

## Dealing with Confrontation

In any situation of risk or physical danger, teachers must act decisively and swiftly to prevent harm to themselves and students. All acts or threats of physical violence must be reported to the Executive immediately. (Always follow up with a written report). Most confrontations, however, will not involve a physical threat.

Being faced with confrontation from a student is one of the most emotionally stressful situations in teaching. It is threatening for most members of staff no matter what their position. Confrontation attempts to undermine the teacher's class control and authority.

It is important to realise that most students are not trying to attack you as a person but rather may be angry at the situation, the school, their peers, their family or themselves. When dealing with confrontation, it is important to remain calm and in control.

Handling confrontation can be approached in three stages:

### 1. Be Prepared

- Develop strategies to use before a confrontation occurs.
- Know your students, watch for signs of escalation.
- Share strategies with other teachers.
- Reflect upon and rehearse responses that convey control and conviction.
- Use tactical ignoring and low-level intervention first if possible.
- Practise non-confrontational body language.
- Have a behaviour management plan in place for your class.
- Discuss problems with students privately.

### 2. Diffuse the Situation

- Take your time and wait at least 5 seconds before responding.
- Lower the emotional level.
- Remain as outwardly calm as possible.
- Lower your tone of voice.
- Maintain physical space.
- Allow a cooling off period.
- Don't engage: "I see you're upset, we'll talk about it later."
- If you are really stressed, walk away. Follow up later.

### 3. Redirect the Situation

- Redirect the class back to the lesson.
- Give the student a clear and reasonable choice.
- Change focus, go on with something else.
- Give the student a job to do.
- Allow time-out. E.g., "You seem upset. Here's a note. Go to the bubbler and have a drink. Then you can join the class and finish your work." (But always set a strict time limit).

## **Points to Remember**

- Make time to follow up with the student after class on a one-to-one basis, perhaps with your supervisor nearby.
- Don't back the student into a corner, physically or metaphorically.
- The most powerful tool is an engaging curriculum that provides opportunities for students to succeed.
- Don't argue with a student in front of their peer group.
- Don't use ultimatums or threats you can't follow through.

As part of an evaluation, students identified these traits they value in teacher:

- Teach the content in a way that can be understood.
- Acknowledge students as people and treat them in a respectful way.
- Make the rules for behaviour clear.
- Give a warning before acting.