



Top Ten Behaviour Intervention and De-escalation Strategies

'De-escalation is more often than not subtle and effective learner management. When staff de-escalate well, it is almost like the learner doesn't realise it...' (Steve Brown, 2014).

Brown celebrates using a checklist to guide staff, 'lots of professionals use checklists to remind them of what they need to do and what they need to remember... to inform them of risks and solutions in more high-risk circumstances'¹³. See below a guide or checklist of strategies.

¹ Steve Brown (2014) Autism Spectrum Disorder and De-escalation Strategies: A practical guide to positive behavioural interventions for children and young people.

1. Take an empathic and non-judgmental approach

If someone says or does something you perceive as strange or irrational in behaviour, judging them or discounting their feelings can have an adverse effect on the situation as it unfolds. Whether or not you think those feelings are justified, they are a reality to the other person. Actively listen to create or maintain a connection.

2. Respect personal space

Personal space is 360 degrees, horizontal and vertical. Towering over a learner, standing in front of doorways and exits or being in any other way intimidating with your use of space during an intervention can provoke an unwanted response.

Have an awareness of the effects of your positioning in relation to the learner. In some cases, an individual may feel supported and anchored by close proximity and in others de-escalation is more successful when there is more distance.

3. Use of Non-Verbal Communications (NVCs)

Being mindful of gestures, facial expressions, movements, and tone of voice can be of benefit in de-escalation. The more a person feels loss of control, the less they hear other people's words. Learners are then more likely to respond positively to non-threatening, non-aggressive NVCs.

4. Consistent, calm, adult behaviour

Behaviour influences behaviour. Remaining calm, rational, and professional when responding to behaviours is imperative. Behaviour interventions should be delivered with both parties' dignity intact.

5. Feelings in focus

Getting the facts into a perspective context is important, however, how a person feels is a major factor in dealing with behavioural situations. In certain behaviours, people have trouble identifying how they feel about what is happening to them. Ask questions that support the other party in expressing their feelings. Be prepared to listen to the other's perspective without interruption even if it is different to your own. Remain curious and open to finding out something you don't know.

6. Use 'drive bys'

Before speaking, attempt to refocus a learner with gentle reminders of the expectations. Use simple encouraging gestures or signs to point them in the right direction before challenging them directly. Examples of drive bys may be: putting the necessary equipment on their desk, a thumbs up, pointing to the sign of the rule needed to succeed or asking if they are ok.

7. Script your interventions

Agree a script for landing a tough message softly. Explain to learners what you have noticed, remind of the rule or agreement and calmly state what needs to happen next or what their options are. Ensure you are assertive and not aggressive. Planning a script ensures you are focused and helps you to avoid verbosity.

8. Set limits

If a person's behaviour is aggressive, defensive, hostile or disruptive, an appropriate action to take is to give them clear, simple, and enforceable limits. In circumstances where a person acts in a belligerent way, offer concise and respectful choices and consequences.

9. Fogging and redirecting

Directly responding to challenging questions can result in providing additional oxygen to a difficult situation. If a person challenges your authority, an effective way of managing the situation is to redirect their attention to the issue at hand. Your ego doesn't need to enter the conversation.

10. Allow take up time

Allow take up time for a learner to make a decision. When being asked to turn your behaviour around space should be granted to do this. The learner should have the opportunity to do the right thing. Give them a few moments to consider what you have said to them. Although silence can cause a feeling of awkwardness, it can also be used as a chance to pause, reflect and allow a settled period of calmness to occur. This approach can provide a person with the opportunity to stop, take stock of the situation, consider what's happening around them and work out in their own mind, how they should proceed.

The aim for these strategies is to encourage and allow learners to feel they can chose to make the appropriate choices rather than feeling cornered into it.