

## STRATEGIES TO DE-ESCALATE PEER-VS.-PEER CONFLICT AMONGST STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL DIFFICULTIES

**1. Modelling** → The key strategy for managing minor conflict within the classroom is for the teacher to model positive conflict resolution behaviour. If a teacher uses sarcasm, overuses shouting, always responds punitively to minor infringements, holds a grievance over a number of lessons etc. then the students will view this as the 'rules of engagement' in the classroom and act accordingly.

**2. Seating Arrangements** → Carefully consider your seating arrangements. A U-shaped seating arrangement or group tables may foster positive group work but may also lead to negative interactions because they force students with emotional and social difficulties to sit looking directly at one another.

**3. Safe Territories** → Students with social difficulties are often resistant to change and become aggressive in response to uncertainty. They will often prefer a set seat and table (a 'territory') in the classroom. Avoid frequent, abrupt changes in seating plans.

**4. Team Spirit** → Encourage students to take on responsibilities for the running and upkeep of the classroom – such as taking the register, handing out and taking in books, handing out writing equipment, writing the date on the board etc, praising each other's work. Always encourage and reward students who help another student.

**5. Use of Language** → Use constructive language when advising students on their interactions with one another, "Please speak politely to each other." rather than "Don't call each other names." For some students with concentration and receptive language difficulties, using the negative means they automatically focus on the negative – and then tend to act impulsively on this thought.

**6. Red Lines** → Read the 'emotional climate' of social interactions – classroom humour and light-hearted banter will go a long way in helping relax the students and make for a better learning environment, but left unchecked it can escalate quickly as students with social difficulties will often take jokes too far. Discuss what the 'red lines' are with students and consistently remind them.

**7. Triggers** → Try to spot 'hidden' triggers amongst the students who regularly engage in conflict – especially discreet comments (often seemingly harmless single words), leading questions, sly nudges and throwing etc that some students will use to provoke confrontation whilst avoiding unwanted teacher attention / classroom sanctions. If possible, ask a colleague to come and 'help out' in a lesson with the aim of spotting these triggers and those students involved.

**8. Soap Opera Switch Off** → Try to distinguish between real anger and acted anger. Some students will deliberately over-react as a way of diverting attention from the work, gain adult attention and to try 'score points' against a student they are in conflict with. This may not be something they think through consciously but will habitually resort to. In these situations, it is crucial not to get caught up in the drama and to respond quickly, calmly and matter-of-factly in addressing the issue - then switching straight back to discussing learning.

**9. Solution-Focused** → If students are in constant conflict, remove either individually or together from the classroom audience to discuss the issue. Move away from the typical 'who started it' discussion and direct them towards 'moving on'. Students with social difficulties are likely to have a deeply embedded view that the only way of ending a conflict is by 'winning' the argument and will need repeatedly coaching in 'letting go'.

**10. Slow Motion Repeats** → Some students fall into a habit of 'quick responding' – they will misread situations and rapidly respond defensively / aggressively. On talking through a conflict, try to break it down into steps to raise their awareness of how the conflict emerged. Where appropriate, it can be useful to have another adult sit in and explain what happened as a 'neutral'. It is important during this process, that the language 'taking responsibility' and 'putting things right' is focused upon rather than 'blame' and 'punishment'.

**11. Action Replays** → Where you have trust with a student and they are receptive to your advice, it can be useful to repeat verbatim the insults they have used in a matter-of-fact way (this takes away the taboo / perceived power of such insults) and even 'play act' their responses. This can prove a very effective tool in raising self awareness. In extreme situations, a temporary CCTV camera could be placed in the room to playback behaviour to students involved in constant conflict.

**12. Diversion Tactics** → Following conflict, ask the student/s involved either going with another member of staff to do a job for 5 – 10mins or if you can trust them, running an errand. This will help provide 'cool off' time and distract their attention from the previous issue.

**13. Bully Spotting** → If there is repeated conflict between particular students or if there is a complaint made, then it is important to follow it up with an investigation - with support from pastoral staff. Sometimes students may claim that a conflict is a two-way argument when in fact it is being instigated and perpetuated by them as the more dominant, aggressive side.

**14. Time Out** → Where there are repeated issues of conflict, a protocol – organised in cooperation with dept. colleagues or pastoral staff – may be required to allow particularly volatile students to take limited 'cool off' time in another classroom or office area.