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Don’t Keep a Good Man Down: Intervention Strategies for Common Causes of Anger and Aggression

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Interventions and Strategies:

- **Determine the Cause of Angry and Aggressive Behavior/Perform Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)** – Use prior experiences and/or data to understand why the behavior occurred and what the person is communicating through their behavior.

- **Recommend Breathing Exercises** - Ask the individual to close their eyes and take deep breaths in through the nose, from the diaphragm and let them go through the mouth. If this seems frustrating, also ask them to notice where the tension in their muscles is strongest and focus on relaxing those muscles (Davis & McKay, 2008).

- **Begin Relaxation Exercises** - Prompt the person to still themselves and focus on their thoughts. Ask them to use their meta cognition to focus on the thoughts that they are having, and repeat a word, or count to three. When a thought comes along, observe it and then think about the repeating. This allows for the analysis of their own aggression as well as releasing tension (Davis & McKay, 2008).

- **Prompt the Individual to Visualize a Peaceful State** - Allow the individual time to visualize a scene in which they prefer to relax. In this scene, visualize all the details of what one might experience in a calming environment. This may also be helpful for an individual to visualize themselves calming and try to utilize that relaxation in the current situation (Davis & McKay, 2008).

- **Get Help** - Send or call for assistance.

- **Physical Interventions** - Physical Intervention should only be carried out when less restrictive interventions have not relieved the situation, when the student’s ability to communicate is not hindered, and only when there is imminent danger of physical harm to self or others (704 KAR 7:160).

- **Disconnect from Personal Attacks/Emotional Responses** - When communicating with a defensive person avoid exaggerating, lying and distorting. Do not use sarcasm or attempt to get in the last word. Set boundaries but do not set ultimatums or provide consequences at this time. Finally, avoid shouting or raising your voice when a calm clear voice would communicate as effectively (Thompson & Jenkins, 1993).

- **Reinforce the Control of Behavior** - Positively reinforce the ability to control angry and aggressive behavior rather than inadvertently reinforcing the negative behavior (Zirpoli, 2012).

- **Contingency Contract** - A contingency contract is a written behavioral agreement between a student and a teacher regarding the consequences of their behavior and targeting specific productive behaviors. Contingency contracting provides awareness of and reinforcement for constructive behaviors (Wilkinson, 2003).

- **Provide Clear, Simple Instructions** - Calmly present the defensive individual with clear and specific directions regarding what to do. Providing the individual with choices of positive and negative consequences, allows him or her the ability to take responsibility for their behavior.

- **Provide a Supportive Environment** - Anxious individuals respond most positively to people who demonstrate empathy, genuineness, and warmth in both their environment and the way they communicate (Wampold, 2011).

- **Choose Words with Care** – To effectively communicate during a crisis, one should continuously evaluate a person’s progress and their needs with genuineness and authenticity (Wampold, 2011).

- **Address the Harmful Stimulus** – A behavior does not occur within a vacuum, rather it is a reaction to a stimulus. Address that stimulus to allow de-escalation.

- **Practice Relaxation Techniques and Coping Strategies** - Talk about what happens when situations escalate and it’s mental and physical effects on the individual.
  - Rehearse breathing, relaxation, and visualization techniques that can be used to calm him or her (McKay & Rogers, 2000).

- **Establish an Effective Reinforcement Plan** - Positively and consistently reinforce targeted behaviors in all environments schools wide (Benner, Nelson, Sanders, and Ralston, 2012).

References: