Many brain-compatible tools and strategies have been developed to enhance students' capacities to learn and self-regulate. These tools are having a profound impact on learning and behavior in classrooms across the country. My colleagues and I will be sharing the tools we have found to be most effective in this e-newsletter.

Nipping Problems In the Bud: Some De-Escalation Techniques

As part of creating a learning environment that is both relaxed and promotes alert and focused learners, a teacher, interventionist or aide needs to have a bank of de-escalation techniques ready to use. I have gathered some of NEARI's most commonly used de-escalation techniques to share. Our staff use them with students who are in the early stages of escalating. Early escalation could take the form of making demands, holding up the group intentionally, becoming boisterous, mistreating classroom materials, or just saying "No, I don't want to" when the teacher says "It is time to clean up", "...join the others, or "...sit and work".

Of course it is important to be sure that the new troublesome behavior is an intentional attempt to sidetrack the teacher or the class. There are many reasons for being out of sorts, for resistance or refusal, so before you assume the student is purposefully disrupting the routine, and is sending a message that he won't do the activity no matter what, check in with him/her. This is really the first step when de-escalating.

With de-escalation, you are working to defuse the situation, calm things down, and avoid a power struggle. AFTER you
achieve this goal, you might want to address the behavior in some way, but the first goal is to defuse the situation. You don't want to get into a struggle, a 'yes, you will', 'no, I won't' conflict. There is no need for that anyway, because the teacher already has the power and at any moment can set a limit and consequence, either alone or with help. Remember setting a limit is NOT the same thing as winning a power struggle.

Winning a power struggle with a "difficult" student is never the goal. Being right never improves a situation. It does not foster a close relationship or a feeling of safety, and it certainly does not help the student commit to joining the lesson.

Sometimes it seems like the "No, I won't" is just willfulness. But it usually comes from another place too--a place of anxiety, confusion or fear. So, here are some ways to de-escalate an escalating behavior in the hope of fostering mutual understanding and eventual buy-in.

1. Approach the student with an open friendly stance early on. Ask how the student is doing. Or just stand nearby and ask if the student needs help.
2. Lower and soften your voice.
3. Use descriptive words one can see, hear and touch: I see that you are crying hard; would you like a Kleenex? Do you need some time, say 5 minutes just sitting on the couch to settle yourself down?
4. Tell the student the results of what he is doing that he might be unhappy about: you will miss the discussion, you won't be able to share your work, or the students will be sorry to have not heard your report.
5. You can also affirm that being out of routines is okay. It is important that when any of us is upset, we can take the time to calm ourselves and think more clearly. Ask what alternative...
6. Appeal for cooperation as part of the larger community. (The group could use your expertise.)

7. Encourage the student and let him know that he is capable of doing what you are asking. Give examples from similar situations in the past.

8. Tell the student what you will do while he takes a break and what you hope for or expect next. Never keep secrets, bribe the student (if you stop, you can get ____) or whisper to another staff near a student.]

9. Provide a quiet private place for the student to be without 3 or 4 staff hovering and talking nearby.

10. Identify, or better, ask about the student's feelings. Ask what happened? Listen to the story.

11. Focus on what you can agree on. Honor shared values.

12. Set your position aside (or ask him to do so) and present a few choices.

13. Ask questions about what might be happening, but only do this with someone whom you know might be willing to hear your view who is calming and has the mental capacity at that time to enter a discussion with you.

14. Focus on getting back into routines, making light of the issue (if it is not serious); find humor in the situation.

15. Redirect the student to another topic and revisit this situation at a more neutral, less volatile time.

Each of these choices is appropriate for different situations. Intervening is an art, and deciding what to do when takes care and practice. The important underlying message to the student is that we care about you and value a structured, relaxed, calm environment where all your needs will be heard loudly and clearly.

I hope some of these techniques will help, especially at this time of year when
students sometimes have sad memories, extra frustration, and more needs.

Penny

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* Time on Teaching v. Time On Learning: They Are Not The Same
* Normalization: An Important Brain-based Concept That Has Stood the Test of Time
* Auditory Processing: A Hidden Issue for Learners That Schools Often Know Little About
* More Proof That Stress and Learning Don't Mix
* Nine Principles of Accelerated Learning
* A Great Summer Reading List On The Brain And Learning
* The Learning-Ready Resource Center Is Open For Business
* Being Introverted In An Extroverted World
* Revisiting the Original Brain Based Principles of Learning
* Three Overarching Principles of Brain Based Teaching

2015
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* Circadian Rhythms Play A Role In Learning
* Good Ways To Begin The School Year
* Some Famous Quotes About ROUTINES to Ponder
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* Belief and Effort = Success
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* What Gets Students Engaged in Learning?
* Do You Have A Laughing, Playful Classroom?
* Using Frequency, Intensity and Duration To Improve Learning Outcomes
* Things That May Help De-escalate Students' Disruptive Behaviors

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