provide support.

- Review, update and plan supports.
 - Check whether school and student plans were followed effectively and if adjustments are needed.
 - Discuss what might be updated in existing plans or incorporated in new plans, including:
 - » triggers for agitation and what could be modified
 - » signs of agitation, acceleration and peak escalation
 - » the communication, social and emotional regulation skills that will be modelled, taught and practised when the student is regulated
 - » support that will be provided, such as prompts, learning supports, structured breaks, connection opportunities and positive feedback
 - » environmental modifications, such as seating arrangements, noise levels and visual stimuli
 - » safety planning aligned with the school's critical incident management procedures when the student is unable to regulate their emotions and respond appropriately to support.
 - Specify how staff can seek assistance during escalated incidents.

- Discuss follow-up actions.

- Some behaviours may require school leadership involvement. Where appropriate and safe, include the student in this process so they know what's being shared or discussed.
 - Discuss and agree on reasonable, respectful actions to help make amends, repair relationships and teach replacement behaviours.

This might include:

- » apologising or checking on affected staff or peers. Encourage and support (but don't force) apologies, as forced apologies can be counterproductive.
 - » cleaning up any mess made (with help if needed)
 - » other actions relevant to the behaviour and the student's developmental skills.

- Plan the return to class.

- Discuss how and when the student will return to class.
 - Help them practise what they might say to peers or staff.
 - Address any feelings of shame or worry about how others may have viewed the incident.
For example, 'It's understandable to feel nervous about what others might think. One moment doesn't define you and we know everyone is working on things.'

- Consider what other debriefing might be helpful to conduct with other students and adults who were involved, saw or were impacted by the incident. This debriefing can involve:

- ensuring that anyone who saw the escalation knows that appropriate follow-up has occurred, while maintaining the dignity and privacy of everyone involved
 - arranging appropriate support to help them process what they experienced
 - advising everyone involved that the student will be given the opportunity to move forward.
You can encourage others to make deliberate efforts to interact positively with the student to help reinforce positive relationships.

Support the student to return to class

Support the student to return to class either after the debrief or, if they're regulated and it would be helpful for them to return sooner, at a suitable point in the debrief and finish it later:

- Arrange for and support the student to re-enter the classroom and regular routine in a dignified and supportive manner. This might be after a break or during a transition when other students are also moving, and it's less noticeable.
- Explain what to do and help them with what they need.
- You might temporarily reduce the difficulty of demands placed on them, increase the frequency of reinforcement for positive behaviour through praise, and have a support staff member or school leader discreetly stay in the classroom.
- Continue to monitor them for signs of agitation and provide support where needed.



Complete the follow-up

To complete the follow-up:

- Record the incident in the school's student information management system and in the workplace health and safety system if necessary.
- Inform relevant staff members, including the student's other teachers and support staff, so they can look out for signs of re-escalation and provide support. This is especially important if you are not the student's regular teacher.
- Update the individual student plan – or develop it if needed. Seek support from specialist teachers and school leaders if necessary. Plans should include a summary of the triggers, signs of agitation and escalation, support preferences and needs, and roles and responsibilities when the student is regulated and during each phase of escalation.
- Consider if a referral needs to be made to the student support team and discuss this with relevant staff members, the student (if appropriate) and their parents or primary caregivers.

If escalation occurs more than once, the student support team should be involved in reviewing incidents and planning for the student.

- If the student's parents or primary caregivers weren't involved in the debriefing conversation:
 - Provide them with a summary of the incident, follow-up actions and the draft individual plan.
 - Provide opportunities for them to ask questions, share information and contribute to the plan.
 - Focus on the importance of safety and wellbeing for everyone – their child, other students and staff members – and refocusing on learning.
- Explain to the student and their parents or primary caregivers who will receive a copy of their updated or new plan, explaining that this can help people better support them.
 - Provide a copy to the student (if appropriate), their parents and primary caregivers and all staff working with the student.
 - When sharing and following student plans, maintain privacy and avoid shaming the student or embarrassing them in front of peers.

Later in the day or the next day:

- Check in with the student to see how they're feeling, offer support and remind them of the strategies to use if they begin to feel agitated.
- Continue to make a deliberate effort to have positive interactions with the student to help reinforce positive relationships and encourage other staff and students to do so too.
- Provide positive feedback when you see the student engaging in learning, working well with others and using their plan to regulate their emotions and seek help.



