



Transcript- Episode 65

Read The Room, Regulate Yourself: What To Do When Behavior Escalates

Welcome to the Inclusion Podcast.

Today is Episode 65. And I think this is one you're going to want to listen to on repeat, which is all about de-escalation. And what we have for you today are 20 de-escalation ideas that work.

Well, that's good, as opposed to some that are mediocre. I always laugh because when Julie ever introduces herself and she says that she has cute kids, then she'll say in the chat, you know, tell me if you have cute kids or mediocre kids, you know? So when you said, you kind of like emphasized that work, I was like, well, good. We're going to do another podcast called de-escalation strategies that do not work.

Yeah, that sucks. But I don't think that one's going to get as much listening. I don't think people are going to listen to it on repeat.

Probably not. Yeah. Okay.

So let's talk a little bit about escalation without talking about triggers, which is like probably another whole podcast, our disdain for triggers, or the word triggers, or searching for triggers. Because I think you and I use that word even informally, like, oh, that triggered me or my lid is flipped. Or I tell you, like, I'm trying to get myself regulated because I can feel myself amping up.

So let's talk a little bit about, like, what's happening when we escalate or what are some behaviors we're even talking about?

Okay. So when we say the word escalate, when we're talking about de-escalation, we're bringing down the heat in a way. So you know that like when a student's emotions start to boil over, things are getting intense.

Things are becoming really hard to tolerate. That's what we're meaning by escalation. Things are on the rise.

They're not getting more calm. They're getting more intense, more challenging, more something. And so what we're talking about is how do you turn the heat down? How do we bring down those challenging behaviors that are starting to boil over? And the secret to it all is at that time, they need to co-regulate or borrow our calm.

So let's do a little confession, Julie, and let's look at our list of behaviors that escalate. And let's share one that we're prone to. Where as adults or where? You and me.

As even in our co-teaching relationship, I'll go first. You don't have to. But like I can find myself, if I get escalated, making hurtful statements, probably never, well, threats because I did threaten to quit the other day.

Yeah. But I can feel, you and I call her the ice queen, but I can feel myself being snarky or resistant or a little bit hurtful, like things that I know aren't helpful to the situation. Or I would say my other one is like, I get frustrated because I'm trying to be like perfect. So then it turns into like frustration.

Yeah. Those are what we mean.

I'm not meaning always like it escalates to where I break a window or rip paper or hit anybody, but it's that big emotion that starts to make me maybe not show up as my best self. So how can I deescalate that?

Yeah. Yeah.

It's any behavior that you can turn up the heat on it and it becomes counterproductive. So I'll use my example would be, I shut down in such a way that makes it so I cannot perform, I cannot engage, I cannot any longer. And so it's like a little bit of shutting down is really common.

When it escalates, I'm no good. Like I really cannot be involved in a discussion any longer. I really need to be laying down on my bed with my heavy blanket because I've got to re-regulate.

I've got to get back to my prefrontal cortex. And so it can be a lot of different things, but when things are escalating, it means they're, the volume is turning up, the heat is turning up. We're getting a little out of control.

Okay. So let's, let's tell folks that we have these 20 ways to deescalate that work, and you can get that at [inclusiveschooling.com/download65](https://www.inclusiveschooling.com/download65). There are 20 that we've generated when things are, what Julie said, the, the energy is turning up and we want to make things better.

So we don't want to like rush the feeling. We don't want to do, you know, what we call go the diagonal and try to do problem-solving. We don't want to like tell everybody you're fine.

You know, you're fine. Buck up cupcake. Right? So we're not trying to make it worse.

That's why we mean these work, meaning allows for processing. It allows people to feel safe, seen, soothed and secure. So they're still really important to a regulatory state, but they're going to help things not continue to spiral or turn up.

And in your case, the dial went down. It's still an escalation of withdraw. It's so, but we have to think of those as well.

That's right. That's right. So just to be clear, the strategies we're going to talk about aren't rewards or consequences.

