



Responses to Behavior

Secondary; 6th-12th grade

Melissa Apostolos

Consulting Teacher

- 12 Years teaching 7th and 8th grade World History and US History at Crystal Middle School
- 7 years teaching 10th, 11th, 12th World Civ, US History and Psychology at Fairfield High
- Induction Consulting Teacher 2026-



Learning Goal:

We are learning to respond to disruptive behavior so that all students can learn.

Success Criteria

- ❑ Identify triggers and escalation indicators.
- ❑ Use de-escalation strategies when a student has a “flipped lid”.

Continuum of Engagement

Self-Reflect: Where might you be right now on this continuum?

ACTIVE-----PASSIVE-----

DISRUPTING	AVOIDING	WITHDRAWING	PARTICIPATING	INVESTING	DRIVING
Distracting others from learning Creating an unsafe situation	Off task (doing something different from what the teacher wants me to do) Looking for ways to avoid doing work	Not working Unfocused Separate/ by myself	Doing my work by myself or with others Focused and paying attention Responding to questions	Asking questions Knowing what I am learning and why it's important	Setting goals Asking for feedback Checking my work Leading learning
Disengagement			Engagement		

From Disrupting to Avoiding

→ The goal is **not** to move from Disrupting to Participating; simply to move out of the **Disrupting** mode.



This step is about **safety and climate**. The teacher priority is to create safety for all students and **then** to minimize the disruption.



First, we must understand the behavior.

Four Critical Concepts to Understanding the Behavior...

1. Misbehavior is a symptom.

- Academic frustration
- Attention/connection
- Escape/avoidance
- Sensory overload
- Lack of coping skills
- Difficulty with flexibility
- Lack of basic social skills
- Fear of embarrassment
- Loss of control



Partner Discussion:
Which underlying need is easiest to miss when you're in the moment?

Look beneath the behavior.

Before we respond to what a student is doing, pause and consider what might be happening underneath.

Remember, we are making a hypothesis, not making an assumption.

Look at patterns, gather info, and stay curious as to what the misbehavior is a symptom of.



2. Behavior is communication.

- Student actions are purposeful; often an attempt to solve a problem.
- We must stop & “listen” to the message the behavior is conveying.



3. Behavior has function.

- Behavior is never random or aimless
- Individuals only repeat behavior when they get something out of it (e.g. if a student repeatedly misbehaving and gets to leave the classroom, they have learned that misbehaving further their desire to escape)
- Behavior has bookends: environmental variables that occur prior to the unwanted behavior (antecedents) and the response of the teacher & peers. These bookends fuel behavior & allow it to persist.

