

# In the Heat of the Moment: Strategies for De-escalating Children's Challenging Behaviors



Presented by  
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## How children feel about their behavior



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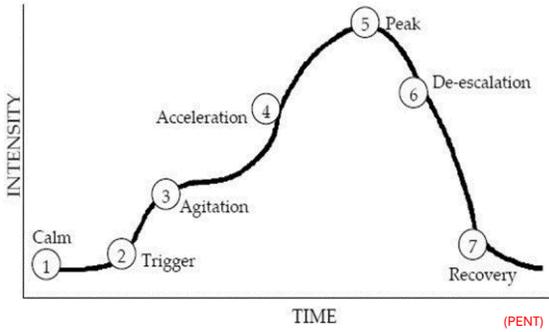
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### Behavior escalation cycle




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### Systems Response

- **Before an incident**
  - Action plans and supports
  - Prepare
  - Plan
- **During an incident**
- **After an incident**
  - Debrief
  - Take time to re-group




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### Anxiety is...

- Being apprehensive or afraid about a real or imagined circumstance
- Significant worry that interferes with the ability to take action
- Symptoms of anxiety can be expressed
  - in thinking
  - behavior
  - physical symptoms

Anxiety becomes a problem for children when it starts to get in the way of their everyday life

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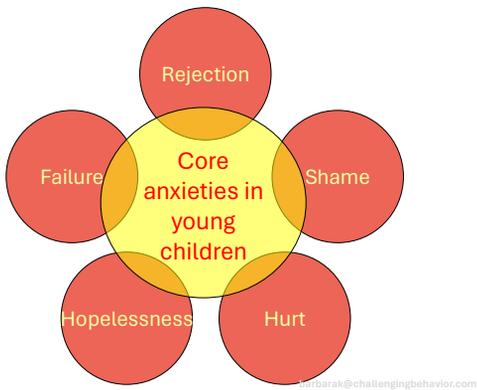
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### Thinking of "That child" with challenging behavior that you have worked with

How would you describe him/her when s/he is feeling safe and competent?

- Engaged
- Smiling
- Relaxed
- Interacting with peers
- Cooperative



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### Recognizing when "That Child" feels good about themselves

Observable and Internal

Physiology	Behavior
Smiling, swinging feet while sitting	Talking with peers Engaged in an activity
Feelings	Thoughts
Happy Proud Confident	"This is fun" "I can do this"

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• How would you describe him/her when feeling anxious?

- Physiology
- Behavior
- Facial expression
- Interaction with peers

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### Recognizing anxious behavior

Observable and Internal

Physiology	Behavior
Feelings	Thoughts

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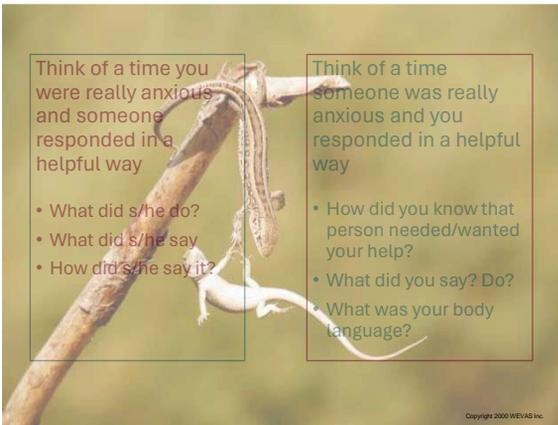
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### Open Communication Strategies

- **Connect**
  - A smile or nod
  - Door Openers
    - Are you okay?
    - Would you like some help?
  - Open ended questions
    - Who, what where, when, how?
- **Listen**
- **Comfort**
  - Respond to the need within
  - Acknowledge, encourage
- **Confirm**
  - Use validation statements
  - Reframe
- **Calibrate**

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### Non-verbal communication

- Allow your facial expression and stance to match what you are saying.
- Match their general stance.
- The quality of your voice should match the child's voice.
  - Tone
  - Cadence
  - Speed
  - Volume

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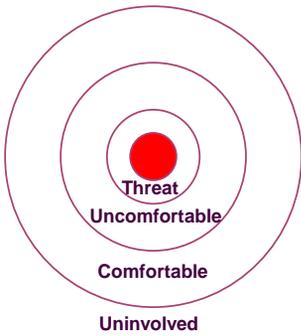
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### Circles of Comfort



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### Responding to a child's anxiety

Child's behavior in a Competent state	Child's Behavior when anxious	Your Response

