

# Use de-escalation strategies

A suggestion for implementing the strategy 'Respond in challenging situations' from the Guide: [Behaviour and learning](#)

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## **Includes:**

Consider safety first

Communicate calmly and simply

Use high probability instructions

Explore simple calming and de-escalation strategies

Be mindful of body language

Make time and space

Inclusive Education

From

Guide: [Behaviour and learning](#)

Strategy: [Respond in challenging situations](#)

Suggestion: [Use de-escalation strategies](#)

Date

21 June 2026

Link

[inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/behaviour-and-learning/use-de-escalation-strategies](https://inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/behaviour-and-learning/use-de-escalation-strategies)

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## Consider safety first

Create space and time.

- Remove the audience – ask other students to take their work and move away.
- Give the student physical space.
- Name the emotion in a calm even voice, “You look really angry”, “I can see that you are very frustrated”...
- Wait.

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# Communicate calmly and simply

Keep messages simple and consistent. As challenging situations escalate and emotions heighten, calm logical processing ability is very diminished. This means ākongā will not be able to think or hear much.

- ✓ Slow down
- ✓ Be aware of your breathing, tone, pitch and speed of speech.
- ✓ Maintain a low, calm tone of voice.
- ✓ Communicate using appropriate words or visuals that are minimal, clear and explicit.
- ✓ Use supportive phrases – "I'm here to help. When you are ready, we can..."
- ✓ Actively listen – nod and repeat key phrases to show you hear what they are saying.
- ✓ Use visuals and gestures to communicate, such as an OK sign.
- ✓ Validate their emotions – "I can see you're feeling really frustrated."

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## Use high probability instructions

A high probability instruction is one that ākongā are likely to follow. It aims to defuse a situation by giving the child or young person a way to feel more secure and time to regain control.

Examples:

- Let's go for a walk around the playground.
- Will you go and get the swimming key for me?

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## Explore simple calming and de-escalation strategies

This video describes simple calming and deescalation techniques.



Video hosted on Youtube <http://youtu.be/R2PSExM-NhU>

Closed Captions

Source:

[Dartmouth Trauma Interventions Research Center](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2PSExM-NhU>

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## Be mindful of body language

Rehearse body language and positioning so that you can feel confident when responding in challenging situations.

For example:

- Maintain a calm presence and provide reassurance.
- Allow extra physical space between you.
- Approach or position from the side, rather than front on. This is less confronting.
- Keep an appropriate distance. Close enough to let ākonga know you're there, but making sure they don't feel trapped.
- Use appropriate eye contact. Direct eye contact can be challenging and intimidating.

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## Make time and space

When people are feeling upset or distressed, they are usually too emotional to process reasoned and logical arguments. Avoid asking questions and rationale for behaviours until students feel secure and regain control.

For example:

- Give ākonga extra time and space to settle.
- Some students are likely to need extra time to recover from distress.
- Extend time in alternative spaces and doing alternative activities.
- Reduce demands for extended periods.

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