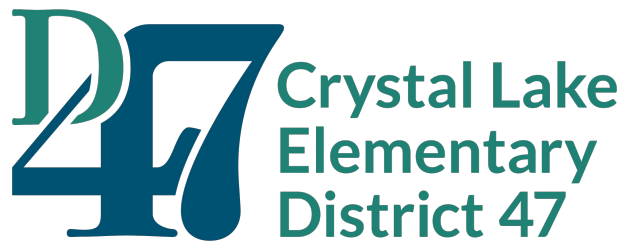


Verbal De-Escalation: A Tier 1 Approach



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Objectives

1

Define verbal de-escalation and its role in **Tier 1** (universal) supports

2

Identify early signs of escalation in students

3

Apply **5 evidence based verbal strategies** in daily interactions

4

Practice techniques

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What is Verbal De-Escalation?

Verbal de-escalation in elementary school is a set of **calm, non-confrontational communication techniques** used by teachers to defuse a student's escalating behavior, before it becomes a crisis.

It involves using a **calm tone, active listening, and validating the student's feelings**, to help them **regain control, de-escalate emotions, and re-engage** with their learning.

What is Tier 1?

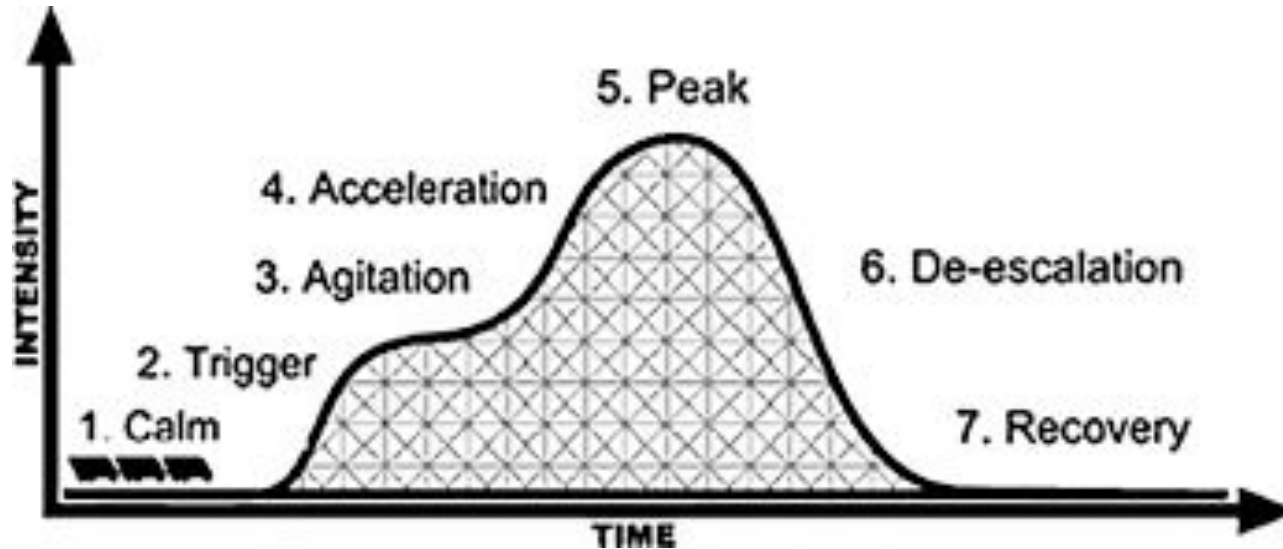
Tier	Who	Goal
Tier 1	ALL students	Prevent escalation through proactive, positive supports
Tier 2	Some students	Targeted interventions
Tier 3	Few students	Intensive, individualized plans

Today= Tier 1: Tools every adult uses every day.

Why Verbal De-escalation Matters

- 80% of escalations can be prevented with early verbal intervention
- Builds **self-regulation** in students
- Reduces office referrals & staff stress
- Create a **culture of calm**

The Escalation Curve



Calm ➡ Restless ➡ Resistant ➡ Refusal ➡ Rage ➡ Recovery

Goal: Catch at **Restless** ➡ **Resistant** using **voice and words**.

Telling vs Asking...

- Instead of telling students what to do, start asking questions. Asking questions builds intrinsic motivation and helps avoid power struggles.
 - Ex: “Stop laying on the floor” vs “What are you supposed to be doing?”
 - Ex: “Get your pencil out.” vs “What are your classmates doing?”
 - Ex: “Stop making noise and do your work” vs “What is making this seem hard for you right now?”
- This can reduce resistance and can de-escalate power struggles
- Encourages self-reflection for the student

Ask, Don't Tell

Thirty - Second Interventions

Is what you're
doing okay now?

What's your
job now?

**WHEN WILL YOU
BE READY TO
START?**

What can I
do to **HELP**
you so you
can ---?

WHAT'S THE RULE?
**WHAT ARE YOU
SUPPOSED TO BE
DOING?**

It looks like you have a problem.
How can I help you solve it?

Do you want to figure out a better
way? How can I help you?

Is what you're
doing now
helping or
hurting our
lesson?

What did we agree to?
Can you do that?

What do you want/need?



What are you doing?



How is it working for you?



Could you have done worse?



Is there a better way?



How can we make this right?



If you do this, what does it
say about you?