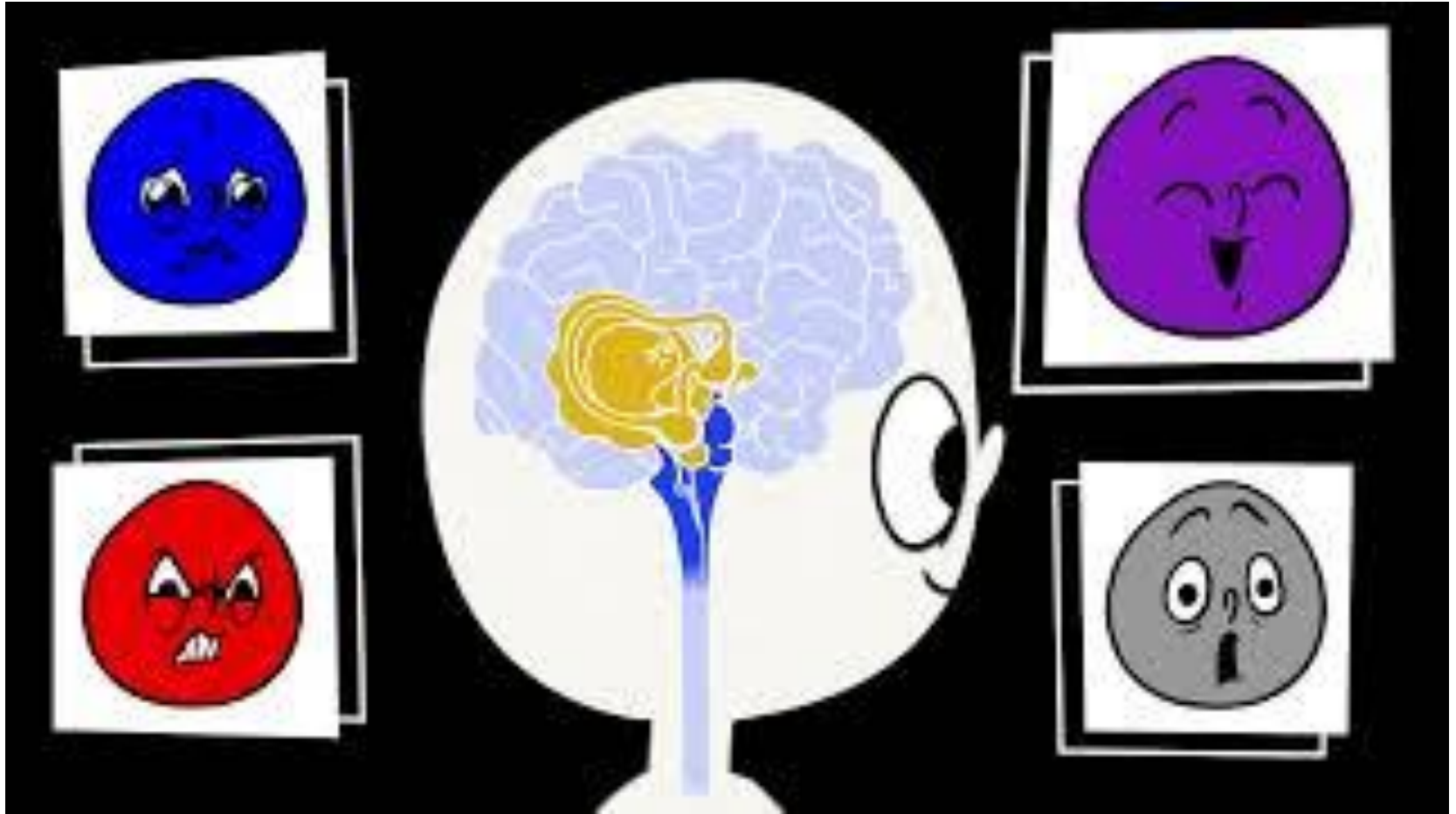
4. Behavior **CAN** be changed.

- Break the behavior code: look for patterns (time of day? Activity? People? location?)
- Interventions and plans must be aligned with the function of the behavior
- Consider the time frame: if a student has been demonstrating inappropriate behavior for years and lacks the necessary skills, the change will take longer.
- Teachers can utilize the [FSUSD Behavior Intervention Toolbox](#) to get started

