

# Behavior Management Techniques

These techniques are appropriate to use when a youth is showing signs of stress, and may be escalating towards a crisis. They are designed to provide support and lessen the stress to the point that the young person can use their own coping strategies to handle the situation.

## Proximity

This simply means being physically close to the young person while offering support. Often this will minimize the chances that the behavior will get out of control.

Touch is a powerful intervention and, if used at the wrong time with the wrong person, can easily escalate the situation. If done at the right time, a simple touch can be a reminder that a caring adult is there for help and support. It requires knowing how the youth will interpret the touch. If they have a history of sexual assault, touch may be interpreted as the beginning of another abusive situation. Knowing the youth and having developed a trusted relationship is critical.

## Prompts

Prompts involve short statements or key words that will let the young person know what is expected of them or what will be coming next. They can be non-verbal, such as eye contact or throat clearing. Or they can be signs, signals, or reminder of schedules (What happens at 10AM?) that help the youth return to the expected activity or help the youth transition.

## Hurdle Help

Sometimes stress is caused by situations being very complex and overwhelming. Hurdle help is a technique to reduce the complexity of the situation and to help the youth get started. For example, the adult can do a small piece of the task at hand to demonstrate how to break the task down into smaller steps and make it more manageable and less overwhelming. Sometimes it might be enough to just get started, refocusing on the activity and away from feeling stressed out.

## Time Away

This strategy involves taking the young person away from the stressful situation and them a chance to regroup and regain control. It is not meant to be used as punishment like time out. Because it is intended as a positive alternative, the adult should be clear that the youth will come back to activity soon.

## Redirection

This technique involves offering the youth an alternative to a stressor the youth is experiencing at the time. If, for example, the youth is going to a store to buy a certain snack and is stressed out because the snack is not available, the adult might suggest another attractive snack that is available and help prevent the child from getting too upset about the situation.

## Planned Ignoring / Positive Attention

When a young person has a pattern of attention seeking through acting out, it may be better not to engage. Instead, the adult deliberately ignores the behavior—but when the distracting behavior stops, follows up with positive attention for any positive behavior from the youth. This strategy is a little bit more complex, involving a couple of steps or actions. It also requires the adult to set priorities and to decide which objectives or goals are more important at the time. Here is an example: While working on a homework project, the youth exhibits behaviors that are attention seeking and inappropriate or distracting given the task. Instead of confronting the youth and potentially getting into a power struggle, the adult deliberately ignores these behaviors, waits and intentionally rewards positive behavior when it occurs (such as completing part of the assignment).

## Directive Statements

Directive statements are not commands or demands; they are simple, direct, and clear statements of expectations which provide the youth with guidance on what to do next. Keeping a calm tone of voice is critical. “Please, go to your room and cool down” will be more effective than “Go to your room right now!” This strategy is particularly helpful when the adult detects signs of confusion or anxiety which can easily lead to increased agitation.

## Caring Gesture

Young people need to know that the adults who surround them care for them. Caring gestures are techniques to show the youth affection, interest, and concern without overstepping professional boundaries.

- Smiling
- Supportive phrases and gestures (“thumbs up”)
- Expressing that you care for them
- Encouragement

Expressions of caring and affection must be genuine and sincere. Using caring gestures might redirect and prevent a youth's behavior from escalating further.