

**COMPLETE**

# **DE-ESCALATION**

**GUIDE IN THE CLASSROOM**

**STAYING IN CONTROL WHEN STUDENTS AREN'T**

# THE FOUNDATION

Most de-escalation trainings assume you'll remember what to do in the heat of the moment.

**You won't.**

Not because you're bad at your job. Because your nervous system hijacks your brain when threat shows up. And an escalated student feels like a threat, even when it's not physical.

**The Hard Truth:**

You can't execute strategy if your not regulated first.

**The Solution:**

You don't need more strategies. You need a regulated nervous system and a clear identity before the student even opens their mouth.

# THE 3 LEVELS OF DE-ESCALATION

<u>Level</u>	<u>Focus</u>	<u>When It Happens</u>
Level 1	Regulate Yourself	Before You Intervene
Level 2	Regulate the Interaction	During the Moment
Level 3	Repair and Rebuild	After the Storm Passes

**Most teachers skip level 1. That's why they escalate with the student.**



# REGULATE YOURSELF FIRST

The 5-Second Reset.

When a student escalates, your body will try to match theirs. **This is biological.** You have 5 seconds to interrupt it.

**Step 1: Stop Moving.** Freeze your body. Movement feeds adrenaline. Stillness feeds control.

**Step 2: Breathe Low.** One deep breathe into your belly. Not a gasp. A controlled 4-second inhale through the nose. This tells your nervous system: "I'm safe. I'm in charge."

**Step 3: Drop Your Center.** Feel your feet on the floor. Relax your shoulders. Lower your hands to your sides or clasp them in front of you. Open palms = non-threatening. Pointing = threat.

**Step 4: Name It.** Silently say to your self: "They are escalated. I am not. This is not an emergency."

**Step 5: Choose.** Now you intervene. Not from reaction. From intention.

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## THE PRE-GAME MINDSET

Before you even walk into a room where a student is escalated, **ask yourself:**

“Am I trying to **win** this moment or **stabalize** it?”

If you are trying to win, you’ve already lost.

**Your Only Goal:**

Lower the temperature.

**Nothing** else matters until that happens.

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## QUICK REFERENCE: AM I REGULATED ENOUGH?

Ask **yourself**:

- Is my voice lower than theirs?
- Are my hands still?
- Am I breathing?
- Can I pause without filling the silence?

If the answer to **any** of these is “**NO**”, you’re not ready.

Take **another** 5 seconds.

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# THE 4-PHASE DE-ESCALATION FRAMEWORK

## Phase 1: DROP THE ROPE

A power struggle requires **TWO** people pulling. Refuse to pick up the rope. What this looks like:

Student: "I'm not doing this stupid work!"

Teacher (pulling): "**Yes you are, and you'll do it now** or you're going to the office."

Result: **Escalation** continues. Now its about **winning**, not work.

Instead:

Student: "I'm not doing this stupid work!"

Teacher (**drops the rope**): "Okay. You're upset. I'm not going to fight with you about it."

**Then stop talking.**

Why this works:

When you stop pulling, the student has nothing to push against. The **energy deflates.**

Scripts for dropping the rope:

- "I'm not doing this right now."
- "I hear you. We're not doing this dance today."
- "Take a moment. I'll be over here when you are ready."
- "This conversation isn't working right now. Let's hit pause."

**Key rule:** After you drop the rope, be quiet. Don't fill the silence with lectures. **Silence is your ally.**

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## PHASE 2: VALIDATE WITHOUT AGREEING

Validation is not an agreement. Validation is an **acknowledgement**.

An escalated student needs to feel **heard** before they can **hear** you.

What **validation** sounds like:

Instead of:

**“Calm down!”**

**“That’s not true!”**

**“You need to STOP!”**

**“That’s disrespectful!”**

Say:

“I can see something’s bothering you.”

“I hear your frustrated.”

“You’re really upset right now. I get it.”

“Something’s clearly going on today.”

The formula:

“I hear/see \_\_\_\_\_. That makes sense you’d feel \_\_\_\_\_”

Example: “I see you threw your paper. That makes sense you’d be **frustrated**, this assignment is tough.”

Why it works: When a student feels heard, their defense system lowers. You can’t talk logic to a **defensive** brain.

**WARNING: Do NOT** follow a validation with **“BUT.”**

“I hear you’re upset, **BUT** you still need to do the work.” That “but” cancels the validation. The student stops listening after the “but.”

Instead: Validate. Pause. Then redirect **SEPERATELY**.