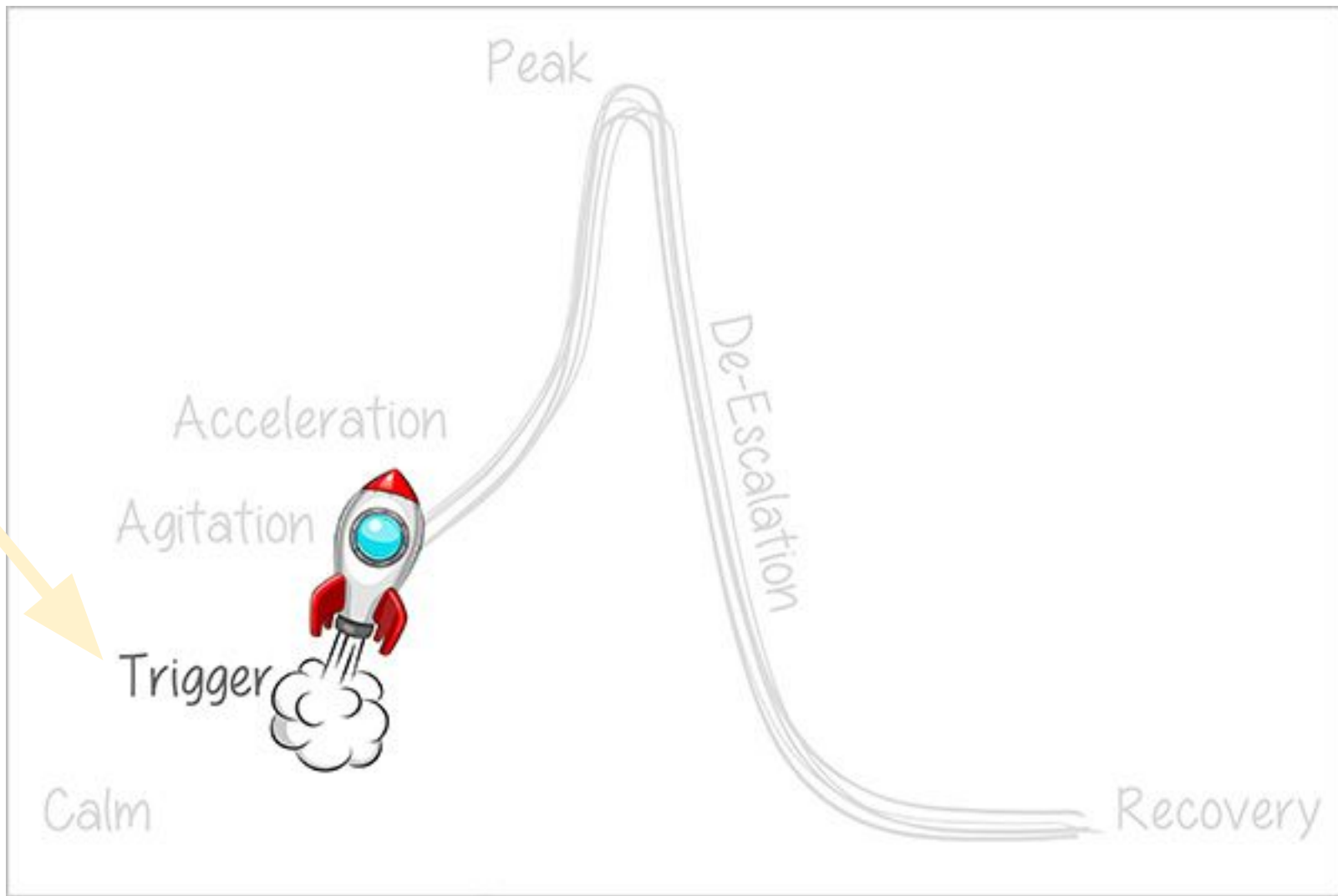
Four Critical Concepts to Understanding the Behavior...

Partner Discussion: What stands out the most from what we just learned about understanding behavior?

When a Student Flips Their Lid



TRY to
intervene
here!



Common Triggers of Crisis Behavior



Lack of attachment

Our brains are hardwired to evaluate tone, facial expressions, and posture. Harsh or dismissive interactions cause the nervous system to sense harm.



Mental health distress

Anxiety and depression, often rooted in traumatic experiences, can trigger crisis responses.



Mismatch of Expectations

Students accustomed to different rules at home may struggle to adapt to school-wide expectations.



Overstimulation

Environmental factors, peers, or technology can overwhelm students, making concentration difficult.

“I have come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element. It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes the weather. I possess tremendous power to make life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate, or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis is escalated or deescalated, and a person is humanized or dehumanized. If we treat people as they are, we make them worse. If we treat people as they ought to be, we help them become what they are capable of being.”

Haim G Ginott, Teacher and Child: A Book for Parents and Teachers

YOU ARE THE RE

Partner Discussion:

What might 'adding fuel'
look like?

What might 'bringing calm'
look like?

When a student is dysregulated, your response matters.

Your calm → can create calm

Your intensity → can increase intensity

Pause. Breathe. Respond—don't react.

Knowing What to Do



An adult's reaction can either **escalate** or **de-escalate** behavior.



Never enter into power struggles.



Use self-regulation strategies to stay calm.
Project calm and empathy rather than anger and frustration.



Goal: Prevent "flipping the lid".

Notice triggers and early warning signs proactively.



Wait until both are calm before correcting or punishing.
Students must accept responsibility, but timing is everything.

Avoid Communication Blockers

Marshall Rosenberg, a psychologist and the author of *Nonviolent Communication*, describes several communication blockers:

- **Judgment** -educators automatically place judgment on the student without understanding their perspective.
- **Comparisons** -expecting a student to have the same perspectives or feelings as other students.
- **Demand** -an educator demands that students treat them a certain way in a situation.
- **Denial of responsibility** -a teacher lacks the ability to take personal responsibility for how their own actions may have affected a situation.

Reflect: Have you ever found yourself using a communication blocker?