Case example: Debriefing with those involved and supporting the student to return to class

After a difficult incident where he shouted at a classmate, Jake has returned to class and is feeling calmer. Jake was visibly upset and required support during the peak and de-escalation phases. Now that he's returned to a calm state, his teacher, Ms Thompson, begins the recovery phase.

Ms Thompson meets with Jake privately during their break, alongside Mr Hoey, who assisted during the peak phase. Together, they begin the debriefing process.

Ms Thompson: 'Jake, I'm glad you're feeling better. I wanted to talk with you about what happened so, together, we can figure out how to avoid that happening again. Are you ready to talk?'

Jake: 'Yeah.'

They sit down and go over a reflection sheet that helps guide their discussion. Jake is encouraged to think about what triggered the outburst, how he felt and what might help him in the future.

Ms Thompson: 'Jake, can you tell us what happened before you got upset?'

Jake: 'I don't know. I felt like Tommy was picking on me, and I couldn't make him stop.'

Ms Thompson: 'I see. You were feeling upset and frustrated, and then it all became too much. That sounds really difficult. I'll also follow up with Tommy, as it's not okay to be disrespectful to you. Can you tell me what he said and did, and what you tried?'

Jake tells Ms Thompson what Tommy said and did and what he tried. Ms Thompson takes notes to follow up with Tommy.

Ms Thompson: 'What do you think might help if you feel that way again?'

Jake reflects, and Ms Thompson helps him identify strategies for the future, such as asking for the teacher's help, asking for a break or using a calming technique, like breathing deeply, when things feel overwhelming.

Ms Thompson: 'Would it help if we gave you some alone time in the calm-down area when you start to feel frustrated, or would you prefer to come and speak with one of us?'

Jake: 'I think having some alone time would help.'

Ms Thompson: 'Okay, well, next time you're feeling like this, you can move to the calm-down area and take a moment to calm down. It's also really important that you let me know what's happening so that I can help.'

They also talk about the logical follow-up actions. Since Jake yelled at Tommy and disrupted the class, he could make amends by offering an apology to those involved and, if needed, helping with a task to rebuild the positive environment. Ms Thompson will also talk with Tommy about logical follow-up actions.

Ms Thompson: 'It would be good to say sorry to Tommy for what happened and maybe help him with something in class today. How do you feel about that?'

Jake: 'Okay. I didn't mean to upset anyone.'

Mr Hoey: 'It's great that you're willing to take responsibility. Remember, it's okay to make mistakes. Also remember, it's not okay for other students to be disrespectful to you.'

After this reflection, they discuss Jake's individual plan to prevent similar incidents, outlining clear steps for recognising triggers and early signs of agitation, support Jake needs and how to use appropriate emotional regulation and help-seeking strategies. Ms Thompson reassures Jake that this is a learning process, and he's supported as he works through it.

Ms Thompson also debriefs with Tommy and contacts both boys' parents to explain what happened and outline the follow-up actions taken.

Once Jake and Tommy have had time to reflect, Ms Thompson addresses the class. She provides a brief summary of what they saw and reassures everyone that the situation is over and everyone is safe. She reminds the class that they all play a role in creating safe and supportive environments.

Ms Thompson: 'I just want to let you all know that the situation is behind us. We're all safe and working on handling things better in the future. Please be kind and supportive of each other, and if anyone needs help, let me know.'

Jake is supported as he re-enters the classroom. Ms Thompson reminds him of the routine he's returning to: 'Jake, we just completed [activity] and we're going into individual work on [topic]. You'll need your [stationery/tool/resource/etc.].'

Ms Thompson ensures he's supported in engaging in the learning task and privately praises his regulated behaviour. Mr Hoey stays in the classroom for a short time to provide additional support if needed.

Throughout the day, Ms Thompson provides positive feedback when Jake engages in learning or cooperates with his peers. She monitors him closely for signs of agitation and offers praise when he uses his coping strategies, like taking a deep breath or quietly asking for a break. Ms Thompson also monitors Tommy and praises him when she sees him interacting positively with Jake.