They're connection moves and they're simple ways to help students and ourselves get back to a regulatory state. So let's talk about a few of them, Kristie. And I think I'm ready to start with the first one, if that's all right.

Yeah, you're fine. Cause I'm going to do number five.

Okay. So my, the first one that you'll find is called lower your energy, lower the room. And what that means is when something's escalating, you lower your body, meaning you don't stand over a student. You get right next to, you lower your tone.

You change your pace and you regulate yourself. I just breathed with you.

Yeah. Because regulation is contagious. We have mirror neurons. And if you can regulate yourself, you're going to be regulating many others by your example.

And we mean this in a neurobiological way. It's not just they're watching you and, oh, I'm going to copy the teacher. No, no, no, no. Your body cannot help but calm when somebody else's body calms next to them.

Okay. Kristie, that's my favorite. Lower your energy.

Sorry. I was still taking a nice deep breath.

It was so lovely. Yeah. You can stay there if you want.

Yeah. Thank you. Um, no, cause you know, Julie knows I don't like to be told to take a deep breath.

So I think that those mirror neurons are really helpful for people like me who can get kind of resistant to deescalating. Like I kind of like it, I want it right. And so if she just does it next to me, my body can't help.

It's kind of like a yawn, right? I can't help but yawn. But when she takes a deep sigh, like my body just wants to sigh too. And then even if I don't want to feel better, my body feels better.

Yeah. Yeah. Okay.

So the fifth one on your list of 20, you know, we have this phrase in neuroscience. I said, we, like I'm a neuroscientist. Let's pretend we are.

I can play one on podcasts, right? Let's do it.

Yeah. Okay. I am a doctor, just not like Sam said, one that helps, right?

That's right.

So number five is name the emotion, not the behavior. So I like this one for two reasons.

One from a neuroscience perspective, there's a phrase called name it to tame it, but I don't love non-reference pronouns. So I was always confused. Like what am I naming? Because it is a non-reference pronoun.

Name it to tame it. Okay. I see you're kicking me.

I don't feel like that tamed anything. But when we say name the emotion, not the behavior, I now know what is being tamed or co-regulated or processed. I also like it because it's focusing on the state, not the behavior, which is our other favorite thing, Julie.

Like I'm focusing on that you've turned up the heat or turned down the motivation subconsciously, of course. And I'm going to help you process that. So that's, that's one of my favorites.

So instead of stop swearing, try, "you look really frustrated", or "this seems very overwhelming to you and to me". And so it's really shifting that energy, but that name it to tame it is I'm naming the emotion. And in fact, maybe I have a third reason I like it, Julie.

Everybody loves emotional literacy. And we're always telling people you can't teach emotional literacy in the storm, but this kind of actually does. It gives a name to the emotion that I can start to then, no, it's not me. I can let it go. It will fade with some recognition.

Absolutely. I love that because if you name the emotion, it looks like you're frustrated and you're wrong. And someone will say, I'm not frustrated. I'm super upset, right? What I love about that is, okay, good.

We're having a dialogue about your emotions at the moment in a way that, you know, it's going to get to a better place soon.

Okay. So Kristie, I'm going to just add one of my favorites, which is respond with a whisper.

And instead of matching the energy of the student who's upset, you might whisper, I'm right here and you're safe. It disarms the student. It's unexpected.

And it instantly shifts the energy where they're expecting you to come in with big behavior as an adult, like stop that. That's enough. You just go back in and say, I'm right here and you're safe.

Another one I love to say to teenagers is you're not in trouble. I'm here to support you. So I was going to pick number 12, which is totally related to yours, but then I wanted to do 13.

So I'll do 12 quickly. So it said, let go of correcting in the moment. So Julie and I both have read, you know, Mel Robbins' Let Them Theory.

I kind of like it here and like, I'm just going to let it go for a minute, especially in the moment. And I'm going to prioritize connection over correction. There's no reasoning, judging, correcting, teaching, consequating.

