

PBIS QUESTION

How does a staff member avoid a power-struggle when dealing with a defiant students?

The bulk of the information provided below is acquired from **Dodging the Power-Struggle Trap: Ideas for Teachers**. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.interventioncentral.org/behavioral-interventions/challenging-students/dodging-power-struggle-trap-ideas-teachers>. This is the same website that I pulled information from last week. It has an abundance of ideas that you may find helpful. I recommend that you take a few moments and read the full article as well as explore this website, it is highly informative.

What disengaging tactics can I employ with a defiant or non-compliant student?

- As a staff member, use a brief, simple stress-reduction technique before responding to a provocative remark or behavior
- Respond to the student in a 'neutral', business-like, calm voice. If a person speaks calmly, that individual is more likely to believe that he or she really is calm-even when dealing with a stressful situation.
- Keep responses brief when addressing the non-compliant student Short staff responses give the defiant student less control over the interaction and can also prevent instructors from inadvertently 'rewarding' misbehaving students with lots of negative adult attention.
- Avoid reacting in a confrontational manner to 'baiting' student remarks that are deliberately intended to draw you into a power struggle



What interrupting tactics can I employ with a defiant or non-compliant student?

- Divert the student's attention from the conflict.
- Remove the student briefly from the setting. If the teacher notices that a student is becoming argumentative with classroom peers or acting defiantly toward adults, the educator may want to briefly remove the student from the room ('antiseptic bounce') to prevent the student's behavior from escalating into a full-fledged confrontation
- Allow the student a 'cool down' break. Select a corner of the room (or area outside the classroom with adult supervision) where the target student can take a brief 'respite break' whenever he or she feels angry or upset.
- Paraphrase the essential points of the student's concerns (Lanceley, 1999). Many students lack effective negotiation skills in dealing with adults. As a result, these students may become angry and defensive when they try to express a complaint to the teacher-even when that complaint is well founded. The instructor can show that he or she wants to understand the student's concern by summing up the crucial points of that concern (paraphrasing) in his or her own words.
- Ask open-ended questions to better understand the problem situation and find possible solutions (Lanceley, 2001). The instructor may pose who, what, where, when, and how questions. One caution: **Avoid asking "why" questions (Lanceley, 2001) because they can imply that you are blaming the student (e.g., "Why did you get into that fight with Jerry?").** Also, the student may become even more frustrated when asked a 'why' question, because he or she may not be able to answer it!

What deescalating tactics can I employ with a defiant or non-compliant student?

- Replace negative words in teacher requests with positive words (Braithwaite, 2001).
- Use non-verbal strategies to defuse the confrontation. When people get into arguments, they often unconsciously mirror the emotional posturing of the other (Braithwaite, 2001; Long, et al., 1980)--for example, pointing when the other points, standing when the other person stands, etc. The teacher can

use non-verbal techniques to lower the tension when confronted by a student. For example, if a student is visibly agitated, the teacher may decide to sit down next to the student (a less threatening posture) rather than standing over that student. Or the teacher may insert a very brief 'wait time' before each response to the student, as these micro-pauses tend to slow a conversation down and can help to prevent it from escalating into an argument.

- Acknowledge that the student is in control and must make his or her own behavioral choices. Sometimes students defy adult requests because they want to demonstrate their own autonomy and independence. When a student's confrontational behavior appears to be driven by a need for control, the teacher can frankly acknowledge that the student is free to choose whether or not to comply with the instructor's request. Of course, the teacher also presents to the student the likely consequences for non-compliance (e.g., poor grades, office disciplinary referral, etc.). Walker (1997) recommends framing choices for uncooperative students in a two-part statement. The teacher first states the negative, or non-compliant, choice and its consequences (e.g., the student loses free time at the end of the day if a seatwork assignment is not completed). The teacher then states the positive behavioral choice that he or she would like the student to select (e.g., the student can complete the seatwork assignment within the allotted work time and not lose free time).
- Offer the student a face-saving path out of a potential conflict. Students sometimes blunder into confrontations with their teachers and then are unwilling or unable to back down from those show-down situations. In such instances, the teacher may want to engineer a way out for the student that allows that student to avoid a full-blown conflict while saving face.
- Use humor to defuse a confrontation. By responding with humor to a defiant student, the teacher signals to that student in a face-saving manner that his or her behavior is not yet so disruptive or confrontational as to be a violation of the behavior code. The student can join the teacher in laughing off the event and return to participation in class activities. Instructors should exercise caution, though, when using humor to defuse confrontations.
- Label the emotion that the student's behavior appears to convey. A teacher, for example, who observes a student slamming her books down on her desk and muttering to herself after returning from gym class might say, "Angelina, you seem angry. Could you tell me what is wrong?" 'Emotion labeling' (Lanceley, 1999) can be a helpful tactic in deescalating classroom confrontations because it prompts the student to acknowledge his or her current feeling-state directly rather than broadcasting it indirectly through acting-out behavior.
- Consider the 'communicative function' of the confrontational behavior. Students may not feel comfortable telling the teacher that they don't like a class assignment, have forgotten their study materials for the fourth time this week, or do not know how to do the math problem that they have been asked to solve on the board. So they convey the message instead through disruptive and defiant behavior. When the instructor is able to 'read' the message that the defiant student is trying to send through his or her behavior, that teacher can sometimes restructure the assignment or otherwise modify the activity or classroom setting to defuse the confrontation with the student.