Ms Thompson is focusing on recovery, reflection and restoring relationships after escalation:

- **supporting de-escalation** – Co-regulating with Jake; modelling regulated body language, words and actions; giving Jake time and space to calm down; avoiding demands; and offering basic needs like food, water or quiet, calm places to rest helps him recover from escalation.
- **rebuilding trust and relationships** – Debriefing with Jake, Tommy and others involved allows for reflection, reassurance and planning for future support. Follow-up actions that are fair, related to the behaviour and focused on repairing relationships while maintaining Jake's dignity support the rebuilding of trust and relationships.
- **learning from the incident** – Identifying triggers, discussing coping strategies and updating Jake's plan helps support him with regulating his emotions, solving problems and preventing future escalation.
- **encouraging positive re-engagement** – Checking in with Jake, supporting and encouraging positive behaviours, and ensuring staff, parents and primary caregivers are informed can help Jake feel supported moving forward.

Supporting your wellbeing

It can be very challenging to manage escalation as, in these situations, students can say and do unsafe and hurtful things. Supporting your own wellbeing is essential.

Try to regulate your emotions and responses by seeing the behaviour as a sign that the student is still developing the skills to manage difficult emotions, needs support but can't ask for it, or is reacting to overwhelming feelings.

To support your wellbeing:

- Focus on safety and wellbeing, while recognising that students are still developing essential skills, including emotional regulation, effective communication, positive social interactions, learning focus and persistence.
- Seek help from specialist support staff and school leaders when behaviours are more complex or serious.
- Recognise that students may escalate for various reasons, some of which neither you nor they may be aware of or able to control. Reviewing student plans, debriefing and seeking others' assistance can help you support students and try to prevent escalation in the future.
- Remember that refining your classroom management and teaching practice can take time. It can also take time for students to learn what's expected of them and develop their skills.
- Use this guide to plan, script and rehearse how to prevent and respond to escalation in ways that support de-escalation, regulation, recovery and planning for the future. This supports you with focusing on your own regulation as you deliver planned responses, rather than trying to regulate and consider how to respond at the same time. You might do this independently or with the support of colleagues.
 - You might focus on a student, a group of students or a class who sometimes experience difficulties with emotional regulation.
 - Use this guide to identify your strengths and prioritise the area you'll focus on first. Work on one area at a time until you can confidently demonstrate it.
- Pause before responding to maintain your own emotional regulation and ensure you aren't reacting impulsively.
- Regularly reflect on your own and your students' strengths and successes, the effectiveness of approaches, areas for improvement and student needs requiring support.
 - Take time to reflect on your own or debrief with the support of colleagues after times of escalation.
- Ask colleagues and students' support networks for strategies and suggestions on how to support students.
- Consider what resources, planning time and debriefing process you need after escalation. Discuss with the relevant school leader how these might be arranged.
- Use your employer's employee assistance program to access additional support for your wellbeing.
- Participate in professional development to strengthen your own wellbeing strategies.

It's also helpful to keep in mind that building a positive classroom culture and developing student-teacher relationships take time. Your efforts may not be realised immediately, but there will be incremental improvements and, over time, you and your students will benefit from your persistence.

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Appendix A: Proactive and preventative approaches to creating calm and learning-focused classrooms

Proactive and preventative approaches start with planning and early interactions with students, and require time and consistency to develop. They involve:

- building teacher–student relationships through respectful interactions and engaging with families to support student learning
- developing and maintaining high expectations for all students, making reasonable adjustments as needed and supporting students to achieve them
- being intentional about developing a positive classroom culture by modelling, discussing, explicitly teaching, practising, revising and reinforcing expected behaviours, routines and rules (for relief teachers, familiarise yourself with the class expectations and maintain consistency by reinforcing the established rules and routines)
- establishing culturally safe, inclusive and predictable learning environments
- actively engaging all students in learning by providing high-quality instruction aligned with how students learn, as outlined in AERO's model of learning and teaching
- using the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education and Personal and Social capability to explicitly teach and support students in practising and using emotional regulation and social skills
- supporting students' diverse needs by understanding and following individual plans, collaborating with students' support networks, and planning and taking action, including supporting their emotional regulation, communication needs, social interactions, sensory differences and physical needs
- teaching and encouraging all students to understand and support each other's strengths and differences.
- effectively responding to low-level disengagement and disruption and seeking assistance when behaviours persist or are more serious
- implementing a whole-school approach to strengthen and support individual practice in classrooms, playgrounds and other school spaces and provide practical support for all staff members.