“I hear/see you’re upset.” (PAUSE)

“Here’s what needs to happen next....”

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## PHASE 3: GIVE A WAY OUT

An escalated student feels **trapped**. Trapped students get more **escalated**.

You must **build** a bridge back to dignity.

The Principle: Give them a **choice** that preserves their autonomy while meeting your requirement.

Choice Scripts:

Situation: Refusing work → Script: **“You can do it at your desk or at the quiet corner. Your choice.”**

Being disruptive → **“You can reset here or take 2 minutes at the quiet corner & come back ready.”**

Arguing → **“We can talk about this now calmly, or we can talk about it later. Which works for you?”**

Shut down → **“You don’t have to talk right now. Just sit here. We’ll figure it out when you’re ready.”**

**The magic phrase: “Help me understand what’s going on?”**

This isn’t **weakness**. It’s **strategic**. It positions you as an ally, not the enemy.

When they **refuse** the choice: Stay **calm**. Stay **consistent**.

**“That’s okay. You don’t have to choose yet. Let me know when you are ready.”**  
Then wait. Don’t hover. Don’t lecture. **Just go about business nearby.**

Silence + patience = **pressure release.**



## PHASE 4: PRESERVE RELATIONSHIP

Once the temperature drops, your job isn't done.  
How you exit **MATTERS**.

### Do **NOT**:

- Gloat ("See?, I told you.")
- Lecture ("Next time just do what I say.")
- Hold grudges ("You're on my list now.")

### Do **THIS**:

- "We good?"
- "Alright. Let's move on."
- "Tomorrow's a new day."
- "I appreciate you coming back around."

Short. Clean. Forward-moving.

The **follow-up** (later that day or the next day):  
Pull them aside briefly.

- "Hey, we good from earlier/yesterday?"
- "I know that wasn't you. Let's keep it moving."
- "You're not in trouble. Just checking in."

This tells them: **I see you** as more than their worst moment.

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**THISWAY**

**THATWAY**

**WRONGWAY**

**TURNAROUND**

## THE DE-ESCALATION SCRIPT BANK:

When a student is **YELLING**:

**Do:**

Lower your voice →

Use their name softly →

Say: "I hear you" →

Wait for a pause →

**Don't:**

Match their volume

Yell over them

Say: "Stop yelling!"

Interrupt

Script: **"I hear you. I'm right here. I'm listening."**

**← WRONG**

**RIGHT →**

## THE DE-ESCALATION SCRIPT BANK:

When a student is **REFUSING**:

**Do:**

State expectation once →

Give space →

Offer a choice →

**Don't:**

Repeat yourself 5 times.

Stand over them

Threaten consequences

**Script:** “Here’s what I need ...(task). You can do it now or a take a moment and do it in a few. Let me know.”

N<sub>1</sub> O<sub>1</sub> B<sub>3</sub> O<sub>1</sub> D<sub>2</sub> Y<sub>4</sub>

S<sub>1</sub> A<sub>1</sub> I<sub>1</sub> D<sub>2</sub>

I<sub>1</sub> T<sub>1</sub>

W<sub>4</sub> A<sub>1</sub> S<sub>1</sub>

E<sub>1</sub> A<sub>1</sub> S<sub>1</sub> Y<sub>4</sub>

## THE DE-ESCALATION SCRIPT BANK:

When a student is **CURSING**:

**Do:**

**Don't:**

Stay flat emotionally →

**Act shocked/offended**

Do ignore the language → **“Don't you talk to me that way!”**  
(Address the emotion)

Set boundary, **CALMLY** → **Escalate with the student**

Script: “I'm not focused on the language. I'm focused on you. What's going on?”



## THE DE-ESCALATION SCRIPT BANK:

When a student is **THREATENING TO LEAVE:**

**Do:**

Stay calm →

Acknowledge their feeling →

Offer an alternative →

**Don't:**

Block the door physically

Say "You're not going anywhere!"

Chase them

Script: "I can see you need space. Here's what works: you step into the "quiet corner" for 2 minutes, then we can talk."



## THE DE-ESCALATION SCRIPT BANK:

When a student is **SILENT/SHUT DOWN**:

**Do:**

Lower pressure →

Sit nearby quietly →

Say “We’ll talk when ready” →

**Don’t:**

**Demand they talk**

**Stare at them**

**Keep asking whats wrong**

**Script: “You don’t need to talk right now. I’m just going to be here for a minute. Let me know when you are ready.”**



## AFTER THE STORM - REPAIR AND REBUILD

The 3-Step Recovery Process:

Step 1: Check **yourself**.

