



Kids Included Together

# De-Escalating Unsafe Behavior

This resource has quick tips on de-escalating unsafe behavior. Program Leaders can use this tip sheet as an outline for staff training or as a self-assessment on de-escalating behavior. Program staff can use this resource as a reminder on how to best de-escalate unsafe behavior.

**For more information on this topic, visit the KIT Academy.**

1



## Remove the Audience

- Relocate other children as far away as the room allows (or another room, if available).
- Reduce the amount of attention from peers.
- Avoid talking or making eye contact.

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## Be a Coach

- Approach with a side-by-side technique.  
*Don't stand over the child or take an assertive position in front of them. Approach from the side, shoulder-to-shoulder, and crouch down to their level.*
- Stay arm's distance away.

*The closer a child lets you get, the more receptive they tend to be.*

2



## Establish a Second Set of Eyes

- Call for support from someone **NOT** in ratio, when possible.  
*If staffing doesn't allow for this, be sure the other children are in a safe area with something to focus on like drawing or playing cards. Remind them that you are going to keep everyone safe.*
- This person should focus on the other children.

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## Use Words and Gestures to Relate

- Acknowledge the child's feelings out loud without making assumptions.  
*For example, saying "You seem upset you lost the game" instead of "You're angry you lost the game."*
- Avoid open-ended or "why" questions.  
*It's about connection, NOT correction.*

3



## Set up the Environment

- Await your "second set of eyes."
- Remove furniture and materials from around the child.
- Try to position yourself in sight of a camera if you have them in your program.

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## Engage with Empathy

- Look for signs that the child is relaxing.
- Offer simple choices that don't relate to the behavior.  
*For example, if the child got upset while playing with Legos, don't force them to clean up. Instead, ask, "Would you like to read a book or draw with crayons?" Make sure to offer choices that are calming for that specific child.*
- Take the first opportunity to offer praise.



*There is plenty of time to clean up later.*  
**The most important thing is to keep everyone safe.**

## Help Staff Discover the Skills the Child Needs

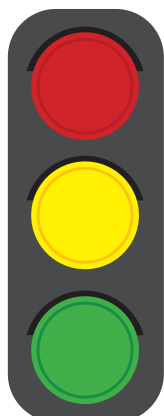
- Capitalize on teachable moments later in the day.
- How can you help the child develop skills to respond differently in the future?

## For Program Leaders:

Before you begin staff training on how to de-escalate unsafe behavior, you should assess your staff's current frustration threshold. Use the chart below to understand where to begin your training.

## Assess Staff's Frustration Level in the Moment

(Meet staff where they are, not where you want them to be.)

	If your staff is...	Try this...
	NOT ready to engage the child	Remove Audience and Establish Second Set of Eyes (Steps 1 & 2)
	Willing to try with help, may be unsure about following steps	Continue Steps 1 & 2 and add Step 3: Set Up the Environment
	Ready to engage child	Use all six steps independently

## In the Moment:

- Take a Moment to Refocus & Self-Regulate
- Practice deep breathing by placing one hand over your abdomen and inhaling deeply; try to move the hand over your belly with your breath.



### REMEMBER

Children and youth aren't **GIVING** you a hard time; they are **HAVING** a hard time!