**1 BE FLEXIBLE—
CHANGE ACTIVITIES,
RESOURCES, OR DELIVERY**



**2 USE YOUR ATTENTION
& RELATIONSHIP**



**3 SIGNAL, WARN &
RESTATE EXPECTATIONS**



**4 TEACH AND
RETEACH**



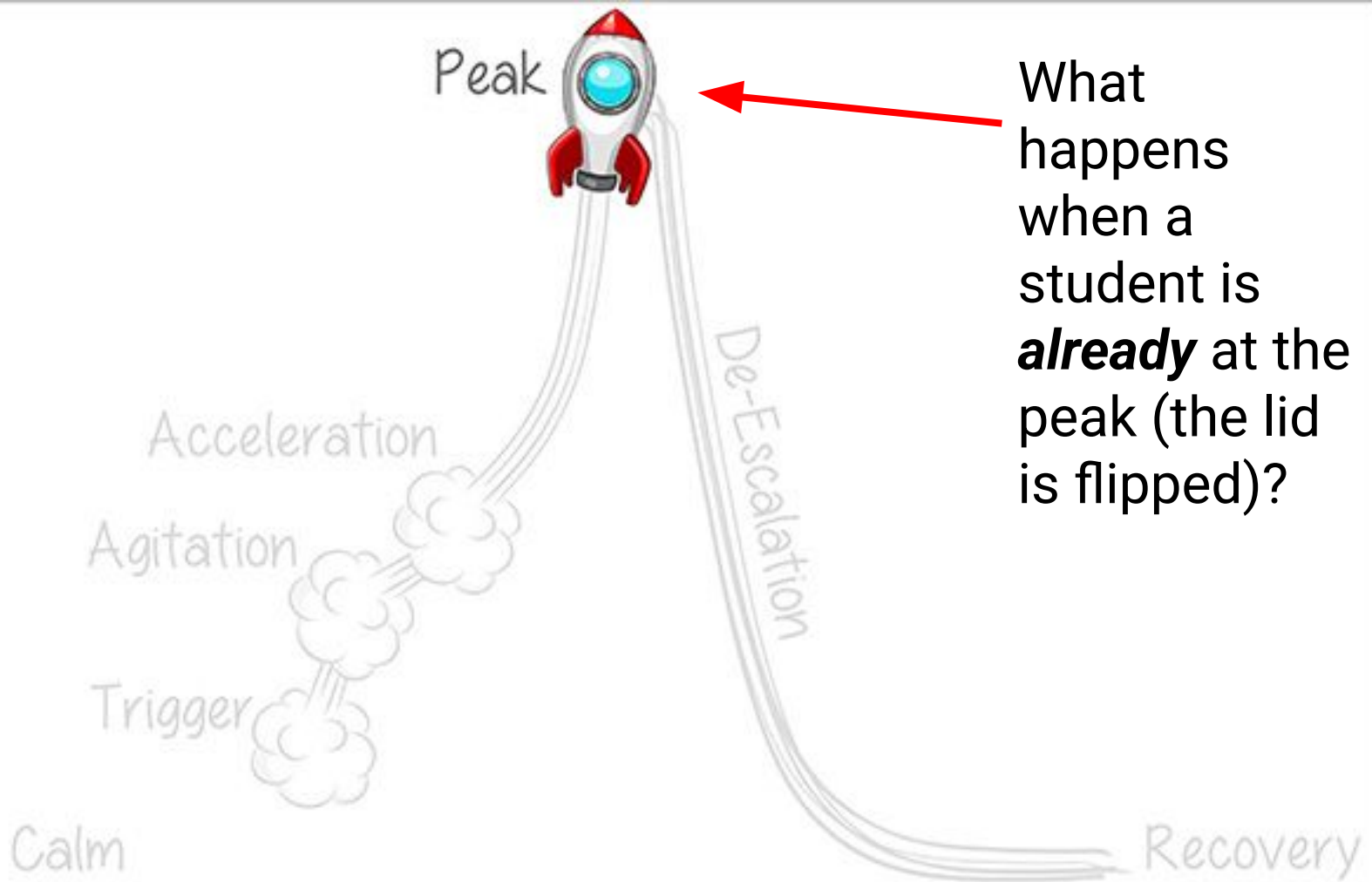
**5 CHANGE
THE ENVIRONMENT**



**6 USE POSITIVE
REINFORCEMENT**



**7 PROVIDE CHOICES &
RESPECT INDIVIDUALITY**



Remember...

- At this stage, reasoning, consequences, lectures, and problem-solving are usually **ineffective**.
- The teacher's job is to become the student's "borrowed regulator."

