

Student behavioral challenges can present as internalizing behaviors such as anxiety, cognitive rigidity, perfectionism, or depression. Although internalizing behaviors are less disruptive than externalizing behaviors, they cause significant distress for students and may escalate to externalizing behaviors. Teachers should be prepared to appropriately identify and respond to internalizing behaviors to support students.

IDENTIFYING AND RESPONDING TO INTERNALIZED BEHAVIORS

Classroom teachers should use the traits listed in the Student Risk Screening Scale—Internalizing and Externalizing Behaviors (SRSS-IE) to identify students with internalized behaviors.

EMOTIONALLY FLAT

SAD/DEPRESSED

LONELY

SHY/WITHDRAWN

ANXIOUS

PEER REJECTION



FOR MORE DETAILS ON THE SRSS-IE, PLEASE CLICK HERE.

STRATEGIES FOR RESPONDING TO INTERNALIZED BEHAVIORS:

Teachers can respond to students exhibiting internalized behaviors by targeting the following strategies listed below:

- Model adaptive behaviors, including:**
 - Adaptive thinking,
 - Self-praise, and
 - Problem-solving
- Provide explicit instruction in adaptive behaviors, including:**
 - Self-monitoring their moods and
 - Adaptive thinking
- Ensure that students have frequent opportunities to experience mastery in the classroom.**
- Offer students a choice of activities.**
- Use classroom management strategies to create a supportive environment. Effective strategies include:**
 - Explicitly teaching classroom procedures and behavioral expectations aligned to schoolwide expectations,
 - Actively supervising students during instruction
 - Providing more positive than negative feedback on behavior,
 - Providing specific praise that identifies desired behaviors (especially for behavior that counters internalizing symptoms such as participating in class)

REFERRAL FOR ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

Beyond the indicators listed above and the relevant strategies to address internalized behaviors, teachers should be particularly mindful of the following elevated indicators. If a student exhibits at least one of the criteria below, teachers should promptly refer students for additional support.

EXHIBITS SADNESS OR DEPRESSION

SLEEPS A LOT

IS TEASED OR BULLIED BY PEERS

DOES NOT PARTICIPATE IN GAMES

VERY SHY OR TIMID

ACTS FEARFUL

DOES NOT STAND UP FOR SELF

SELF-INJURY (CUTTING, HEAD BANGING)

WITHDRAWN

Taken verbatim from: [University of Missouri Center for Schoolwide Positive Behavior Supports](#)

Students exposed to trauma may react to situations in the classroom with an escalation cycle that may culminate in threatening or disruptive behavior. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Student Engagement Project recommends the strategies listed below to deescalate behaviors at each stage of the escalation cycle

DE-ESCALATION ACROSS PHASES OF THE ESCALATION CYCLE

PHASE 1: CALM

- Supervise, reduce distractions, and provide quiet space.
- Establish and teach clear expectations and acknowledge and praise compliance.
- Establish routines to decrease downtime and disruptions.
- Plan ahead for starter activities, transitions, and entry and exit routines.



PHASE 2: TRIGGERS



- Identify the situation where the behavior is likely to occur.
- Use pre-correction to teach appropriate response. Rehearse the expectations, prompt or remind students as needed, provide specific praise or reinforcement.
- Work with all staff and faculty to teach and reinforce social skills.
- School and non-school triggers – Group social skills, anger management, community services.

PHASE 3: AGITATION

- Show empathy: recognize the student's problem and communicate concern.
- Redirect and help the student become engaged in activity, lesson, or task (passive or movement).
- Provide choices.
- Provide space in a quiet area or allow students to disengage briefly or put their heads down.
- Use proximity or brief interactions; show acceptance.



PHASE 4: ACCELERATION



- Pause and assess to show students that staff are calm and controlled
- Avoid escalating the student's behavior.
- Use a calm but serious tone.
- If the situation escalates, withdraw and follow school procedures for emergency situations.

PHASE 5: PEAK

- Focus on student and staff safety.
- Notify necessary staff of situations and provide directions for response.
- If needed, evacuate others.
- Contact appropriate assistance.
- If emergency procedures were used – Notify parents, document, debrief, and learn from it.



PHASE 6: DE-ESCALATION



- Monitor for health and safety.
- Once escalation is over, allow student space to calm down, under supervision.
- Avoid blaming – provide opportunity for non-judgmental discussion.
- Provide independent work that is fairly easy to complete to help regain focus.
- Debrief and document the incident to provide data for ongoing planning for safety.

PHASE 7: RECOVERY

- Help student return to normal activities and engage in learning.
- Continue with planned consequence and do not discuss or negotiate.
- Acknowledge cooperative and appropriate behavior.
- Encourage and support student in changing problem behavior



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