

## Prevention Strategies

Adapted from Fritz Redl's Strategies

Staff working with students who have severe emotional disabilities can often prevent crises from occurring. Fritz Redl has proposed a list of useful strategies that can be used in the classroom to handle many situations.

1. **Proximity Control:** Closeness of the child to the teacher in a stressful moment may stem an outburst, not so much because of fear of detection but because the child can draw added strength from the teacher's nearness. The staff member can stand near the student or in some cases can touch the student in a reassuring way (hand on shoulder). Touch should be used with caution, as it may be upsetting to some students.
2. **Planful Ignoring:** The technique of ignoring depends on the situation and whether or not we can safely afford to ignore what is happening. The student may be using the behavior to test the staff. By ignoring the behavior we are showing our disapproval of that behavior. Attend to him when he/she is on task.
3. **Signal Interference:** We signal by a nod, pointing or a gesture calling attention to the fact that what is going on should be controlled. Signals are usually most effective in the early stages of misconduct and may prevent incidents from escalating.
4. **Emotional Drain Off:** When a child can verbalize anger and frustration s/he is less likely to act it out. This may be done by allowing the child to openly express feelings either to the group or to the teacher, whichever seems most appropriate or available.
5. **Humor:** Laughter can serve several useful functions. It can reassure the child he has little reason for anxiety. By handling an incident with humor, the teacher retains the leadership of the group, while wiping out the anxiety. Humor should be genial and kindly. There is no place for sarcasm or ridicule.
6. **Hurdle Help:** Some children misbehave in school when they do not know how to cope with some aspect of the work. If this occurs, provide some assistance and help the student over the hurdle of what seemed difficult. The teacher's strategy is to help the child with the task at hand, to prevent the misconduct.
7. **Diversion and Re-Direct:** Sometimes a growing restlessness becomes evident with the student or the class as a whole. Rather than concentrate on the over-excitement, it may be wise to change the nature of the activity or re-direct the students to a new focus of interest/activity.
8. **Support from Routines:** In some groups problems arise because children do not know what is expected of them. The establishment of routines meets this need. Consistent daily management and organization are the best tools to support positive behavior.
9. **Direct Appeal:** A direct verbal appeal to the student to discontinue the misbehavior may be sufficient to alter the situation. Direct appeal is most effective when used sparingly. It

should be clearly stated which behavior is unacceptable, what needs to be done instead of the inappropriate behavior, and the likely consequences for the student's choices.

10. **Conflict Resolution Room:** When a student becomes a danger to self or others or severely disrupts the ongoing program, it is necessary to remove the child from the classroom. This should be the last resort after other proactive options have been tried. While in the Conflict Resolution Room (CRR), the adult helps the student to regain control and then to make sense of what happened so that the student can learn more adaptive ways to handle future situations. This is a time of problem-solving and consequences, not punishment. The student should be welcomed back into class with the plan that the student and CRR staff developed together.
11. **Skillful Use of Classroom Materials:** There are objects which hold strong appeal for children. If misuse occurs, then the child and the object must be gently separated. At other times, the object may be so supportive and tension-relieving, that it may be helpful during times of stress. Skilled use of classroom materials will help to support individual needs and positive behaviors.
12. **Encouragement Rather Than Criticism:** “Catching the child doing something good” is a more effective way to shape behavior than criticism. Praise students by giving concrete, specific examples of their academics and behavior that highlight positive gains. Students are better able to accept descriptive praise rather than personality praise. Say “The colors that you used in the artwork are vibrant!” rather than “You’re great!” Students with low self-esteem are better able to “own” concrete examples of their accomplishments rather than general praise.
13. **Anticipating Planning:** Some new situations are hard for children to manage. Often a brief description of what the situation may be like or what limitations may be anticipated will enable the group to feel more relaxed in the face of the challenging event.
14. **No:** You must say “no” when a “no” is required. It can be given firmly and calmly. Its judicious use will increase its effectiveness. It can be reassuring for the child to have the adult set the limits.
15. **Rewards and Promises:** Receiving a reward or reinforcement is one way to acknowledge and promote behavior that is appropriate. Reinforcement should always be paired with social praise so the student understands the direct connection between his/her behavior and the reward. Initially, the student may need instant gratification to encourage personal growth. Start where the student is at and gradually delay the reinforcement or require more to get it so that the student can progress. Success breeds success.
16. **Consequences/Not Threats:** It is helpful to clearly state the consequences of the choices that students may make, acknowledging that they have the power to choose their own behavior. Encourage them to choose wisely. Threats undermine relationships, put the locus of control on the adult, and create anxiety. Consequences encourage responsible decision-making.