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

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

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?
The MODEL

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).