



Learning Community

Behavior Support Techniques

Behavior support techniques enable us to intervene at moments of agitation to prevent the escalation of emotions and behavior. When successfully implemented, behavior support techniques help us de-escalate youth and avoid crisis.

Strategy	Description	Tips to Remember
Prompting	Signaling either through verbal or non-verbal cues to begin a desired behavior or stop an inappropriate behavior.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ A prompt is not a threat, i.e. “do this or else!” ✓ A prompt should not be given more than once or twice. ✓ Prompts should be given pleasantly, as privately as possible.
Caring Gestures	A gesture, not dependent on a young person doing something right, that communicates that “I care about you and you are important to me (even in this difficult situation).”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Gestures must be genuine and sincere. ✓ Gestures should be consistent (not overwhelming on one day and non-existent the next).
Hurdle Help	Setting expectations/providing challenging tasks <i>and</i> supporting young people to meet those expectations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ This does not mean doing the task for the young person, but rather offering assistance so that the young person can get beyond a critical moment and continue on their own.
Directive Statements	Directive statements tell young people specifically what is expected of them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Make sure that the directive is important and relevant. ✓ Make sure that youth can meet expectations. ✓ Make sure youth is calm enough to respond. ✓ Use a respectful tone and avoid being apologetic, uncertain or hesitant.
Strategy	Description	Tips to Remember
Proximity	Proximity means nearness. The presence of a trusted adult can be calming. Touch (i.e. a pat on the shoulder) can be powerful, but only when used within a therapeutic relationship in which the adult is very clear about how the youth will interpret the touch.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Standing or sitting between young people can be an effective buffer or barrier. ✓ Any use of touch should be done before escalation.
Time Away	Giving young people time and space away from a situation can help them to calm down and regain control.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Time away does not necessarily mean time alone. It is often helpful to have an adult accompany a young person to help them regroup.

Adapted from *The Therapeutic Crisis Intervention Student Workbook*, Martha J. Holden, MS, Sixth Edition, Residential Child Care Project, Cornell University, 2009.

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