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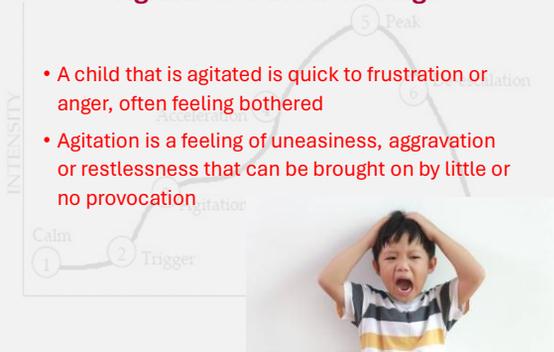
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### Agitation is the next stage

- A child that is agitated is quick to frustration or anger, often feeling bothered
- Agitation is a feeling of uneasiness, aggravation or restlessness that can be brought on by little or no provocation




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### What is Your #1 Button Pusher”?




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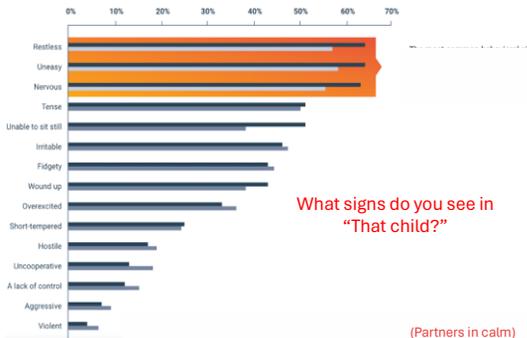
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### Behavioral signs of agitation



What signs do you see in "That child?"

(Partners in calm)

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How do you feel when your buttons are pushed?



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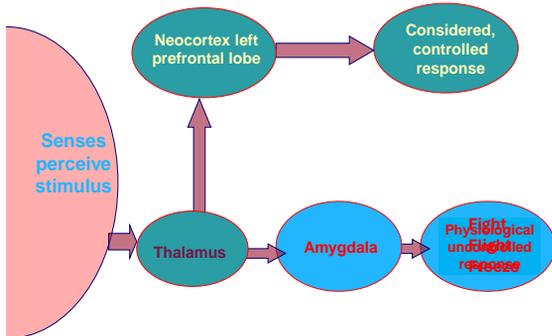
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### Amygdala Hijack



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### Out of control emotions

- Impair reasoning (even smart people sometimes act stupidly)
- Can result in not choosing the best response
- May increase the likelihood of escalating the student's behavior



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## Managing an emotional hijack

Your brain needs 6 seconds to take back control

- Thinking about it makes you more upset
- Perform an analytical mental function

**S = Stop**  
**T = Think**  
**A = Act**  
**R = Review**

Count to 10 in a foreign language  
 Take a deep breath and count to 6  
 Think of all the places you have lived  
 Visualize your favorite beach  
 Name several positive things about the child

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## How you respond is important

### Timing is everything

- Show empathy
- Validate the child’s feelings
- Be positive
  - Tell the child what to do, not what not to do.
  - Eliminate “No,” “Don’t,” “Stop” and “Why?”
- Recognize close approximations
- Ignore some behaviors
  - Give children attention when they are engaging in appropriate behaviors
- Use logical consequences
- Be assertive

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## Effective Responses

### Be assertive (Respects your and the child’s needs)

Start with the child’s name, pause to be sure you have his/her attention

What you say - content

How you say it – non-verbal cues

Use goal oriented language

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**The I-Message**

1. Statement of the behavior	"When you on your knees during story time
2. The effect of the behavior	"no one can see the pictures...
3. The feeling	"and that makes it hard for everyone else to enjoy the stor"y

(Thomas Gordon)

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### Acceleration/Agitation



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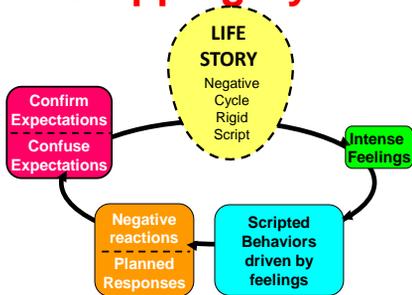
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### Stopping Cycles



Limiting responses are designed to help the child step back from preset scripts and hook into rational thinking

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### Limiting Responses

Responses	Purpose	Method
<b>The Interrupt</b>	Stop the inappropriate behavior Save face Cause the child to stop and think	Unexpected response Sense of humor
<b>Offering choices</b>	Stop the inappropriate behavior Save face Cause the child to stop and think	Unexpected response Offer a choice not a challenge

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### The interrupt

- Completely unpredictable
- Does not fit into the child's experience
- Delivered with a straight face
- Causes the child to stop and think
- Helps the child save face



How does that change the child's behavior?

