Appropriate Responses to the Seven Phases of the Escalation Cycle

Managing the Cycle of Acting-Out Behavior in the Classroom (Colvin, 2004)

Phase 1: Calm

Classroom Structure & Quality Instruction

- Supervise, reduce distractions, and provide quiet space.
- Establish and teach CLEAR expectations and acknowledge and praise compliance.
- Establish routines to decrease downtime and disruptions.
- Plan ahead for starter activities, transitions, and entry and exit routines.

Phase 2: Triggers

- Identify the situation where the behavior is likely to occur.
- Use pre-correction to teach appropriate response. Rehearse the expectations, prompt or remind students as needed, provide specific praise and reinforcement.
- Work with all staff and faculty to teach and reinforce social skills.
- School and non-school triggers-- Group social skills, anger management, community services.

Phase 3: Agitation

- Show empathy: recognize the student's problem and communicate concern.
- Redirect and help the student become engaged in activity, lesson or task (passive or movement).
- Provide choices.
- Provide space in a quiet area or allow students to disengage briefly or put their heads down.
- Use proximity or brief interactions; show acceptance.

Phase 4: Acceleration

- Pause and Assess- "Is this an emergency situation?"
- Avoid escalating the student's behavior.
- Pausing rather than responding immediately shows students that while they may be out of control, staff are calm and controlled.
- Use a calm but serious tone.
- If the situation escalates, withdraw and follow school procedures for emergency situations.

Phase 5: Peak

- Focus on student and staff safety.
- Notify necessary staff of situations and provide directions for response.
- If needed, evacuate others.
- Contact appropriate assistance.
- If an ESI was used—Notify parents, document, debrief and learn from it.

Phase 6: De-escalation

- Monitory for health and safety.
- Once escalation is over, allow student space to calm down, under supervision.
- Avoid blaming—provide opportunity for non-judgmental discussion.
- Provide independent work that is fairly easy to complete to help regain focus.
- Debrief and document the incident to provide data for ongoing planning for safety.

Phase 7: Recovery

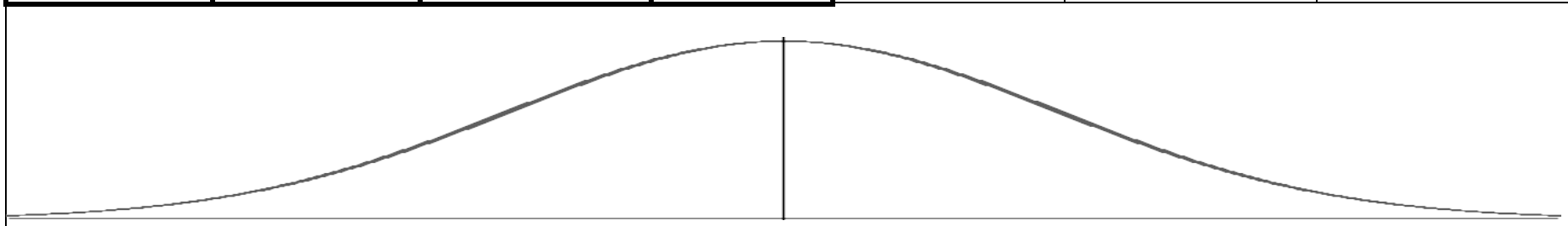
- Help student return to normal activities and engage in learning.
- Continue with planned consequence and do not discuss or negotiate.
- Acknowledge cooperative and appropriate behavior.
- Encourage and support student in changing problem behavior.

Source: Colvin, G. (2004). *Managing the cycle of acting-out behavior in the classroom.* Eugene, OR: Behavior Associates.

Escalation Cycle (adapted from Bounds, 2003)

**This is a tool teams can utilize to plan responses to each phase of the acting out cycle. This should be a part of a comprehensive positive behavior support plan.*

Specific Student Responses						
Calm Cooperative	**Triggers** Unresolved conflicts	**Agitation** Unfocused	**Acceleration** Focused/intense	**Peak** Most severe	**De-escalation** Confused	**Recovery** Non-engage/alone



Specific Staff/Adult Response						
Prevention	Prevention and redirection	Reduce anxiety	Safety	Crisis intervention	Remove excess attention	Re-establish routines

Adapted from Bounds (2003)

Lewis, Kittelman & Wilcox (2011).