Did you stay regulated? If not, what triggered you? This isn't guilt, **it's data**. Use it to get better.

Step 2: Check on **them**.

Brief. **Private**. Low-stakes.

“You good?”

“We straight?”

“Tomorrow is a fresh start.”

Step 3: Reset the **standard**.

Next interaction, act normal. **Don't** punish with coldness. **Don't** overcompensate with fake sweetness. Just consistent, **calm**, clear.

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## WHEN YOU NEED TO ADDRESS IT FORMALLY

If the behavior requires a conversation later:

The formula:

1. State what happened (**facts only**).
2. State the **expectation**.
3. Ask **their** perspective.
4. Problem-solve **TOGETHER**.

“Yesterday, when I asked you to start work, you yelled and walked out. That can’t happen. What was going on there? **What do WE need to do** differently so today goes better?”

This is **accountability + relationship**. Not one or the other.

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## WHAT TO DO WHEN NOTHING WORKS

When a student is **unsafe**.

De-escalation has its **limits**. If a student is:

- Physically violent
- Destroying property
- Threatening others
- Completely out of control

Your job changes. Now it's **safety** first.

- Clear the room if needed
- Call for support
- Remove other students
- Document everything

De-escalation is for **most** situations. Safety protocols are for the **rest**.

Know the **difference**.



## WHEN YOU NEED SUPPORT

You are **not** meant to do this **alone**.

- Talk to your admin team
- Request training for your whole staff
- Build a crisis response plan
- Ask for a debrief after incidents

And **most** importantly:

Get **support** for yourself. This work is **heavy**. Don't carry it alone.

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## YOUR DAILY REGULATION PRACTICE

5 minutes a day to stay **UNBREAKABLE**.

### Morning (2 minutes)

Before you enter the building:

- 3 deep breaths
- Say: "Today I stay steady, **NO MATTER WHAT.**"
- Visualize one challenging student and see yourself calm.

### Midday (1 minute)

Between classes or during prep:

- Feet on floor.
- Roll shoulders back
- One deep breath
- Ask: "**How am I doing right now?**"

### After School (2 minutes)

Before you drive home:

- 3 deep breaths
- Name one win (even if it's **SMALL**)
- Let the rest go
- Say: "I'm off duty. Time to be **present** at home."

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## THE UNBREAKABLE EDUCATOR CODE

1. I **regulate** before I react.
2. I don't fight for power, I **lead** with presence.
3. I validate before I correct (**connection before correction**).
4. I give students a way back to **dignity**.
5. I **seperate** the behavior from the human.
6. I **stay steady** so they can too.
7. I am the adult. I set the tone. **ALWAYS.**

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## DIGGING DEEPER

This guide is meant to give you tools. Tools without a deep foundation will fail under pressure.

True de-escalation mastery comes from:

- Emotional regulation training.
- Identity work.
- Authority presence.
- Nervous system conditioning.
- Consistent practice with feedback.

Your **students**, your **family**, and most importantly, **YOU** need **YOU** to be steady. You **deserve** to teach without losing yourself.

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# FINAL WORD

## You Made It This Far for a Reason

You didn't finish this guide by accident. Somewhere inside you, there's still a **fire**. It might be **buried under exhaustion**. It might be covered by years of "this is just how it is." But it's there. **You** became an educator to **make a difference**. Not to survive. Not to react. Not to dread Mondays. Here's the truth no one tells you: The **students** who need you most **will also test you most**. Not because you're doing it wrong. Because they're looking for someone who **won't break**. Someone who **won't leave**. Someone who **stays steady** when the world feels chaotic. **That someone is you**. Not perfect you. Not "has it all figured out" you. **Just you**; regulated, present, and unwilling to lose yourself in the chaos. This guide gave you tools. But tools don't change classrooms. **Teachers change classrooms**. Regulated teachers. **Confident teachers**. Teachers who know who they are before the door even opens. **That's you now**. Not because you read this. Because you'll use it. Because you'll practice. Because you'll fail forward and try again. Because you'll **breathe** before you react, **validate** before you correct, and give students a way back to **dignity** when everyone else has written them off. You are not just a classroom manager. **You are a leader of future leaders**. And leaders? They don't break when it gets hard. They get steady. Now go lead like only you can. **Your classroom is waiting**.



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**Life's pressure is equal to  
your resistance.**

**BRYANT MCGILL**