



SAFETY DIRECTOR BULLETIN



SCHOOLS DE-ESCALATION BEST PRACTICES

Recognizing and responding to red flags in a student's behavior can help prevent classroom situations from escalating, which can also help mitigate workers' compensation and other liability exposures. We explore five de-escalation strategies that support student and staff safety.

When students experience emotional dysregulation, losing their ability to control emotional responses, early and thoughtful intervention can help prevent escalation, particularly in special education environments. Knowing when and how to respond equips school staff to maintain safety while supporting students with care.

"Schools are continuing to increase their social and emotional support resources for students, but year-over-year incidents are still increasing," said JoAnna Pallardy, Risk Control Product Manager at Safety National. "With 67% of public schools [citing at least one violent incident](#) between 2021-2022, it is critical for staff to understand how to respond to these situations."

Below are five strategies that can help school staff navigate challenging moments with confidence and compassion.

1. Provide Space: When a student becomes emotionally dysregulated, physical proximity can sometimes intensify the situation. Staff should maintain supervision from a safe and respectful distance, ensuring the student feels supported without feeling crowded or pressured. Giving a student space allows them time to process emotions and regain control. Staff should avoid hovering or excessive monitoring, which may heighten frustration. Instead, they should remain visible and available while reducing feelings that could contribute to escalation.

2. Limit Words and Demands: Students experiencing dysregulation [often struggle to process language or follow multi-step instructions](#). In the moment, lengthy explanations, lectures, or threats of consequences are unlikely to be effective. School staff should use brief, calm statements and offer reassurance rather than demands. For example, "I'm here when you're ready," or "Let's take a minute," may help reduce stress and help the student begin to self-regulate.

3. Speak Calmly with Compassion: It can be difficult to maintain a sense of emotional regulation when de-escalating, but tone, pace, and body language communicate more than words. Staff modeling calm behavior can help guide the student back toward emotional stability. Staff should remember to breathe before talking to the student and ask for help from other school support staff if the situation has become too intense.

4. Use Sincerity When Reasoning: Often, dysregulation occurs when a student feels misunderstood or feels isolated from others. Staff can relate to them with sincerity, which may help them feel acknowledged without judgment. When appropriate, staff can collaborate on next steps, like possibly moving to a quieter space or working through another re-regulation technique. Genuine engagement can help rebuild trust and reduce the likelihood of repeated incidents.

5. Keep Crisis Protocol Contacts on Stand-By: De-escalation techniques are most effective when supported by clear procedures. School staff should use a district's crisis response plan, ensuring that the appropriate staff members are informed of a situation if it shows signs of escalating. Utilizing established reporting systems can ensure consistent safety methods for both students and staff.

Source: Carrier Chronicles – A Safety National® News Source

©2026 Safety National®. A member of the [Tokio Marie Group](#). All Rights Reserved. [Legal](#) | [Privacy](#)

This resource is intended for general information purposes only. It should not be construed as legal advice or legal opinion regarding any specific or factual situation. Always follow your organization's policies and procedures as presented by your manager or supervisor. For further information regarding this resource, contact your Safety Director at 877.398.3046. © All rights reserved.