Flipped Lid: Plan of Action

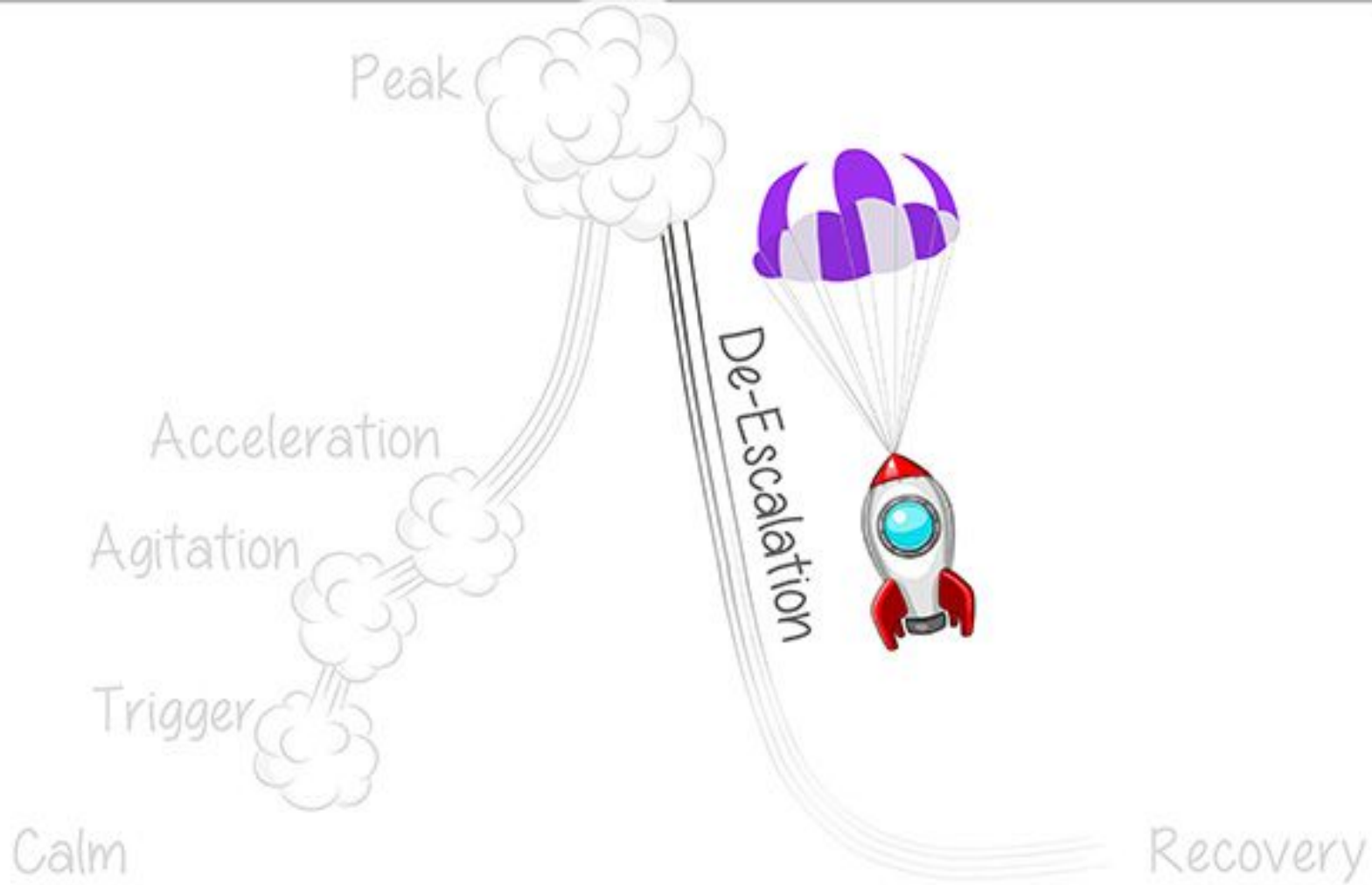
- Help the student slow down
- Use simple language
- Acknowledge their feelings
- Breathe!
- Protect dignity

Partner Discussion:
What does this look
like in practice?



The first step
is to calm the
“hulk brain.”





Co-Regulation: **Slow yourself down first!** Then help the student slow down:

Not Helpful

- **Rapid questioning**
- **Raised voice**
- **Emotional reactions**
- **Matching the students intensity**

"Why are you doing this?
Stop! What happened?"

