Behavioral Response Script Development Guide

Behavioral response scripts are based on the concept of the “Incredible 5 Point Scale” (Kari Dunn Buron; http://www.5pointscale.com). The 5-Point Scale is a visual system to assist students in understanding social, emotional, and behavioral concepts and expectations and to recognize and respond effectively to varying levels of stress and anxiety. It is a cognitive behavioral method of teaching students how to recognize their own internal emotional states and then to practice successful behavioral responses to those states. Information on a variety of uses of the scale can also be found on the Autism Internet Modules website (www.autisminternetmodules.org). An adaption of the scale, outlined in this guide, describes the process of developing behavioral response scripts for staff. The considerations provided are intended to guide and prompt team discussion, however all decisions about behavioral responding for individual students should be made on a case-by-case basis. Case examples are provided in the training that corresponds to this script development guide.

It is recommended that behavioral scripts be developed as a team. Teams should include staff who know the student, environment, context, and available resources, staff knowledgeable about behavioral principles, parent(s), and the student when appropriate. Developing the script in a team meeting with a facilitator using a whiteboard or chart paper and a note-taker capturing the information on the form makes the process efficient as well as improves implementation through team participation and input. The process of developing the script includes four primary steps:

1) Identify what the student says and does during each phase of a behavioral escalation. Fewer levels can be used if 6 distinctive escalation levels do not exist.
2) Develop a step-by-step script for staff to follow when the student begins a behavioral escalation. Ensure the script includes enough detail (e.g. discuss the “what if the student does ‘this’” scenarios) so staff are not left to make response decisions during times of escalation. Key ideas, concepts and considerations for developing scripts are provided in the guide below.
3) Teach all staff how to implement the system and model and practice implementation. This will help identify holes in the plan and give staff more confidence and competence in following the script.
4) Identify and collect data on student behavior(s) and implementation fidelity to guide future adjustments to the script.

Additional Considerations:
- The PURPOSE of a script is to empower adults to consistently respond to student behavior in ways that reduce escalation and teach self-regulation skills.
- Scripts should be nonverbal (or at least minimally verbal), non-emotional, & non-punitive. Providing visuals of the script to each staff member (e.g. what you do and what you say) is recommended to reduce adult emotion during escalation and increase implementation fidelity.
- When using words, ensure staff monitor para-verbal communication (e.g. not what it said, but how it is said), so words do not seem emotional or punitive.
- If Level 5 requires physical intervention or seclusion, be sure staff are well aware and follow procedures set forth by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) for the Emergency Use of Seclusion & Restraint (http://michigan.gov/documents/mde/StandardsforSeclusion-Restraint_247533_7.pdf).

Behavioral Response Script Outline

The graphic below outlines the basic organization of a script and the primary staff responses at each level. It is organized and represented as a temperature gauge which starts from the bottom and increases with escalation. The information to follow is organized with Level 1 at the top to enhance implementation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Escalation</th>
<th>What STUDENT Says and Does</th>
<th>What STAFF Says and Does</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 6—Recovery</td>
<td>Calming behaviors indicating readiness to re-engage</td>
<td>Supports to return to schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 5—Aggression</td>
<td>Physical aggression toward self / others.</td>
<td>CRISIS / EMERGENCY INTERVENTION PLAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4—Anger</td>
<td>Verbal aggression including threats of physical harm</td>
<td>Forced break / time away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3—Agitation</td>
<td>Noticeable increase or change in behavior</td>
<td>BREAK to reduce demands; evaluate environment for stressors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2—Anxiety</td>
<td>Slight change in behavior</td>
<td>Strategies to alleviate anxiety / teach self-regulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1—Engagement</td>
<td>Appropriate behavior &amp; following expectations</td>
<td>Positive feedback / reinforcement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Behavioral Response Script Description & Example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Escalation</th>
<th>What STUDENT Says and Does</th>
<th>What STAFF Says and Does in Response to Student Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 1</strong></td>
<td>• This level includes behaviors that demonstrate engagement</td>
<td>• Instructional delivery is explicit and engaging with high rates of opportunities to respond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Examples</td>
<td>• Tier 1 (Universal) interventions (e.g. positive feedback, use of classroom procedures and routines) are implemented with fidelity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Follows instructions</td>
<td>• The individual PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) plan is implemented with fidelity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Actively &amp; independently engaged</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Level 3 Agitation

- Behaviors at this level are those that are unlikely to go unnoticed and suggest increased emotional dysregulation and a higher likelihood of a full-blown escalation.

- Examples
  - Noticeable Disruption
  - Pacing around the room
  - Active refusals
  - Blurt outs
  - Increased voice volume
  - Attempting to escape situation
  - Moving in and out of groups
  - Off task & on task cycle

- PURPOSE: Students at this level are vulnerable as they are potentially on the brink of a full escalation. As such, the level includes a staff-initiated break to try to interrupt the escalation, protect the dignity of the student and minimize disruption to the classroom. It is critical that the script is detailed and that staff adheres to the specifics to help ensure control of their own emotions and behavior and thus prevent inadvertently further escalating the student.

