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*Original Paper*

## Immediate Interventions for Teachers with Students with Emotional Disturbances/Behavior Disorders and Discipline Issues

Michael F. Shaughnessy

Eastern New Mexico University  
Educational Studies Department  
Portales, New Mexico 88130

### **Abstract**

All too often, teachers have students in their regular education classes with disruptive, hostile, and problematic behavioral issues. The student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) may not provide adequate information for the teacher to address immediate behavioral problems. This small paper provides some minor immediate coping strategies for teachers who are confronted with pupils with ED/BD and related discipline problems.

### **Introduction**

Beginning teachers, as well as seasoned teachers, quite often are confronted with a student who is defiant, hostile, negativistic, oppositional and confrontational. Unfortunately, not all Individual Educational Plans provide teachers with a road map or directives as to how to work with said students.

In other instances, the IEP may have been done several years ago, and the student's behavior may have changed dramatically. This small paper will attempt to provide some immediate coping strategies for teachers and perhaps even improve the already existing skills of seasoned teachers who are confronted with students with attitudinal and behavior problems.

We have all been confronted with explosive students, and there are various terms out there to describe said students. We have heard the words "temper tantrum", "meltdown", "explosive" and "walking time bomb". On occasion teachers have attended a FBA (Functional Behavior Analysis) meeting, which may or may not have resulted in any tangible tactics, techniques or strategies for dealing with oppositional or explosive behavior. There may have been a BIP (Behavior Intervention Plan) which may have offered suggestions as to how to cope with good, positive behavior. Even with the best classroom management techniques (Smith, 2004) many teachers are still confronted with outbursts that disrupt the classroom environment. Teachers may not have recognized nor been prepared to recognize the various characteristics of emotional and behavior disorders of children and adolescents (Kauffman & Landrum, 2018). While they have been given some preliminary data or behavioral strategies, some Difficulties may not have been covered in even graduate textbooks.

1) De-escalation- A seasoned teacher may be able to discern or ascertain when a student is becoming agitated, upset and distraught. Some teachers are able to quickly identify what the activating event is or was and address it quickly. Such intervention is laudable. Teachers need to be aware of certain students and their proclivity towards explosive behavior. De-escalation attempts to help the student calm down and look at the situation in a calm, objective manner.

This may take several steps- and there may be several avenues to pursue. Some of these will be addressed here. First, it may be advisable to have the student sit down if they are not already seated. This in itself may accomplish a great deal.

## DEEP BREATHS

- 2) Secondly, the teacher can suggest that the student take a few deep breaths and take a few minutes to gather their thoughts and look at their emotions objectively. Many students are unable to name their emotions and confuse anger with frustration or exasperation. “Let’s start at the beginning” is an often-utilized phrase to re-focus the student and give the teacher a chance to objectively examine whatever may have transpired and provide an opportunity for critical examination.
- 3) Distract---Depending on the student’s age, they may be receptive to being distracted- this can take several forms- A teacher can indicate their shoelaces are untied- and when the student looks at their cowboy boots, they may realize the teacher is joking- thus breaking up the chain of events that has led to their exasperation. Humor also helps to defuse- depending on the age of the student and what type of humor they may find amusing.
- 4) Desensitize---Gradually lowering one’s voice, gradually reducing any verbiage that may have enraged a student, gradually decreasing the amount of tension in the classroom – all of these things fall under the general heading of relaxation and deep breathing. Teachers can ask students to take a deep breath before they begin talking
- 5) Distance- A seasoned teacher will keep themselves far away from the explosive student who is having a “melt down” or who is visibly upset and agitated. The teacher will also suggest that all other students remain clear until the child is calmer or has calmed down.
- 6) Defer---“Let’s talk about this after school” is one proper way of delaying or defusing. The teacher can also ask other personnel like a neutral guidance counselor to be involved in the later meeting. By the time of the meeting rolls around, the student may have forgotten what angered him or her in the first place.
- 7) Disorient-Hey “What did you have for breakfast today”. This is a confusing question for some students who never in their wildest dreams would expect a teacher to ask this type of question. Contemporary questions such as “Did you see the Super Bowl last night “or some other athletic contest?
- 8) Deflect---Whatever it is you are upset about- I am sure it can be handled in another way. A prompt that they can change their emotions and arrive at a new perspective may help reorient them to a different philosophy.
- 9) Distract---Have you see the latest episode of (whatever the students are watching currently) is a question that may for a brief period of time get their minds off whatever is upsetting them.  
For some students a question about their favorite sports team or television show may be appropriate.
- 10) Diffuse---A calm soothing voice---a gentle approach may be the best to work with a student who is visibly upset. Some teachers have a soft, tender demure voice- and others, not so much.
- 11) D- DAY OFF---In some cases, some individuals simply suggest that the student go home- perhaps they are ill, have a headache, did not sleep well the night before or something has occurred. This seems to be a reasonable intervention- but obviously, instructional time is lost, and the student may learn that this is the way to “escape” a class that they do not like or a teacher that they do not like.
- 12) DISARM--It is often difficult to disarm a student with a weapon and “disarm” here refers to a knife, gun or baseball bat or other instrument that could cause appreciable damage. Most schools today are drug and weapon-free- but that may not deter a very determined young individual who has not as yet been seen by the appropriate psychiatric or psychological services.  
There are many “undiagnosed” individuals with mental health needs who are in need of treatment or supervision. This represents a challenge to schools and even society at large.
- 13) Determine to follow up. Teachers need to follow up with the guidance counselor, social worker, School psychologist and IEP leader to ascertain if there has been an FBA (Functional Behavior

Assessment) done in the past and a Behavior Intervention Plan. At times, these things may have been done several years ago, but need to be updated. The same holds true of the student's IEP.

There may have been substantial changes since the last IEP and the school nurse may need to investigate the realm of medication. In some instances, the student has stopped taking their medication or their medication has been changed or titrated. In other instances, a Positive Behavior Intervention Plan may need to be discussed (Kauffman & Landrum, 2018). For those who prefer a visual demonstration, go to:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6B9Kqg6jFeI>

There is another good presentation at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2PSExM-NhU>

### **Summary and Conclusions**

This paper is a brief attempt to provide some preliminary training and suggestions for teachers who are attempting to educate students or even maintain them in a regular education classroom.

### **References**

Kauffman, J. M., & Landrum, T. J. (2018). *Characteristics of emotional and behavioral disorders of children and youth*. 11<sup>th</sup> Edition Pearson, NY, NY.

Smith, R. (2004). *Conscious classroom management*. Conscious Teaching Publications. San Rafael, CA.