

# District Student Services

March 2022



## De-Escalation Tips for the Red Brain



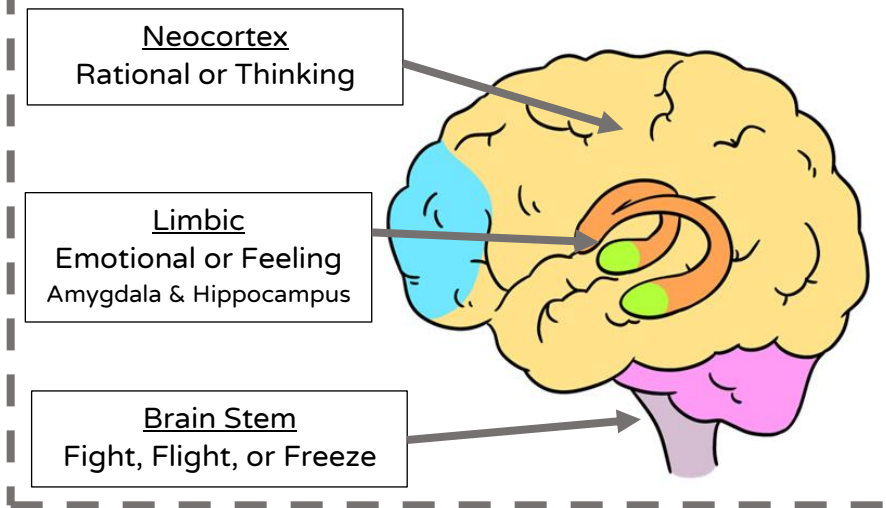
I can be a tool of torture or an *instrument of inspiration*. I can humiliate or *humor*, hurt or *heal*. In all situations, it is *my response* that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or *de-escalated*, and a student *humanized* or de-humanized.

- Haim Ginott

Let's take a moment to think about the past few years in the eyes of a child. It seems like everywhere we turn; we are bombarded by negative or upsetting events. The phrase "traumatic event" is often attached to these times in a child's life, but what exactly is trauma and what does it do to the brain of a child?

A traumatic event is an incident experienced by someone that is perceived to be dangerous or that threatens serious injury or death. When someone experiences trauma, they lose their sense of control and safety and frequently become hyperaware of their surroundings. **Trauma** is a sensory experience that may allow the person to return to regular functioning within a few days or weeks, while others may have difficulty for years afterward.

When a child is calm (*blue brain*) all parts of the **brain** are working in harmony. However, when a child experiences a trauma, there is a disconnect between the parts of the brain and emotions take over. The Brain Stem, or Reptilian/Ancient Brain, takes over when we are threatened. This is when a child may **fight (throw objects, hit, kick, etc.), flight (run), or freeze**. When a child experiences a traumatic event, the limbic system releases higher levels of cortisol (the stress hormone) which results in a higher alertness. The amygdala may go into overdrive and cause fear responses to even normal events, such as a door slamming or loud voices. The hippocampus may stitch together memories of the traumatic event in a way that causes a child to be more fearful. Finally, the Neocortex allows a child to maintain rational thoughts and behaviors. However, when a child goes into *red brain*, they act without thinking; their behaviors are caused by a trigger that clicked the brain into the past traumatic event. When this happens, it is best to reframe the dialogue from teaching to soothing as we try to figure out how we can de-escalate the student.



(Psychology Today, 2022)

### Crisis Prevention Institute - **CPI's Top 10 De-Escalation Tips**

Provided by: Matt McCraine – Behavioral Specialist

#### Tip 1 – Be empathetic and nonjudgmental

When someone says or does something you perceive as weird or irrational, try not to judge or discount their feelings. Whether or not you think those feelings are justified, they're real to the other person. Pay attention to them.

#### Tip 2 – Respect personal space

If possible, stand 1.5 to three feet away from a person who's escalating. Allowing personal space tends to decrease a person's anxiety and can help you prevent acting-out behaviors.

#### Tip 3 – Use nonthreatening nonverbals

The more a person loses control, the less they hear your words – and the more they react to your nonverbal communication. Be mindful of your gestures, facial expressions, movements, and tone of voice.

#### Tip 4 – Avoid overacting

Remain calm, rational, and professional. While you cannot control the person's behavior, how you respond to their behavior will have a direct effect on whether the situation escalates or defuses.

#### Tip 5 – Focus on feelings

Facts are important, but how a person feels is the heart of the matter. Yet some people have trouble identifying how they feel about what's happening to them.

#### Tip 6 – Ignore challenging questions

Answering challenging questions often results in a power struggle. When a person challenges your authority, redirect their attention to the issue at hand.

#### Tip 7 – Set limits

If a person's behavior is belligerent, defensive, or disruptive, give them clear, simple, and enforceable limits. Offer concise and respectful choices and consequences.

#### Tip 8 – Choose wisely what you insist upon

It's important to be thoughtful in deciding which rules are negotiable and which are not. For example, if a person doesn't want to shower in the morning, can you allow them to choose the time of day that feels best for them?

#### Tip 9 – Allow silence for reflection

We've all experienced awkward silences. While it may seem counterintuitive to let moments of silence occur, sometimes it's the best choice. It can give a person a chance to reflect on what is happening and how they need to proceed.

#### Tip 10 – Allow time for decisions

When a person is upset, they may not be able to think clearly. Give them a few moments to think through what you have said.

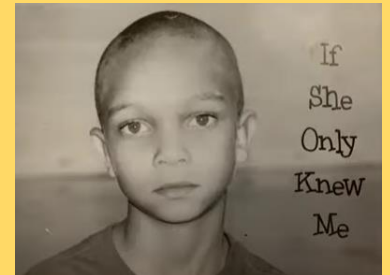
(The Crisis Prevention Institute, 2022)

### Trauma and the Hulk



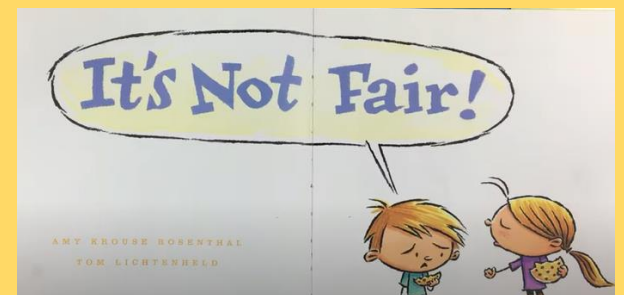
Dr. Jacob Ham's video analogy of The Hulk and Trauma

### If She Only Knew Me



Jeff Gray and Heather Thomas Book on Video – For Teachers  
Provided by: Debra Collins – ESE Specialist

### It's Not Fair!



Amy Krouse Rosenthal Book on Video – For Students  
Provided by: Debra Collins – ESE Specialist

### Resources and Strategies for Understanding Depression

Resource	Description	Grade Level	Educator	Family
<a href="#">We Are Teachers</a>	7 Surprising Classroom Triggers for Kids Who Experienced Trauma (and How to Avoid Them)	All	X	X
<a href="#">De-escalation Script</a>	Basic de-escalation script for educators and parents to utilize when a child is experiencing a behavioral health concern.	All	X	X
<a href="#">Child Mind Institute</a>	School Cuts Suspensions by Asking Kids What's Bothering Them	All	X	

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