Understanding & Managing Escalating Behavior

Colvin & Sugai, 1989

The Escalation Cycle

Effects of Escalating Phases

- **Calm**
  - Student is cooperative.

- **Trigger**
  - Student experiences a series of unresolved conflicts.

- **Agitation**
  - Student exhibits increase in unfocused behavior.

- **Acceleration**
  - Student displays focused behavior.

- **Peak**
  - Student is out of control & displays most severe problem behavior.

- **De-escalation**
  - Student displays confusion but with decreases in severe behavior.

- **Recovery**
  - Student displays eagerness to participate in non-engagement activities.
PURPOSE

• Enhance our understanding of & ways of responding to escalating behavior sequences.

ASSUMPTIONS

• Behavior is learned.
• Behavior is lawful.
• Behavior is escalated through successive interactions (practice).
• Behavior can be changed through an instructional approach.

OUTCOMES

• Identification of how to intervene early in an escalation.
• Identification of environmental factors that can be manipulated.
• Identification of replacement behaviors that can be taught.
1. Calm

- Student is cooperative.
  - Accepts corrective feedback.
  - Follows directives.
  - Sets personal goals.
  - Ignores distractions.
  - Accepts praise.

Calm

- Intervention is focused on prevention.
  - Arrange for high rates of successful academic & social engagements.
  - Use positive reinforcement.
  - Teach social skills.
    - Problem solving
    - Relaxation strategy
    - Self-management
  - Communicate positive expectations.
2. Trigger

- Student experiences a series of unresolved conflicts.
  - Repeated failures
  - Frequent corrections
  - Interpersonal conflicts
  - Timelines
  - Low rates of positive reinforcement

Trigger

- Intervention is focused on prevention & redirection.
  - Remove from or modify problem context.
  - Increase opportunities for success.
  - Reinforce what has been taught.
3. Agitation

• Student exhibits increase in **unfocused** behavior.
  – Off-task
  – Frequent start/stop on tasks
  – Out of seat
  – Talking with others
  – Social withdrawal

**Agitation**

• Intervention is focused on reducing **anxiety**.
  – Make structural/environmental modifications.
  – Provide reasonable options & **choices**.
  – Involve in successful **engagements**.
4. Acceleration

- Student displays *focused* behavior.
  - Provocative
  - *High intensity*
  - Threatening
  - Personal

Acceleration

- Intervention is focused on *safety*.

Remember:
  - *Escalations & self-control are inversely related.*
  - *Escalation is likely to run its course.*
Acceleration

- Remove all triggering & competing maintaining factors.
- Follow crisis prevention procedures.
- Establish & follow through with bottom line.
- Disengage from student.

The MODEL

5. Peak

- Student is out of control & displays most severe problem behavior.
  - Physical aggression
  - Property destruction
  - Self-injury
  - Escape/social withdrawal
  - Hyperventilation
Peak

- Intervention is focused on safety.
  - Procedures like acceleration phase, except focus is on crisis intervention

The MODEL

DE-ESCALATION

6. De-escalation

- Student displays confusion but with decreases in severe behavior.
  - Social withdrawal
  - Denial
  - Blaming others
  - Minimization of problem
De-escalation

- Intervention is focused on removing excess attention.
  - Don’t nag.
  - Avoid blaming.
  - Don’t force apology.
  - Emphasize starting anew.

The MODEL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Behavior Intensity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>High</td>
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<td>Low</td>
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7. Recovery

- Student displays eagerness to participate in non-engagement activities.
  - Attempts to correct problem.
  - Unwillingness to participate in group activities.
  - Social withdrawal & sleep.
Recovery

• Intervention is focused on re-establishing routines & activities.
  – Follow through with consequences for problem behavior.
  – Positively reinforce any displays of appropriate behavior.

Recovery

• Debrief
  – Purpose of debrief is to facilitate transition back to program.
  – Debrief follows consequences for problem behavior.
  – Goal is to increase more appropriate behavior.

Recovery

– Problem solving example:
  • What did I do? (define the problem)
  • Why did I do it?
  • What could I have done instead? (create possible solutions)
  • What do I have to do next? (make a plan)
  • Can I do it?
  • If not, whose help would I like?
Three Key Strategies

- Identify how to intervene early in an escalation.
- Identify environmental factors that can be manipulated.
- Identify replacement behaviors that can be taught.

Final Thought

*It is always important to remember that “if you inadvertently assist the student to escalate, do not be concerned; you will get another chance to do it right the next time around.”* (Geoff Colvin, 1989).

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