



When in a situation where a child is upset/overwhelmed and escalating in their reaction:

- If the child displays a **freeze response** and tends to shut down, and not respond to the adult, it is suggested to give them some space, not to force them to interact beyond their ability, as well as honouring their rhythm.
- If the child displays a **flight response** and tends to run away and hide, it is suggested to set up a predetermined alternate safe space in the school where the child can go to and cocoon.
- If the child displays a **fight response** and is externalizing/explosive behaviours (e.g. kicking, hitting, throwing objects, destroying property, etc.), it is suggested to remove any audience. If possible, taking the child, who is willing, for a walk or accompanying them to a safe and private space (being careful about not forcing them – taking them by the wrist is considered to be a hold).
- Honouring the child's personal space – keeping a safe and respectful distance that feels comfortable for them (needing to consider individual differences in terms of tolerance for physical proximity) – asking if you can sit next to them (if they say no, maintain a greater distance). No need to be in close proximity. However, the adult must be able to see them well to ensure safety and supervision.
- Being mindful of being neutral and non-threatening in our verbal, non-verbal and paraverbal cues (e.g., triggering language, tone/volume of voice, speech rate, body positioning, facial expression, sudden gestures, walking fast towards the child, etc.)
- Being aware of our own level of stress, affect, emotional intensity, and type/level of energy reflected – remaining calm and reflective (having another adult lend a hand if needed).
- Avoiding intense eye contact (this can feel quite threatening to some children). Sitting side-by-side or standing at an angle can help with this issue.
- Demonstrating active listening by reducing the amount of talking and allowing for moments of silence. Modeling deep breathing techniques, naming as something that helps you (no need to pressure them or put too much attention to it, as the children often mirror what we do).
- Being empathetic and non-judgmental; focusing on the emotion(s) experienced by the child rather than their behaviour.
- Offering support or a pause; trying to accommodate and reassure the child.
- If possible/available, providing a space for them to let off steam in a safe manner.
- Avoiding getting caught in a power struggle, anticipating potential refusal from the child and perceiving their challenging questions/comments as needing to vent.
- Moving away from trying to teach a lesson or reason with the child, especially when their behaviour appears erratic and irrational – waiting until a more appropriate time to address the situation (when the child is regulated/calm, and receptive/open to the adult).
- Setting simple, concise, and realistic limits by offering options/alternatives in a supportive manner; being careful to not overload with too many directives. Only offer options that are viable.
- Allowing time for decision-making and choosing wisely what is insisted upon. Keeping conversation simple and clear, avoid overtalking as this can be both confusing and frustrating.



Examples of de-escalation techniques – K4-K5



- Coming alongside the child's frustration, by naming and validating it – focusing on [co-regulation](#) (not expecting the child to regulate their emotions on their own).
- Sometimes, when appropriate, using playfulness and humour (being careful with sarcasm), can be helpful to defuse the situation.
- Not taking the behaviour personally; being careful to not overreact.
- Having another adult support or step in if the situation is not defusing.
- Following the event, it is suggested for the adults involved to:
 - o debriefing on what happened and whether things could have been done differently
 - o reviewing the [school guidelines around preventative practices and alternate measures](#) in place
 - o ensuring the practices are well-adapted to the child's needs and individual differences. Being mindful of the differences between the [4-year-old and the 5-year-old](#), as well as the [preschooler traits at each Tier](#).
- If available, consulting the child's [safety plan](#) for suggestions on:
 - o the proper adult posture
 - o the practices to avoid at each level of stress
 - o the post-debrief practices with the child
- Please note that if any adult involved in the event had to resort to a hold for safety purposes given eminent danger, the steps listed in the [school board protocol on restraints and isolation](#) must be followed.