Practice summary

Australian Education Research Organisation

Teacher wellbeing in classroom environments

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Supporting your wellbeing in the classroom helps you respond to persistent disengaged, disruptive and escalated behaviours with clarity, consistency and confidence.

These behaviours often reflect students' developing emotional regulation, unmet needs or overwhelming feelings. Understanding this can help you maintain perspective and protect your own emotional wellbeing, especially when escalation occurs for reasons that aren't always visible or controllable.

Teachers work within complex environments, and the strategies in this practice summary are intended to be adapted to individual contexts. This practice summary outlines ways to support your wellbeing in the moment, after incidents and as part of your ongoing practice. It can be used individually or shared with colleagues as part of a whole-school approach to staff wellbeing and classroom management. It's designed to complement existing school and system policies, procedures and guidance.

Key points covered in this practice summary include:

- regulating in the moment
- debriefing and reflecting after incidents
- building individual capacity over time
- seeking support, collaborating and accessing resources.



For comprehensive guidance on responding to escalation and persistent and disengaged behaviours, see the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) escalated behaviour and persistent disengaged and disruptive behaviour practice guides.



In the moment: During challenging situations

Managing your own response in real time protects both you and the student from the situation escalating further.

Pause before responding

Pause before responding to maintain your own emotional regulation and ensure you aren't reacting impulsively. This might mean taking a breath, stepping back and saying, 'I'm going to take a moment to think about how to respond.'

Even a few seconds of pause can help you respond from a regulated state rather than react from stress or frustration.

Focus on safety first

If a situation becomes unsafe – for the student, other students or yourself – seek immediate help from school leadership or designated support staff. Your safety and the students' safety are the priority.

Follow your school's crisis management procedures. Don't try to manage dangerous situations alone.

Implement your planned responses

If you've planned and rehearsed responses for this student or situation, draw on those scripts and strategies. Having a clear plan allows you to focus on your own regulation while putting those responses into action. This means you're not trying to manage your emotions and decide what to do at the same time.



Same day: After an incident

Processing what happened after an incident helps you recover, make sense of it and be ready to face the next day.

Check in on your own emotional state

Take a moment to notice how you're feeling. Challenging behaviours are stressful to manage. It's normal to feel frustrated, anxious or upset after difficult incidents. Acknowledging your emotional response is part of managing it, not a sign of weakness.

Debrief with a colleague

Talk through what happened with a trusted colleague or school leader. This can help you process the incident, gain perspective and identify what worked and what you might do differently next time.

Debriefing isn't just about the student's behaviour; it's also about your experience and wellbeing. A colleague can provide emotional support and practical suggestions.

Document what occurred

Record the incident following your school's procedures. Documentation helps with identifying patterns, planning support strategies and ensuring continuity of care for the student.

Keep records factual and objective, noting what happened, when and where, what you tried, what worked or didn't work, and who was involved or notified.

Access immediate support if needed

If you're feeling significantly distressed, overwhelmed or struggling to regulate your own emotions after an incident, seek support from school leadership about immediate next steps.



Ongoing: Building your capacity over time

Building your capacity over time means that difficult situations become less draining and your responses become more consistent.

Plan, script and rehearse responses

Thinking ahead about how you'll prevent and respond to escalation reduces stress in the moment and helps you respond from a regulated state. The aim is to support de-escalation, regulation, recovery and future planning.

You could try focusing on a student, a group of students or a class that sometimes experiences difficulties with emotional regulation. You can plan and rehearse your responses on your own or role-play scenarios with a colleague.

If you need inspiration, strategies and case studies can be found in AERO's escalated behaviour and persistent disengaged and disruptive behaviour practice guides.

Reflect regularly on your practice

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 colleagues after times of escalation. Notice patterns: what tends to trigger difficulties, what approaches are working, and where you need additional support or strategies.

Seek ongoing support and collaboration

Build relationships with colleagues, specialist support staff and school leaders who can provide strategies, suggestions and support for managing challenging behaviours.

Look to colleagues and students' support networks for strategies and suggestions on how to support specific students. Share what you're learning and what's working — supporting each other strengthens the whole school community.

Access available resources and professional development

Look for opportunities to participate in professional development to strengthen your classroom management skills and wellbeing strategies.

Consider what resources, planning time and debriefing processes you need. Discuss with your relevant school leader how these might be arranged.

Your employer will likely have access to an employee assistance program. Use this to access additional support for your personal wellbeing.

Be patient and persist

Refining classroom management and teaching practices that create conditions where students can focus, engage and thrive takes time. It can also take time for students to learn what's expected of them and develop their skills for effective classroom learning.

Building a positive classroom culture and developing student–teacher relationships also take time. Your efforts may not be realised immediately, but there'll be incremental improvements. Over time, you and your students will benefit from your persistence.

This practice summary is part of AERO's suite of classroom management resources and guidance for supporting students' diverse needs. It draws on content from the escalated behaviour and persistent disengaged and disruptive behaviour practice guides, which include detailed case examples and further guidance. For more information, visit edresearch.edu.au.

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