

# De-escalation strategies

It is often possible to minimise behaviours that may lead to physical harm or danger to self or others by acting early — immediately before or as behaviour begins to escalate. Ignoring escalation and not addressing its cause can increase the frequency and/or severity of the behaviour.

Therefore, it is important for teachers to identify the triggers that cause concerning behaviour and to recognise the early signs of escalation. This will provide an opportunity to apply strategies that reduce, rather than heighten, an emerging situation.

## Some recognised de-escalation strategies include:

- Keep verbal instructions simple and minimal, using a calm tone of voice
- Use clear, direct language or the student's preferred method of communication (focus on the behaviours you want them to display rather than the ones you don't)
- Reinforce the desired behaviour or positive alternate behaviours when demonstrated
- Acknowledge the student's underlying or expressed emotion (e.g. anger/distress/sadness)
- Use active listening skills
- Provide take-up time
- Be aware of body language (adopt a non-threatening stance – open, relaxed and hands down)
- Problem-solve with the student to address the issue if it is safe to do so.
- Allow adequate personal space
- Use non-verbal cues
- Provide options (within the limits) to help student feel they are in control of their decisions
- Allow the student to access an alternative space **with** school staff that is less stimulating or removes access to the triggers of behaviour in order to self-regulate and problem-solve. (**Note:** never forcibly remove or coerce a student to an alternate space).

**Important:** Effective de-escalation is dependent on the individual needs of the student at the time. If staff are not careful, sometimes what they do to de-escalate can maintain or strengthen the behaviour (e.g. using an alternative work area, or break-away space, when a student finds particular work difficult may reinforce escape behaviour.)