- BREAK CONSIDERATIONS: Break is defined as a time-limited reduction of demand to allow the student the opportunity to regain behavioral and emotional control and prevent the probability of staff inciting further escalation. The following considerations for developing a break script are offered:
  - **Break Activity:** Break activities should serve to calm the student but must be benign in reinforcing value. Examples may include getting a drink of water, taking a hallway walk, going to a break area in the classroom or going to a cool down place / break area outside the classroom. Some students can eventually learn to access “break” right at their seat using a visual to cue staff not to engage them and then return to task when break is over.

  For activities that are highly reinforcing (e.g. preferred interests, technology), it is best to embed them in the student’s schedule and avoid calling them “breaks.” Instead, identify these activities as “choice time,” “preferred activity time,” etc. The term “break” should be reserved for the reduction of demands associated with behavioral escalation as this serves to increase clarity for staff in implementation and avoids inadvertently reinforcing challenging behavior by offering highly preferred activities when students escalate.

  Break choices can be offered as long as the student does not perceive choice-making as a demand which may increase the likelihood of further escalation.

  - **Length of Break:** Break can be as short as 30 seconds but should be no longer than 5 minutes. A student may access back to back breaks making the break longer than 5 minutes, but staff should evaluate readiness and/or prompt back to the schedule at least every 5 minutes. By doing so, multiple opportunities to regain control and return to schedule (i.e. engagement) are offered.

  - **Return to Schedule Protocol:** It is critical to develop a script protocol for returning to schedule after break. The expectation should always be that the break is the completion of the activity (e.g. taking a short walk) or the end of the designated time (e.g. no more than 5 minutes). However, some students may need more than the designated time to deescalate, so decision rules for such situations should be established (see example script below for considerations).

  - **Data:** Data should always be collected on break dates and times and contextual variables in place when break is initiated. This will allow the team to monitor implementation and potential inadvertent reinforcement of challenging behavior and thus assist in making adjustments to the script.
SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT:

- When identified behaviors occur or staff move from Level 2 because the strategies to alleviate the issue are not working, an adult-prompted break is initiated (e.g. “<student>, this is level 3, it’s time for a break”). Staff should avoid using phrases such as “you need to” or “you must” as they tend to incite refusal and escalation. Keeping words and phrases factual (e.g. “it’s time to”), non-emotional (e.g. keep para-verbal communication in check), and non-punitive (Remember, this is just an opportunity for the student to reduce sources of agitation in order to regain regulation and return to engagement). If the student refuses to take a break (e.g. leave the classroom, go to the designated area in the classroom), go to Level 4 protocol.

  NOTE: If student refuses to take the break, a couple issues may be occurring. First, it could be that staff has not prompted the break early enough in the escalation cycle when the student is more likely to comply. In this case, Level 2 should be revisited to attempt to get to the adult-initiated break earlier. Second, it could be that the student perceives the break as punishment rather than an opportunity to regain regulation. Using a word other than “break” or using an interest area that might be better understood (e.g. “warp pipe” from Mario Bro’s for a student with ASD) may assist in addressing this concern.

- Once break is initiated, set a timer for the amount of time previously determined for break. The timer is intended for staff to know when to move to the next step in the script, but if the student finds it helpful, it can be used with the student as well. Once the timer is set, staff should eliminate all engagement with the student (e.g. talking to, looking at, or responding in any way). This will help ensure that the challenging behavior is not inadvertently reinforced. Should the student pose a safety hazard during this time, respond only as needed to create a safe environment. Behaviors that pose a safety hazard are Level 5 behaviors so Level 5 script should be initiated.

- When the time goes off, a few options can be considered when designing break protocol for return to schedule:
  - Staff determines the student is not yet ready to return to schedule based on pre-identified behaviors (e.g. student is yelling, kicking). Timer is re-set for another break period.
  - Staff provide the student a choice to take another break or return to schedule (e.g. staff says “continue break or return to schedule?” Staff may need to be specific about what the current task is on the schedule).
  - Staff determines the student demonstrates pre-determined engagement behaviors (e.g. is calm, asks to go back to class), and simply states “break is over; let’s check the schedule for what’s next.”

Whenever the student is offered a choice to continue a break or return to the schedule and does not choose, the default choice is break. Not choosing is indication of continued escalation. When no response is made, staff should say, for example, “it looks like you have chosen break” and continue break protocol until the student returns to schedule.

NOTE: Whatever protocol is decided, staff should follow the developed script as written and not deviate unless the team, using data, makes adjustments to the protocol. The script should include every detail of what the staff is to say or do.
### Level 4

**Anger**

- Behaviors at this level include verbal aggression and minor property damage but do not include behaviors that indicate imminent danger to self or others (Level 5).
- Some students do not present with behaviors that can be differentiated between Levels 4 and 5. In this case, combine them into one level.

