

Centinela Youth Services

Reframing School Discipline

Viewing behavior as evidence of an unmet need.



When we approach behavior as a clue to an unmet need and its underlying cause, we can then most effectively address it. By shifting our perspective on behavior, we as adults, can offer more well-rounded support to our students.

HOW TO APPROACH STUDENTS WITH CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR

Step 1: Begin with a Foundation of Trust: To get an accurate read of a students needs, we must work as a team to identify the most trusted adult (security, admin, teacher, etc.) to speak with the student and gather information. Give that designated adult space and time with the student.

- This applies to both student *and* parents/caregivers.

Step 2: Ask Questions Neutrally: Lead with curiosity, ask open-ended questions, and leave space for silence. Silence is a valid response.

- Refer to the first section on the back of this page for further guidance.

Step 3: Get Insight into the Root Cause of the Issue: Identify the unmet need.

- Ex: A students behavior is being judged as attention seeking. After talking with them, you discover they receive minimal attention and support at home.

Step 4: As a Team, Communicate and Collaborate to Meet the Need: With the unmet need identified, establish what supports that student may benefit from.

- Ex: [continued from above] Shift response from judging attention seeking behavior to encouraging them. Guide them to feel empowered and accomplished through resources like a leadership or mentorship program.

Step 5: Repair Harm: Now that supports are in place, we can address harm.

- Ex: A youth brings a knife to school in their backpack.
- Identify harm: They violated trust with school officials.
- Address harm: Collaboratively decide how the trust can be rebuilt.

DE-ESCALATION

Once a trusted adult has been identified, utilize the following “Do’s + Don’ts” of de-escalation. Once de-escalated, begin the 5-step approach *above*.

DO	DON'T
Give student space to clear their mind: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • remove from area • walk around (track, field) • give them choices 	Unnecessarily limit their space <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sometimes the constraints of a room can feel overwhelming
Be patient : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • give them time to calm down 	Rush to calm them
Make them feel heard : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • express how much you care and that you are listening 	Silence them



De-Escalation Tips and Strategies

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| ❖ Undivided Attention | ❖ Allow for Silence |
| ❖ Adequate Personal Space | ❖ Clarify Messages |
| ❖ Open & Accepting Body Language | ❖ Identify Points of Agreement |
| ❖ Neutral Facial Expressions | ❖ Develop a Plan with Their Input |
| ❖ Remain Nonjudgmental | ❖ Provide Options |
| ❖ Regulate Tone and Breath | ❖ Recognize Personal Limits |
| ❖ Simple & Direct Language | ❖ Accessible Escape Route |
| ❖ Focus on Feelings | ❖ Seek Support |

Use words and phrases that de-escalate, such as:

- I wonder if...
- Let's try...
- It seems like...
- Maybe we can...
- Tell the person what you want them to do rather than what you do not want them to do. For example, "I want you to sit down" rather than "stop arguing with me" – or offer an invitation to sit down.

Things to Avoid:

- Making threats
- Taking it personally; Being defensive
- Using humor unless you are sure it will help, and you have a very good relationship with the person
- Sarcasm
- Humiliating the person

After any outburst or incident, always make time to debrief, repair and rebuild, or the relationship could suffer.