

RESOURCES GUIDE

# Top 10 De-escalation Tips for Educators

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# Your Work Environment

As an education professional, every day at school or in the classroom presents new encounters, situations, and challenges.

You may find yourself dealing with angry, hostile, or disruptive behavior every day. **Your response to this defensive behavior plays a critical role in determining whether or not the incident will escalate into a crisis situation.**

These 10 de-escalation tips from CPI provide strategies and techniques to help you respond to difficult behavior in the safest, most effective way possible.



“With staff, it has made a big difference. Students are not aware that staff are using the training, since it has become part of practice. The students that are physically disruptive, in general, their physical outbursts decrease when the practice is implemented consistently.”

**KATHY MORRISON**, SOCIAL WORKER,  
SUMTER SCHOOL DISTRICT, GEORGIA

**TIP 1**

## **Be Empathetic and Nonjudgmental**

**When a student says or does something you perceive as weird or irrational, avoid judging or discrediting their feelings.**

Whether or not you think those feelings are justified, they are indeed real feelings to that person. Pay attention to them. Empathic listening is done by:

- Giving them your **undivided attention**.
- **Listening carefully to their feelings** and the facts they're providing.
- **Using positive nonverbal messages**, such as eye contact and head nodding.
- **Restating and paraphrasing** what they said: use their words and ask questions to clarify.

**TIP 2**

## **Respect Personal Space**

**If the space allows, stand between 1-3 feet away from the person who's exhibiting escalated behaviors.**

This personal space tends to decrease anxiety and can help prevent them from lashing out or harming themselves or others. If you must enter someone's personal space to provide care, explain your actions so the person feels less confused and frightened.



**TIP 3**

## **Allow Time for Decisions**

**When a student is upset, they may not be able to think clearly.**

Give them time to think through and process what you've said. Just as you don't want to feel rushed, your students don't either. Avoid rising anxiety and stress for both of you by giving students that time.

**TIP 4**

## **Use Nonthreatening Nonverbals**

**When behavior begins escalating, nonverbals become key communicators to diffusing the situation.**

Be mindful of your gestures, facial expressions, movements, and tone of voice. The more a student escalates into distress, the less they can process your choice of words. When we speak to somebody we care about and respect, our tone and body language become relaxed, receptive, and nonthreatening. There is a special degree of patience and attention we show to those people. And those same qualities are exactly what a person in crisis needs to see so that they can safely de-escalate.

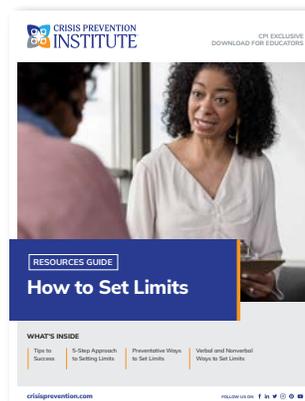
**TIP 5**

## **Set Limits**

**When a student is defensive, disruptive, or belligerent, they need limits that are clear, simple, and enforceable.**

Setting limits as a form of intervention is effective when limits are clearly stated, expectations are reasonable, and the limits given are enforceable—not punishable.

### **BONUS RESOURCE**



**> DOWNLOAD NOW**

**TIP 6**

## **Focus on Feelings**

**As an educator, you understand how important facts are.**

But when dealing with escalating behaviors, how a student feels is often the heart of the matter. Not all people—and especially young people—can accurately describe their feelings toward what is happening to them. Offering supportive responses lets the student know you understand what is happening and helps them filter through their emotions in a more rational manner.

**Supportive responses include:**

**“That must be scary.”**

**“I know how hard that must have been for you.”**

**“How did that make you feel?”**

**TIP 7**

## **Ignore Challenging Questions**

**Engaging a student who verbally challenges you often results in a power struggle.**

When a student challenges your authority, redirect their attention to the issue at hand. Managing a power struggle is critical to your mental well-being, as well as that of the individuals you're conversing with.

When a student challenges your authority, **redirect their attention to the issue at hand.**

### **BONUS CONTENT**

**> Learn additional CPI strategies for managing your classroom.**



TIP 8

## Avoid Overreacting

**While you cannot control a student's behavior, you can control how you respond to them.**

Remaining calm, rational, and professional will have a direct effect on whether the situation escalates or diffuses.

**Strategies to help you remain calm include:**

- **Taking several deep breaths** before responding.
- Remembering that **distress behavior is often rooted in fear and anxiety.**
- **Taking a moment to calm yourself** by reiterating what the individual is saying.

TIP 9

## Choose What You Insist Upon Wisely

**Be thoughtful in deciding which rules are negotiable and which are not.**

For example, if a student doesn't want to work on an assignment at a particular time, are you able to offer them the choice to do it another time, or provide them with another task? Options and flexibility can help you avoid unnecessary confrontations.

TIP 10

## Allow Silence for Reflection

**It may seem counterintuitive to let moments of silence occur while working with a student, but sometimes it's the best choice.**

This gives both you and the student a chance to reflect on what's happening, and how to best proceed.



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