Do you need my help or can
you try it yourself?



The 5 CORE Verbal Strategies

Strategy	Phrase Examples	Why It Works
Regulated Voice	Low, slow, calm tone	Models self-control; lowers arousal
Positive Framing	“Walk with me” vs. “Stop running”	Focuses on what to do
Choice Offering	“Would you like to sit here or there?”	Restores sense of control
Empathy First	“This feels hard right now.”	Validates emotion without agreement
Simple directions	One-step, clear; “Hands down, please”	Reduces cognitive load

Strategy 1- Regulated Voice

- High-pitched, fast: “STOP RUNNING, NOW!”
- Low, slow: “Feet on floor, please.”

Tip: Match student’s energy **downward**, never upward.

Strategy 2- Positive Framing

Instead of...	Say...
Don't yell	Use a quiet voice
Stop throwing	Keep the ball on the table

Can you think of another negative phrase that you hear or have said that can be turned into a positive one?

Strategy 3- Choice Offering

Examples:

- Red marker or blue?
- Take a break now or in 2 minutes?

Rule: Both choices are acceptable to you.

Avoid false choices (Be quiet or else)

Strategy 4- Empathy First

Script:

1. Name the feeling: “You seem frustrated.”
2. Short & genuine: Avoid “I know exactly how you feel.”
3. Pair with next step: “Let’s take three deep breaths.”

What would you do? Student says, “This work is too hard!”

Strategy 5- Simple Directions

Keep it:

- One action
- Under 5 words
- Starts with a verb

Line up vs. Can you please get into line quietly?

Putting It Together- An Example

Scenario: Student refuses to clean up blocks.

1. **Regulated Voice-** “I see you’re upset about cleaning.”
2. **Empathy-** “It’s hard to stop building.”
3. **Choice-** “Would you like to put away big blocks or small ones first?”
4. **Simple direction-** “Start with the red ones.”

Tier 1 Accountability

- ☐ Used regulated voice 3x per day
- ☐ Gave 2 choices today
- ☐ Named a feeling

Ways to support regulation:

- Build a relationship- Take time each day to have fun with them!
- Stay calm- Students will often feed off our emotions. Model what we want them to do. An escalated adult can not calm down an escalated child!
- Ask parents- Find out what works at home. Do they use specific phrases, songs, techniques, etc.
- Visual supports- deep breathing boards, calming options, I need/I feel...
- Offer choices and try to get the brain to think of something else
- Simplify language when speaking to them!
- Direct them to the designated calming space- calm corner, motor room, etc.

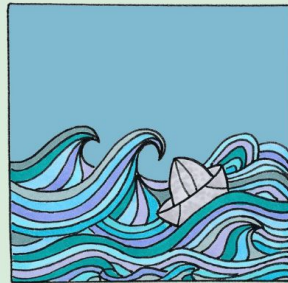
What to Ask When “How are You?” Isn’t Working

Before You Ask Anything

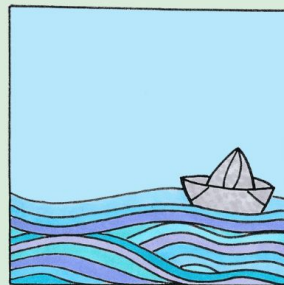
1. Ask Permission-Connection starts with choice, not pressure
 - a. “Is now a good time to talk?”
 - b. “Do you want company or do you want space?”
2. Don’t Fix
 - a. Most people don’t want answers, they want to be heard
 - b. Not the time for solutions, advice, or making it better.
3. Stay Calm
 - a. Behavior influences behavior. Coregulate
 - b. Take a breath, your calm tells them everything they need to hear: “This is safe.”
4. Be Ready for Silence
 - a. Silence doesn’t mean it’s not working
 - b. Silence means they are thinking

What to Ask When “How are You?” Isn’t Working

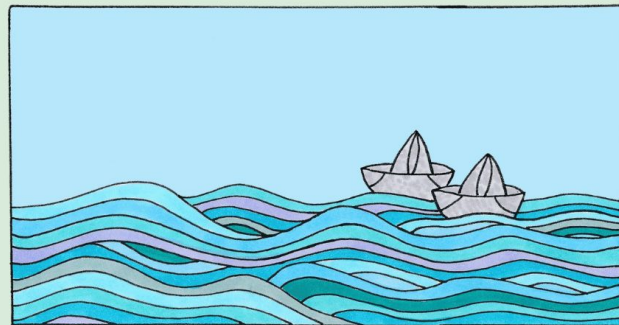
WHEN THEIR STORM



MEETS OUR CALM



CO - REGULATION OCCURS



@kwiens62

Let Go of “How are You”



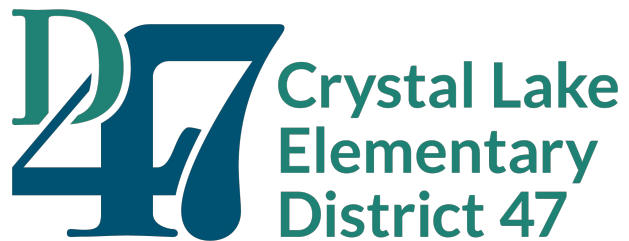
25 Supportive Questions



Resources

Q&A





Thank You

Behavior Coach Team 2025