I'm just for that moment. It doesn't mean we can't come back to it. Doesn't mean we can't learn something down the road from it.

But in this moment, it doesn't serve us. And then this, you might be surprised I picked 13, Julie, because it's almost like breathing on demand. Just put your hand on your heart to remind yourself to stay calm.

What we often did is, you know, we talk about shark music, meaning from like the Jaws movie, that as things escalate, there's that, if you play the Jaws song, I mean, some people are too young and they don't know, they can go Google it.

But it's like, dun-dun, dun-dun, dun-dun, dun-dun, dun-dun, dun-dun, right? It's that escalation of fear. So we would encourage co-teachers to put their hands together as if they're going to give themselves a high five.

And then they would put that like at the top of their forehead or over their heart that meant the shark fin. And so it was a signal that like, I need help. Like this is shark music for me or quote unquote, a trigger.

I need help. So that same thing of putting your hand over your heart, taking the minute to do a deep breath. It's just like sending out a signal that you too might need help.

Well, and I think putting your hand over your heart internally reminds your body that you're safe. And so it's a real self reminder, even if it's not a signal to others, it's to say, hey, I'm safe. I'm right here for myself.

And that'll, again, deescalate you, which is going to help deescalate students. And you can get all 20 of these ideas that work at [inclusiveschooling.com/download65](https://www.inclusiveschooling.com/download65).

Julie, is there one more or two more or anything else you want to say as we wrap up this episode?

Well, I just kind of want to say a few things and that, and it's just really to remember the goal is not perfection.

You're not going to do this perfectly. Everyone's going to escalate all the time and your job is going to be to help deescalate. And it's not always pretty.

And just to remember, it's about helping everyone feel safe again, including you. And just lastly, I want to say you are the one that can be the calm in the storm and that calm can change everything about the weather in the room.

You can find every episode with the show notes at [inclusiveschooling.com/inclusion-podcast](https://www.inclusiveschooling.com/inclusion-podcast) to build more inclusive schools together.

SHOW NOTES

What This Episode Is About

When emotions rise and behavior escalates, many common responses accidentally make things worse. In this episode, Julie and Kristie share **20 de-escalation strategies that actually work** — not rewards, consequences, or power moves, but connection-based actions that help students (and adults) return to a regulated state.

This episode focuses on what to do **in the moment**, when the heat is turning up and everyone needs calm more than correction.

Key Takeaways

- Escalation isn't just yelling or aggression — it can also look like shutdown, withdrawal, or refusal.
 - De-escalation is about **turning the heat down**, not winning the moment.
 - Students (and adults) regulate through **co-regulation** — they borrow calm from the people around them.
 - Correcting, lecturing, or problem-solving during escalation almost always backfires.
 - Small, intentional shifts in adult behavior can rapidly change the emotional climate of a room.
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Answering a Common Question

What actually helps de-escalate behavior in the moment?

Connection, not control.

Lowering adult energy, naming emotions, slowing the pace, and signaling safety help the nervous system settle so learning and communication can resume.

Episode Download / Handout

20 De-Escalation Strategies That Work

This practical download gives educators **20 concrete, research-aligned ways to reduce escalation** without power struggles, shaming, or punitive responses.

Inside the download you'll find:

- Strategies for calming yourself first
- Language shifts that reduce intensity
- Ways to support students who escalate outward or shut down
- Simple moves that restore safety and connection

Why download it?

Because when emotions spike, it's hard to think clearly. This tool gives you a ready-to-use menu of responses so you don't freeze, react, or escalate alongside students.

👉 Download at inclusiveschooling.com/download65

Practical De-Escalation Moves

- Lower your energy before trying to lower a student's
 - Change your tone, pace, and body position
 - Name the emotion instead of correcting the behavior
 - Respond quietly or with a whisper
 - Pause correction and prioritize safety and connection
 - Use grounding gestures (like a hand over your heart) to calm your own nervous system
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