



Combs Educational Consulting, Ltd.

Special Delivery

The newsletter for evidence based practices
in Special Education
November, 2017
Volume 1, Issue 4

BEHAVIORAL CRISIS PREVENTION

Is your classroom a safe and supportive place for students to learn to manage their behavior? A few simple steps can ensure that it is. I liken behavioral crisis prevention to fire prevention because it provides a commonsense framework for knowing many practical strategies to PREVENT the crisis from occurring. As we know, there are really only two appropriate strategies to implement once a fire has ignited...get the heck out and call 911! On the other hand, there are MANY strategies that we can use to PREVENT that fire from starting.

This simple “fire prevention” checklist, with a few simple tweaks of the analogy, will help you prevent behavioral crisis in your classroom by simply applying the same logic used in fireproofing your home.

Make sure your smoke alarms are installed and working. You must know and pay attention to the early signs of a child’s escalation so that you can take early action. These early warning signs (grumbling, sighing, fidgeting, shoving chairs, etc.) need to be shared with any adults who may be in a supervisory position

with the child, including those in the cafeteria, recess areas, specials classes, etc.

Create a safety/escape plan.

Have a simple plan for evacuating all students from the area when a behavioral crisis occurs. Have a simple signal that cues everyone to leave the area, and a plan of where the students are to go. Practice it now and then so that it can be done safely and with the least disruption possible.

Keep heat sources at a safe distance from flammable materials. You can likely identify what common triggers there are that are likely to “inflare” a student. If interacting with a particular student tends to be a trigger, seat the two students apart. If loud, crowded hallways are a trigger, let the student transition a few minutes before or after the rest of the students.

Don’t overload electrical outlets.

Students who are under stress or experiencing sensory overload or are overwhelmed by frustration are more prone to be triggered. Be aware of what overloads your student(s) and ensure that you are unplugging some of the stress inducing elements before they ignite a crisis.

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Beware of unattended flames.

Just as you wouldn't go to sleep with an unattended candle burning, you need to be aware of a child's emotional state "burning" and respond to it. If a child appears to be upset, depressed, sad, angry, do what you can to put out that flame before it causes a problem.

Candles should only be burned in sturdy, non-tip, and non-combustible holders.

Children who are under stress, dealing with trauma, are experiencing rage or are otherwise emotionally compromised need a safe and separate place to process their emotions with a supportive adult, or may need a place to just "chill out" for awhile.

High-risk areas should be protected by ground-fault circuit-interrupters.

Just as you make sure that outlets in kitchens and bathrooms are equipped to interrupt a potential short circuit, you need to look at the high risk activities, interactions and locations that could lead to a child's behavioral escalation and have plans to interrupt and redirect the child to a different topic of conversation, a different activity or different area to prevent further escalation.

Install a fire extinguisher and know how to use different strategies to put out different types of fires.

Plan ahead for the simplest and safest appropriate means for extinguishing different behavioral fires. Remember, just like there are different methods for putting out an oil fire than an electrical fire, there are also different methods for handling a behavioral crisis, depending on its cause. You don't want to accidentally make a fire spread when you are trying to put it out.

Keep high-risk areas free of clutter.

Many things can contribute to the likelihood of a behavioral crisis occurring. Family stress, trauma, abuse, academic difficulties, social difficulties, bullying, sensory overload are just a few examples of clutter that can cause an enormous fire from just a small spark. Be aware of the "clutter" in your students' lives and try to reduce it when possible, or assist the student in dealing with it.

Unplug appliances when not in use.

Students who are at-risk of behavioral crisis benefit from planned, proactive "breaks" throughout their day. The opportunity to "unplug" for short periods can reduce the stress chemicals that can set a person up for behavioral crisis.

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Avoid build-up of flammable substances. The more stress that builds up in a student, the more likely it is for a small spark to ignite a huge flame. Try to prevent stresses from building up by noticing and dealing with early signs that things are going awry.

Don't smoke in bed! There may be certain activities, interactions or locations that create such a high risk of potential behavioral crisis for an individual student that they should just be avoided at all costs. While rare, it is critical to be aware of these and to avoid them.

Dispose of ashes and coals in a metal container away from the house. After a behavioral crisis has been extinguished, realize that the ashes can still be hot for a long time. Don't force the child to return to the classroom or to process the situation too soon, or you risk re-igniting the fire.

Ensure your chimney is clean and in good repair. It is imperative that children who struggle with emotional and behavioral self-management have opportunities to release their feelings safely and completely in a way that does not interfere with the learning and safety of others. Plan ahead for with whom, how and where that can happen at a moment's notice.

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Home Checklist for Older Consumers
www.cpsc.gov/CPSCPUB/PUBS/701.html;

Home Safety Council
www.homesafetycouncil.org; Fire Safety Checklist for Older Adults,

United States Fire Administration
www.usfa.fema.gov.