

## De-escalation of Students in Crisis

Safe Supportive Schools Conference



December 4, 2015

### While you are waiting...

- Please read the statement on the paper in the middle of your table with your table mates.
- Then – discuss your thoughts on this statement
  - Do you agree/disagree
  - How does this statement connect to today's topic?



If there is anything that we wish to change in the child, we should first examine it and see whether it is not something that could better be changed in ourselves.

Carl Jung

### Objectives:

- Identify **core behavior levels** of a student in a process of **crisis escalation**
- Understand the **precipitating factors** which cause students and staff to emotionally escalate
- Recognize the **importance of staff attitudes** and professionalism in responding effectively to angry students
- Identify useful nonverbal and verbal **techniques to de-escalate** behavior

## Acting Out Behavior

Referrals

Anger

Detention



I.S.S.

Young men, step outside!

Frustration

## How do *you* handle acting out behavior?

- What are the acting out behaviors we see on campus and in our classrooms?



## Stereotypes: Fact or Fiction?

Threatening **DANGEROUS**

"Kids these days are out of control!"

Swearing



FIGHTING

BAD ATTITUDE

## What does conflict *look* like?

- We must first look at how conflict develops and how our responses should be different as the behavior escalates.



### What does conflict *look* like?

- 1. **Anxiety:** a noticeable increase or change in normal behavior – pacing, finger drumming, wringing of the hands, staring.

\* **Be Supportive:** an empathetic, non-judgmental approach, attempting to alleviate anxiety

### What does conflict *look* like?

- 2. **Defensive:** the beginning stage of loss of rationality. At this point, an individual often becomes belligerent and challenges authority.

\* **Be Directive:** an approach in which staff member maintains control of a potentially escalating situation by setting limits/boundaries.

### What does conflict *look* like?

- 3. **Acting Out Person:** the total loss of control which often results in a physical acting out episode.

\***Nonviolent Crisis Intervention:** Safe, non-harmful control and restraint techniques used to safely control an individual until he can regain control of himself.

### What does conflict *look* like?

- 4. **Tension Reduction:** decrease in physical and emotional energy which occurs after a person has acted out, characterized by the regaining of rationality.

\***Therapeutic Rapport:** an attempt to reestablish communication with the individual.

### What does conflict *feel*/like?

Movie Clip: "Freedom Writers"

What types of potential or actual conflict do you see in this clip? What red flags do you see for this teacher?

Pay attention to how the various people in this scene might be feeling on the first day of school.

### First Day of School



### What does conflict *feel*/like?

We must understand what makes conflicts and emotions escalate...

There are factors which are the causes of conflict over which a staff member has little or no control and can't "see" from the outside.

### What does conflict *feel*/like?

Understanding what causes emotional escalation can help staff to:

1. Prevent acting out behavior by being proactive
2. Recognize that we are seldom the cause of acting out behavior\*
3. Avoid becoming the cause of acting out behavior ourselves

## Precipitating Factors

Life: "Stuff happens..."

### ■ Internal Factors:

### ■ External Factors:

## Life: "Stuff Happens"

- Internal Factors: health, drug abuse, hunger, emotions, fear, hormones, sleeplessness, grief, illness, meds
- External Factors: divorce, financial trouble, bullying, homelessness, abuse, violent communities

## Emotional Escalation



- Social Status
- Stress
- Normal Adolescent Development
- Trauma response

## Emotional Escalation



- ABUSE:
- Past trauma
  - Powerlessness

## Is it really that bad?

Healing Invisible Wounds: Why Investing in Trauma-Informed Care for Children Makes Sense 2010

Approximately 25% of U.S. children will experience at least one traumatic event by age 16

- 39% of 12-17 year olds reported witnessing violence
- 17% reported physical assault
- 8% reported sexual assault

75 – 93% of youth in the juvenile justice system are estimated to have experienced some type of trauma

SO MUCH is out of our control!

What CAN we control?



SO MUCH is out of our control!

What CAN we control?

**US!**

- Open lines of communication
- Get to know your students
- Show compassion
- Be proactive



## Maintaining Personal Power

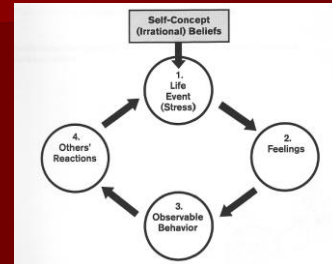
- **Rational Detachment:** the ability to stay in control of one's own behavior and not take acting out personally.
  - You can control your own response
  - Maintain a professional attitude to avoid overreacting or acting inappropriately

## Maintaining Personal Power

\* What positive outlets do you have to purge the negative energy you get from students?



