

TWENTY KEY POINTS FOR PREVENTING A SITUATION FROM ESCALATING

1. When possible, use non-verbal cues in the first instance. Assess the response.
2. Speak slowly, calmly and clearly. (Remember rule of FIVE: no more than FIVE words in a sentence and use words with less than FIVE letters when you can).
3. Give clear and consistent directions.
4. One direction per sentence (e.g. “Move to this desk.” rather than “Move to this desk, take out your book to show me your homework and start on the second worksheet while you’re waiting for me to give you the answers to the first worksheet.”)
5. Give the student space, don’t crowd. Avoid an audience. If possible, move elsewhere with the student or move others away from the scene.
6. If possible, you choose the time and place to deal with the student. (E.g. after the lesson without the class as audience? Outside staffroom?).
7. Ask yourself: Do I need support? Another teacher? Head Teacher? AP? DP? Principal?
8. Remain calm yourself; maintain self-control.
9. Use non-threatening body language and tone of voice. Model appropriate, assertive behaviour for students to follow; don’t get into “whinge tennis”.
10. If possible, avoid dealing with a student when he/she is in an angry or aggressive state. Allow time for them to calm down and for their adrenalin levels to drop. (Remember: avoid a ‘fight or flight’ response).
11. Try to avoid dealing with a student when you are upset or angry. Give yourself time to react rationally rather than emotionally. This may mean allowing a short time between an offence and the issuing of consequences, while always remembering that if intervention is too delayed, it will be less effective.
12. Reinforce positive change (e.g. “Now that you’ve returned the ball, you can re-join the game.”). Focus on what you want the person to do (i.e. behaviour, not the person).
13. Offer choices, but only if appropriate to situation. Repeat directions in a calm voice and state consequences, highlighting the positives and emphasise the benefits.
14. Be patient. Listen to what a student has to say, then respond. (See No. 9)
15. Put yourself in their position (reasons for their behaviour do vary). Softer on the person, harder on the issue.
16. Avoid triggers that increase stress levels. Assess the student’s motivation for his/her choice of behaviour. (Fear? Frustration? Manipulation? Intimidation? Insecurity?).

17. Prepare to be flexible. Don't back students into a corner, either physically or metaphorically.
18. Try to not take it personally. Maintain as much emotional distance as you can.
19. Avoid chasing a student who absconds. Clearly direct them to return but avoid chasing. (The student leaving does not mean the consequences have been avoided, merely postponed! Always report immediately and always follow up.)
20. Never punish a group or a class for an individual's misbehaviour. Not only is this unfair, you will automatically create an alliance in opposition to you.