

HOW TO STAY CALM IN THE CLASSROOM DURING CONFLICT AND CHAOS

Staying calm during times of conflict and chaos in the classroom can be challenging. When we lose our cool it can escalate situations and make them worse. To better keep yourself grounded and calm during stressful moments there are steps to be taken before, during and after the conflict has arisen. Learn ways to stay regulated or recover from being dysregulated.

Definitions:

Dysregulated -the state of having trouble controlling your emotions and how you act on those feelings.

Regulated - able to experience strong emotions, not be overwhelmed by them, and positively act on them.

How to recognize when you are dysregulated:

- Heightened feeling of being overwhelmed or “on edge”
- Moody or irritable
- Easy to upset or anger

Helpful Tips:

- Be patient with yourself. These tools take a long time to learn. With practice you will begin to utilize them without realizing.
- No one is perfect. There are times where you will say the wrong thing or make a mistake, this is normal.

Resources:

- Managing Classroom Conflict
- “In the Moment” Coping Skills

Building capacity for calm before conflict or chaos arises:

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Build a friendship with a colleague.

Having someone who works with you or in the same profession as you that you feel comfortable asking for help can aid us in externalizing our feelings and make sense of difficult situations.

Learn what triggers you and how it feels in your body.

We all have things that elicit strong emotions. It can come after something is said or an action by someone else. If we have a sense of what happens in our bodies when we are triggered we can begin to identify the signs that we may be getting dysregulated. For some people, this can feel like a racing heart, clenched fists, eyes welling up with tears, a tightened jaw, or an overwhelming feeling to escape or distract yourself. Take some time to understand how YOUR body experiences feeling triggered and dysregulated.

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Learn coping strategies.

After you have noticed the things that trigger you, the next step is to be able to manage them. There are many coping skills we can utilize in moments of high stress and strong emotions. Being able to get ourselves grounded takes practice, and will not happen overnight. The more you practice different skills the better you will be able to utilize them when conflict arises in the classroom. These skills can range from deep breathing, feeling the ground beneath your feet, or squeezing a stress ball.

Co-create classroom norms/expectations.

Co-create a list of agreements with your class at the beginning of the school year or semester with your students. Setting these norms together will set clear expectations of how everyone is to treat each other and behavior within the classroom.

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As conflict or chaos is arising:

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Take a deep breath before responding.

If you have the time and space, ask for a moment and wait ten seconds before you respond, taking deep breaths. If you need to respond right away, try answering slowly with a soft voice. This slows down the interaction. The goal is to lower your heart rate and ultimately de-escalate the conflict.

Stay grounded in the present moment.

This is where coping mechanisms learned earlier will be helpful. As your heart rate increases and your mind starts to project worse case scenarios begin to use practices that help you stay grounded, level headed, and calm. This can look like putting your hand on your desk to feel something solid, or pausing for a bit longer between your words to slow down the interaction and your mind. There are many coping mechanisms, and finding the right ones can reduce stress, de-escalate situations more quickly, and help build positive relationships with your students.

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Make space for the student to share their side of the story.

Meet with the student(s) privately for them to share why they were upset or acting out. Often our actions or reactions have little to do with what was said or our behavior, it is often something deeper. By asking questions and being curious we can help them move forward from the incident feeling better. Making space can be difficult when you are in the middle of a lesson. If there is space, ask the student(s) involved to talk in the hallway, or ask them to stay after class to debrief the incident. You can also practice restorative circles as described in our 11 Ways to Help Kids Calm Down In The Moment resource.

Notice what emotions are coming up for you.

Are you getting angry, defensive, anxious, or aggravated? Maybe you feel hurt or burnt out? As feelings arise it is important to acknowledge them. This can be done in the moment or after the height of the conflict is over. Emotions can control the way we view a situation and cloud our judgment. Being able to understand what we are feeling can help us find empathy for ourselves and others. Try to sit with the feeling and not distract yourself from it, really pay attention to what you are feeling. When we are quiet and listen we can learn that often there is more than one emotion we are feeling.

8

Reflecting and repairing after conflict:

Say sorry if needed.

Apologizing helps the person we may have offended and it helps us as well. Uncomfortable interactions can leave us with feelings of shame that can often make the situation worse. When we own up to our mistakes and apologize, we can fully resolve the conflict and strengthen our relationships. We also model for children that it's ok to make mistakes and what it can look like to take responsibility for your actions.

9

Take time to reflect.

Sit with yourself after the conflict. Maybe you were not able to regulate yourself in the moment and need to calm down in the aftermath. Or maybe you were able to remain calm during the conflict and need time to reflect on the feelings that arose and clarify what happened in the situation. Making space for healing and clarity can help repair relationships and move forward in a positive and constructive way. Journaling is one technique to help us process, writing things down makes them feel more real, tangible, and helps us make sense of our emotions as well as the situation.

10