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Handling Confrontations MEADCAR

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As you go through your career you will come across many variations of simple models designed to help you deal with problem behaviour, confrontation and/or the need for intervention in the behaviour of a student. Such models can play the role of a mantra, helping you to focus your attention on the task facing you in a calm, professional and organised manner. The greatest recipe for disaster is to know that you must intervene because you are the teacher, and although you do not know what to do, you must do it anyway.

Meadcar spells out a framework by which you can regulate your intervention.

Maintain, - A calm, pleasant, presentation. This is your Maintain state. Control your breathing, relax your face muscles, and be aware of your nonverbal communication. Ensure there are no contra-indicators – anger, threat, disinterest, annoyance. Use assertive, respectful and accessible verbal language. Pre practice your positive, assertive stance.

Emotion – Recognise and respect the emotions on display. Never invalidate the student's feelings, concerns or opinions.

Assume – That student has a genuine reason to feel aggrieved/angry etc.

Decelerate – Reduce the level of interaction to the level where it can be discussed appropriately. Adopt deceleration of tension as your key objective.

Contain – Prevent the event from escalating or involving others. This may involve separation or isolation in extreme situations.

Agree – With the student what is to be done (**we** will meet after class and sort this out **together**).

Resolve – Do it, make the agreement work (WIN WIN situation).

These stages can be further analysed.

1. **Maintain:** once you have established your maintain state you will be able to cope with most situations far more efficiently. The maintain state includes:
 - a. Absence of defensive reactions.
 - b. Absence of aggression: comment, look, proximity, stance; steady calm look at the individual (not stare, glare or 'that look!')
 - c. Avoidance of passivity; be proactive and positive in your reaction.
 - d. Avoid creating communication roadblocks: Look for the signs; behaviour; respiration and perspiration – speech surge – facial gestures – physical language.
 - e. Ensure a win-win situation; to have a winner implies a loser.
2. **Emotion:** respect the emotions governing the behaviour. It is good to give recognition to the emotion "I understand you feeling angry, but I need you to calm down so you can tell me what the problem is.", "I can see you feel"
3. **Assume** a relevant (for the student) cause: Behaviour always has a cause, and no matter what the behaviour is, the person presenting it is reacting to that cause. Acting in that way must be seen to have some desired outcome for him/her. Do not disrespect the student's right to feel aggrieved or any other emotion even if it appears to have been caused in error. Assume that the reasons underlying the behaviour are genuine. Do not challenge or reject them until such time as a reasonable discussion or negotiation can be established.

4. **Decelerate:** show you mean no threat, speak empathetically, use appropriate humour, ask nonthreatening question, be aware of your stance and physical presentation. Suddenly attend to something else and then return. Ask the student to help you understand what is happening. Thank them at the first opportunity. Respect the individual and his or her emotions. Respond to the behaviour. Divert your attention towards something else for a moment – provide time for emotion to decelerate.
5. **Contain:** if the situation is not decelerating, or, the student is playing to an audience, or, others are on the verge of getting involved, move the encounter out of the room. Calmly explain that you cannot discuss this here but you are prepared to give the student the opportunity to explain things outside.
6. **Agree:** offer an opportunity a little later to sort things out; can't sort it now, class needs to get on or they won't ..." I can spend some time with you at break time, end of the lesson, end of the day, and we can sort this out together for you.
7. **Resolve:** never leave the event unresolved. Often a short meeting after everyone has calmed down will be enough to agree future interaction. Write down the agreement. Get the student to tell you in his/her own words what has been agreed. Research has shown that passing the problem up the ladder offers a significantly lower chance of it being resolved and a much greater chance of it being repeated and accelerating in the classroom.

With time this intervention model can become the basis of an unthinking and natural response pattern that prevents such situations escalating further.