Helpful

- **Lower voice volume**
- **Slow speech rate**
- **Relax shoulders**
- **Use fewer words**

"You're really upset right now."

"I'm here."

"We'll figure it out."

Students often co-regulate through the nervous systems around them.

Using Simple Language & Choices

A student whose emotions have taken over is not accessing the same level of reasoning, memory, and language processing as when they are regulated.

The more words an adult uses, the more likely the student is to:

- Stop listening
- Feel overwhelmed
- Perceive criticism
- Become defensive
- Escalate further

Not Helpful

"You can't act like this every time you lose. Remember what we talked about yesterday? Everyone loses sometimes and that's part of learning..."

"What should you be doing right now?"

Helpful

"Would you like water or a few minutes of quiet?"

"You can try the problem or take a 2-minute break."

Using Simple Language (continued)

As student dysregulation increases, teacher language should decrease.

When a student is regulated, you can explain, reflect, teach, and problem-solve. When a student is dysregulated, your communication should be:

- **Brief**
- **Calm**
- **Predictable**
- **Reassuring**
- **Non-judgmental**

Secondary Teachers: Avoiding the Power Struggle



Acknowledge Feelings Without Agreeing With Behavior

Not Helpful

"Calm down."

**"You're
overreacting."**

"This isn't that hard."

Helpful

"You're angry."

"That felt unfair."

**"You were expecting
something different."**

Students often escalate when they feel they are misunderstood.

Protect the Student's Dignity

Not Helpful

Public correction

**Public
consequences**

**Public debate/power
struggles**

Helpful

Proximity

**Inviting the student to
move to a quiet space**

**Redirect peer attention
elsewhere**

Many escalations become bigger because they happen in front of peers.

Scenario Activity

- With your partner, read through the scenario.
- Identify potential triggers.
- Identify adult behaviors that may have increased escalation.
- Identify adult behaviors that may have helped.
- Discuss what the adult could have done differently.



Scenario #1- Javier during group work

Potential Triggers

- Feeling unheard or dismissed by peers
- Social rejection
- Difficulty with flexibility and compromise
- Public disagreement
- Loss of status within the group

Teacher Behaviors That May Have Increased Escalation

- Addressing the conflict publicly
- Asking him to leave the room immediately after emotions intensified
- Focusing on compliance before connection

Teacher Behaviors That May Have Helped

- Encouraging respectful collaboration
- Monitoring the group interaction

Scenario #2- Maya during presentations

Potential Triggers

- Performance anxiety
- Fear of embarrassment
- Peer judgment
- Public speaking demands
- Feeling trapped or pressured

Teacher Behaviors That May Have Increased Escalation

- Insisting she present immediately
- Emphasizing expectations over emotional state
- Continuing demands after visible signs of anxiety

Teacher Behaviors That May Have Helped

- Offering encouragement
- Maintaining classroom expectations

Learning Intention & Success Criteria

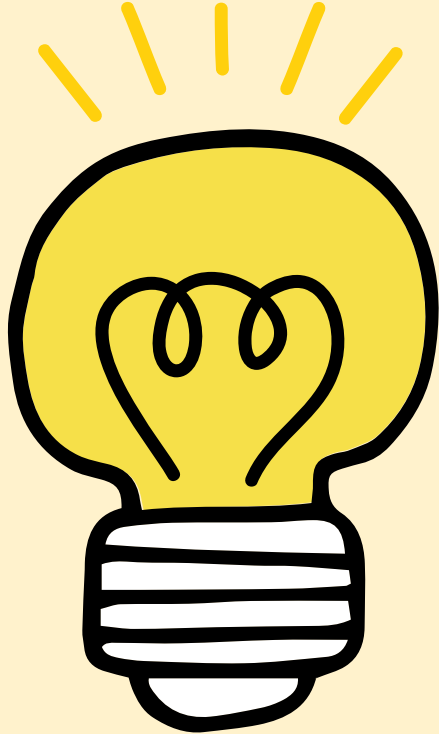
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Success Criteria

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Self-Assess: What's your level of confidence on the success criteria above?





THANK YOU!

Reach out to me if you want
to connect or have any
follow up questions!

MelissaA@fsusd.org

Additional professional development topics I have covered related to this subject:

De-escalation Strategies for Behavior Management

Trauma-informed Practices for Behavior Management

Building Rapport with students & Fostering Relationships

