Behavior Management Techniques

These techniques are appropriate to use when a youth is showing signs of stress, and may be escalating towards a crisis. They are designed to provide support and lessen the stress to the point that the young person can use their own coping strategies to handle the situation.

Proximity
This simply means being physically close to the young person while offering support. Often this will minimize the chances that the behavior will get out of control.

Touch is a powerful intervention and, if used at the wrong time with the wrong person, can easily escalate the situation. If done at the right time, a simple touch can be a reminder that a caring adult is there for help and support. It requires knowing how the youth will interpret the touch. If they have a history of sexual assault, touch may be interpreted as the beginning of another abusive situation. Knowing the youth and having developed a trusted relationship is critical.

Prompts
Prompts involve short statements or key words that will let the young person know what is expected of them or what will be coming next. They can be non-verbal, such as eye contact or throat clearing. Or they can be signs, signals, or reminder of schedules (What happens at 10AM?) that help the youth return to the expected activity or help the youth transition.

Hurdle help
Sometimes stress is caused by situations being very complex and overwhelming. Hurdle help is a technique to reduce the complexity of the situation and to help the youth get started. For example, the adult can do a small piece of the task at hand to demonstrate how to break the task down into smaller steps and make it more manageable and less overwhelming. Sometimes it might be enough to just get started, refocusing on the activity and away from feeling stressed out.

Time away
This strategy involves taking the young person away from the stressful situation and them a chance to regroup and regain control. It is not meant to be used as punishment like time out. Because it is intended as a positive alternative, the adult should be clear that the youth will come back to activity soon.

Redirection
This technique involves offering the youth an alternative to a stressor the youth is experiencing at the time. If, for example, the youth is going to a store to buy a certain snack and is stressed out because the snack is not available, the adult might suggest another attractive snack that is available and help prevent the child from getting too upset about the situation.

Directive statements
Directive statements are not commands or demands; they are simple, direct, and clear statements of expectations which provide the youth with guidance on what to do next. Keeping a calm tone of voice is
critical. “Please, go to your room and cool down” will be more effective than “Go to your room right
now!” This strategy is particularly helpful when the adult detects signs of confusion or anxiety which
can easily lead to increased agitation.

Caring gesture
Young people need to know that the adults who surround them care for them. Caring gestures are
techniques to show the youth affection, interest, and concern without overstepping professional
boundaries.
- Smiling
- Supportive phrases and gestures (“thumbs up”)
- Expressing that you care for them
- Encouragement
Expressions of caring and affection must be genuine and sincere. Using caring gestures might redirect
and prevent a youth’s behavior from escalating further.