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RESOURCES

[Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports \(PBIS\) - Strategies for De-Escalating Student Behavior in the Classroom](#)

[School Action for Safety and Health \(SASH\) - Preventing Injuries from Student Behaviors](#)

QUESTIONS

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Supporting Safe De-Escalation in the Classroom

by Scarlett Sadler

Classrooms and school campuses can be fast-paced and unpredictable. Teachers, paraeducators, and instructional aides regularly work in close proximity to students who may experience frustration, emotional dysregulation, or behavioral escalation. When behavior intensifies, staff may be at risk of injury, particularly if early warning signs are missed. How staff recognize changes in behavior, position themselves within the environment, and communicate during challenging moments can influence whether a situation stabilizes or escalates.

School employees experience higher rates of workplace injury than many other workers, including injuries related to aggressive student behavior. While certain settings may see more frequent behavioral intensity, escalation can occur in any classroom or supervised school environment. Districts, as employers, are responsible for maintaining a safe workplace, which includes identifying and reducing foreseeable risks during behavioral incidents.

Recognizing Escalation Early

Effective de-escalation begins before a crisis point. Behavioral escalation often develops in stages. Changes in tone, pacing, refusal of routine tasks, physical tension, or withdrawal may signal that a student's behavior is escalating. When staff recognize these indicators early, they can adjust expectations, reduce demands, or offer a structured break before behavior intensifies.

Positioning and Environmental Considerations

Physical positioning is a key safety consideration. Standing directly in front of a student, blocking an exit, or becoming confined in a tight space can increase vulnerability. Maintaining a respectful distance, positioning at an angle rather than face-to-face, and ensuring clear pathways for movement

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can reduce both perceived threat and physical risk.

Communication During Escalation

Communication style influences outcomes. When someone is experiencing dysregulation, they often struggle to process complex language. Lengthy explanations or raised voices may further escalate the situation. Short, neutral statements delivered calmly are more likely to reduce escalation. Pausing before responding and modeling controlled breathing can help stabilize the interaction.

Procedures and Follow-Up

De-escalation strategies are most effective when supported by clear site procedures. Staff should understand how to request assistance early and know who to contact if behavior continues to escalate. Where crisis response protocols are in place, these strategies should align with those expectations. After significant incidents, reviewing patterns alongside injury or claims trends can help identify practical adjustments in supervision, training, or environment.

De-escalation practices apply across grade levels and school settings. Small shifts in recognition, positioning, and communication can meaningfully reduce staff injuries while maintaining supportive, student-centered environments.

For support or guidance on strengthening de-escalation practices and reducing employee injury risk, contact [Risk Control](#).