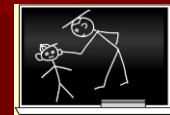
## The Conflict Cycle



## Possible Outcome of a Crisis



## Conflicts on Campus



What is the fastest way to increase the intensity of a conflict with a student?



YOU THINK YOU KNOW  
WHAT I SAID.  
BUT WHAT YOU DON'T  
KNOW IS,  
WHAT I SAID IS NOT  
WHAT I MEANT

Q-TIP



### Breaking the Conflict Cycle

#### 4 Ways to Manage Any Behavior:

1. Stop it – intervene and stop the behavior
2. Tolerate it – Pick your battles
3. Encourage it – Permit or reinforce
4. Prevent it – Teach new skills (self-regulate, self-monitor)

### Emotional 1<sup>st</sup> Aid (Triage/Stabilize)

- **Positive non-verbal body language** – convey support posture, stance, eye contact, personal space
- **Appropriate verbal style** – clear, concrete words, reflection, decoding, minimize ours, maximize theirs
- **Relationship Building skills** – stay calm, Communicate respect, abundant affirmation/validation, Active/Empathic listening



## 4 Interview Skills

- Attending – Being Supportive
- Listening – “Empathic”
- Decoding – ID Precipitator/trigger/stressor
- Responding – Teach new skills/replacement behaviors

## Feelings

### ■ Emotional Memory Bank –



## Choices in Managing Feelings

- **Act them out**
- **Deny and defend them**
- **Accept and own, self-regulate & self-monitor**

## 4 Opportunities to Break the Cycle

### Level 1: Anxiety/Support

1. **Modify the life event (stressor)**
  - “How can I help you?” - supportive
  - Consider possible Precipitating Factors
2. **Alleviate feelings**
  - Supportive, empathy, non-judgmental

## 4 Opportunities, con't

### Level 2: Defensive/Directive

#### 3. Manage Behaviors

- Set limits, provide choices/consequences
- Behavior wanted, 1<sup>st</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, then \_\_\_\_\_

#### 4. Manage Others' Reactions

- Remove the audience
- "Q-TIP"

## Self-Assessing is the Key!

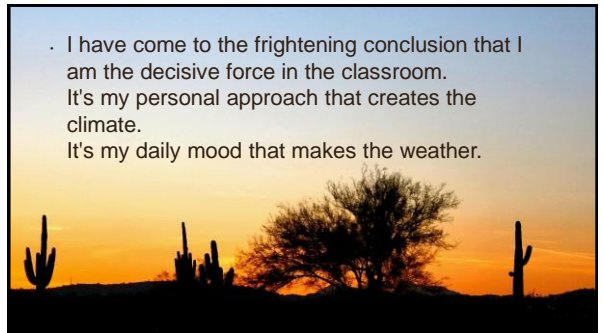
- After dealing with any student conflict it is essential that we look at our own reactions - - thoughts, feelings, behaviors.
- The more honest we can be with ourselves the more approachable we will be with students.

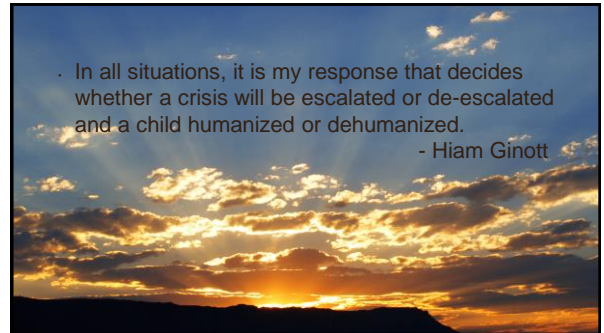
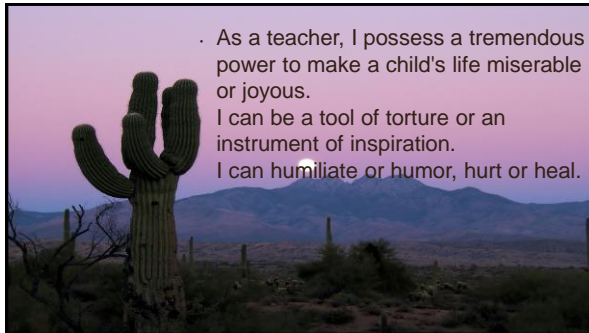
"Honesty is the first  
chapter in the book  
of wisdom."  
- Thomas Jefferson

Know now, do differently

**WHAT, GUT, SO WHAT, NOW WHAT**

- I have come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive force in the classroom. It's my personal approach that creates the climate. It's my daily mood that makes the weather.





### NOW WHAT: Action Plan

What is one thing you will *stop* doing...  
and one thing you will *start* doing...

...that will help bring lasting behavior change in students  
with a tendency to act out?

### Contact Information

Debi Neat, M.Ed.  
School Safety and Prevention Consultant  
debi.neat@gmail.com  
602-679-0281