To determine the effectiveness of these proactive and preventative approaches in your teaching and classroom management and identify ways to enhance your practice, consider how students are responding, including those with individual plans and goals. You may want to:

- use behavioural, academic, attendance and wellbeing data, including observations, to identify patterns and critically reflect on practices
- draw on your relationships with students, families and colleagues to gather honest feedback from them by creating opportunities where people feel comfortable sharing their feedback. This might include offering options for anonymous feedback.
- undertake professional learning or reading
- seek support and feedback on practice from colleagues.

These actions can help you engage in reflexive practice to critically examine your own biases, assumptions, values and attitudes and the impact of these on your teaching, relationships with students, staff and families, and classroom management. In turn, this reflexivity can help you apply responsive practices to support all students in achieving learning success.

Appendix B

Example scripts for supporting students

When a student starts to appear agitated, rehearsed scripts may help you to support them to appropriately express their worries or concerns.

Primary school

Acknowledge emotions

Inviting expression can reduce emotional intensity and identify opportunities to support students:

‘It looks like something’s bothering you. Do you want to talk about it?’

Offer another more appropriate time to talk if needed:

‘I’m interested in what you have to say, but now is not the best time, so let’s talk about this at the end of the lesson.’

Validating emotions helps students feel seen and heard:

‘I see you’re really upset. It’s okay to feel this way.’

If unsafe behaviour is involved, add boundaries:

‘It’s okay to feel upset, but it is not okay to hurt others, even if what they said upset you.’

Offer controlled choices

Choices offer a sense of control and safety. Giving options supports regulation and shows that you respect students’ process. Some students prefer to move. Others need stillness before they’re ready:

‘I understand you’re frustrated. Would you like to take a break or talk about it?’

‘You seem a little frustrated. Do you want to go for a walk with me or stay here a few more minutes?’

Guide toward calming actions

Suggesting a specific calming activity is more effective than vague prompts like ‘calm down’:

‘I know this is hard. Do you want to try deep breathing together? Can you show me how you do it?’

Patience and self-regulation are key. Rushing de-escalation doesn’t work, but staying calm and supportive does:

‘When you’re ready, let’s work on this together. I’m here to help.’

Reinforce positive steps

Praise even small signs of regulation to encourage progress:

‘I like how calmly you’re talking to me right now.’

Positive reinforcement builds momentum and confidence in returning to routine:

‘Great job taking that break. Let’s carry that calm back to class.’

Pause to think and gather more information

Acknowledge that you’ve heard the student but need some time to think before responding:

‘I’m not sure how to respond to that. Let me think about it and come back to you.’

Asking for the student’s suggestions can involve them in solving the problem, while providing time for you to think about solutions:

‘I’m unsure how to respond helpfully. Can you help me solve this? What should we do next?’

Secondary school

Recognise emotions

Acknowledging emotions without judgment helps teens feel respected:

‘You seem really upset right now. It’s okay to feel that way.’

If behaviour crosses a line, set clear boundaries:

‘It’s okay to feel upset. It’s not okay to hurt someone.’

Offering a chance to talk can help reduce the emotional intensity and open communication:

‘Looks like something’s bothering you – want to talk about it?’

Offer choices and autonomy

Giving clear, reasonable choices helps teens feel more in control and respected. Providing options supports self-regulation without pressure. Some teens prefer space, while others need quiet time before they can move:

‘I get that you’re frustrated. Do you want to take five minutes or talk it through?’

‘You seem really angry. Want to step outside for a bit or stay here until you’re ready?’

Support positive coping strategies

Teens respond better to practical, collaborative strategies than vague advice to ‘calm down’.

Stay calm and consistent. Teens notice emotional tone – being regulated yourself helps them do the same, even if it takes time:

‘This is tough – I get it. Let’s take a few deep breaths or a break and come back to it.’

‘When you’re ready, I can help you work through this.’

Reinforce effort and progress

Recognise and reinforce even small moments of self-regulation – it makes a big difference. Acknowledging efforts builds confidence and encourages positive re-engagement:

‘I appreciate how you’re keeping calm right now, even though I know you’re feeling a bit stressed.’

‘It’s great that you took that break and are ready to rejoin’

Pause to think and gather more information

Acknowledge that you’ve heard students but need some time to think before responding:

‘Wow, you must be very upset to speak to me like that. I’m not sure how to respond, so let’s meet later to discuss it.’

Asking for students’ suggestions can involve them in solving the problem, while providing time for you to think about solutions:

‘I’m unsure how to respond helpfully. Can you help me solve this? Where to from here?’