**Examples**
- Screaming / yelling
- Swearing
- Breaking pencils
- Tearing up work
- Stomping feet
- Threats to harm others

**PURPOSE**: The purpose of this level is to provide a safe environment for the student to de-escalate and to prevent behaviors that are a danger to self and others. It is critical at this level that the student is removed from the classroom to a safe place (non-punitive time away) or the students in the classroom are removed to ensure safety for all.

**SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT**: For this level, a non-punitive time away protocol must be developed with extensive detail to ensure staff knows what to say and do at all times. Staff emotions at level 4 will likely be intense and the potential for becoming a precipitating factor to the students’ continued or further escalation is extremely high. As such, a detailed script is absolutely critical.

It is also important to ensure all components of the script align with the procedures set forth by MDE for the Emergency Use of Seclusion & Restraint (http://michigan.gov/documents/mde/StandardsforSeclusion-Restraint_247533_7.pdf).

**Component Considerations in Developing a Non-Punitive Time-Away Script:**
- Location of time away – as close to the classroom as possible is recommended.
- Process for getting to time away including how the student will be cued – (NOTE: If the process includes removing other students, be sure to include the details of how they are cued it is time to go, where they go, what they do, and when and how they return)
- Protocol for addressing behaviors in time away to avoid inadvertently reinforcing challenging behavior and extending the length of the escalation
- Length of time away (NOTE: Do not exceed recommendations outlined in the MDE guide referenced above)
- Return to schedule protocol to avoid inciting re-escalation
- Data collection including documenting and reporting the incident
- Staff debriefing

Wayne RESA Behavioral Guidelines document may assist in developing time away procedures (http://www.resa.net/downloads/special_education_guidelines/behavior_intervention.pdf)

### Level 5

**Aggression**

This level, often considered “crisis,” includes behaviors that pose an imminent danger to self and others

**PURPOSE**: The purpose of this level is exclusively to provide a safe environment until the student deescalates.

**SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT**:
- If restrictive procedures (e.g. seclusion or restraint) are needed, it is critical the script align to the procedures set forth by MDE for the Emergency Use of Seclusion & Restraint (http://michigan.gov/documents/mde/StandardsforSeclusion-Restraint_247533_7.pdf).
- Should a pattern of behavior occur that requires seclusion or restraint, the team must develop an Emergency Intervention Plan (EIP) as outlined MDE for the Emergency Use of Seclusion & Restraint (http://michigan.gov/documents/mde/StandardsforSeclusion-Restraint_247533_7.pdf).
Level 6 Recovery

- This level is most often needed for students who engaged in Level 4 or 5 behaviors.
- Behaviors include those that indicate the student is deescalating. Because de-escalation is a process of incrementally reducing the intensity of the behavior, behaviors may vacillate between Level 1 and Level 4 during this time. Level 1 behaviors indicate readiness to return to schedule.
- Examples
  - Quiet / Withdrawal
  - Crying
  - Sleeping
  - Confusion
  - Denial / Blaming others
  - Responsiveness to instructions

- PURPOSE: The purpose of this level is to ensure the student returns to a Level 1 behavioral/emotional state before returning to the schedule and task demands. It is critical that the student not be prompted to re-enter the schedule too soon after Level 4 or 5 behaviors have occurred because the likelihood of rapid re-escalation is high. Further, adult behaviors can very easily reignite the escalation, so a detailed recovery script and re-entry to the schedule protocol is crucial.

- SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT:
  - Adult verbalizations should be minimal during this time and it is recommended that the verbalizations be scripted out for staff to use to minimize the risk of re-escalation (e.g., “Ready to return?”). These simple questions are intended to give the staff opportunity to evaluate the student’s readiness to return to schedule.
  - A pre-determined “check for readiness” task may also be included in the script (e.g. word search, puzzle, paper/crayons). This task should be benign in reinforcing value and again is intended to provide an opportunity for the staff to assess the student’s recovery.
  - If the student is not ready to reengage with the schedule (as determined by checks for readiness described above), more time to recover should be provided. The “check for readiness” portion of the Recovery script is repeated until student is ready to reengage with schedule.
  - No debriefing or analysis of the incident with the student should occur during Recovery due to risk of re-escalation.
  - Explicit in the script should be the process by which the staff member(s) have the opportunity to take care of their own recovery needs and debrief about this incident.
## Behavioral Response Script--BLANK

**Student Name (DOB):**  
**School (ISD, District, Building):**  
**Date:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Escalation</th>
<th>What STUDENT Says / Does (observable)</th>
<th>What STAFF Says and Does in Response to Student Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1 Engaged</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 2 Anxiety</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 3 Agitation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 4 Anger</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 5 Aggression</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 6 Recovery</td>
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</tbody>
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The works of G. Colvin, R. Sprick, B. Smith-Myles, K. Dunn Buron, and R. Iovannone were reviewed in the development of The Behavioral Response Script Guide