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### Offer choices not challenges

- Identify your desired goal
- Positive choices increase cooperation
- Choices help children to stop and think




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### Using choice



- Wait until the child is calm enough to listen
- Keep your eyes and voice soft
- Respect personal space
- Be clear
- Respect the choice they make

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### Follow-up Strategies

1. Allow Time
2. Avoid Repetition
3. Walk away
4. Allow for Face Saving
5. Respect Feelings

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### The Peak Phase

**The most unpredictable phase**

- During this phase focus on:
  - Addressing disruptive acting-out behavior
  - Maintaining safety
- The child's behavior is out-of-control and may even pose a danger to themselves and others
  - Yelling
  - Having a tantrum
  - Throwing objects
  - Hitting others
  - Engaging in self-harm
  - Running out of the room or the school

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**Note what the educator is doing verbally and non-verbally that moves the child from:**

- Anxious to agitated
- Agitated to aggressive
- May even move to assaultive



Facing the Challenge  
Devereux

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## POLL

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### When a child is out of control

- The child no longer views the world from a rational perspective
- He/she is locked into a specific set of experiences connected to his/her life story that may, or may not be accurate
- Words only add fuel to the fire

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### Make safety the top priority

- The goal is to prevent harm from coming to the child and his classmates
- Be sure you are familiar with the center's procedures for:
  - Contacting the appropriate person for help (if needed)
  - Knowing what to do with or where to take the other children




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### Your Response



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### Using Distance The L-Stance

1. Well within the comfort zone
2. L-stance
3. Place weight on forward foot with rear foot moved farther back
4. Knees bent
5. Eyes relaxed
6. Watch their center or look over their shoulder




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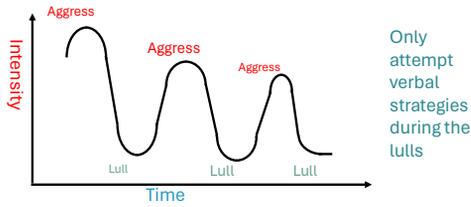
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### Defuse - Detect - Direct



Any statement, however, well delivered may be taken by child as further fuel for their fire

**If this happens, simply use your silence and nonverbal skills and wait for the next lull to try again**

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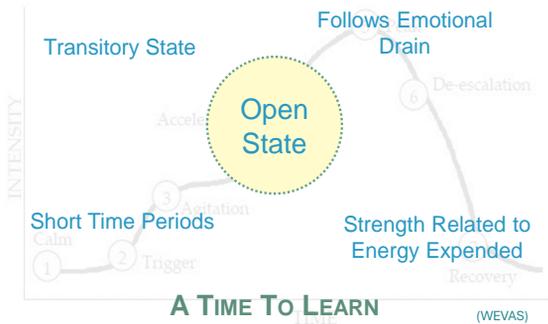
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### Recovery



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### Tips for Debriefing

- Encourage the child when they are down. (e.g. I know we can resolve this)
- If child becomes too emotional hook him/her into thinking (e.g. Ask for detail, or cognition)
- Acknowledge feelings. (e.g. "I know that at times you feel picked on.")
- Give the child credit for calming down
- Prompt the child to think through what happened and reflect on what could have gone differently
- Think about your body language, facial expression, tone of voice and remember the importance of respecting personal space

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### Re-entering the group

- What support do they need?
- Ask the child if they want to play on their own or with friends.
- Provide an activity they enjoy



**AND REMEMBER, EVERY DAY IS A NEW DAY**

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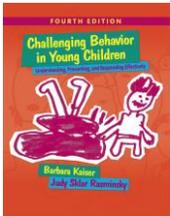
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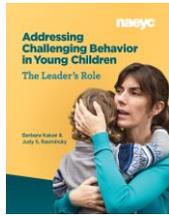
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**THANK YOU**




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**Challenging Behavior in Young Children:  
Understanding, Preventing, and Responding Effectively**  
 Barbara Kaiser and Judy Sklar Rasminsky  
[www.challengingbehavior.com](http://www.challengingbehavior.com)  
 Email: [barbarak@challengingbehavior.com](mailto:barbarak@challengingbehavior.com)

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