



Considerations for Responsive and Responsible Use of Feel Your Best Self: Brief 2

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Emotion regulation strategies can be one effective solution for decreasing negative emotion and increasing positive emotion. Thus, widespread use of Feel Your Best Self (FYBS) strategies is encouraged to build important emotion-coping skills. There can be situations, however, in which putting strategies in place could be unhelpful or unproductive. We have created two briefs to highlight opportunities to facilitate responsive and responsible use of FYBS. In the *first brief*, we focus our example on considerations for emotional response to a range of stressors, including injustices. In this *second brief*, we focus our example on considerations when delivering more intensive supports.

To begin, it is helpful to remember that our primary purpose in creating FYBS is to increase access to simple, emotion-focused coping strategies that children can use as they to navigate different situations throughout their lives. By increased access, our goal is universal (i.e., all kids) and preventive (i.e., teaching proactively). Use of FYBS, however, can also be appropriate in responsive and targeted situations. For example, if we notice that a child is responding to an event with undesired or unhelpful behaviors (e.g., withdrawing, using unkind words), it can be highly relevant and appropriate to prompt use of an FYBS strategy. FYBS also can be useful with children who demonstrate need for increased intensity of emotion regulation support, that is, in targeted or individualized ways. For example, FYBS can be used in small groups or with individuals who need additional instruction, examples, or practice. Targeted supports work best when language and strategies are consistent across settings; thus, FYBS offers an excellent opportunity to provide more targeted instruction of lessons being taught to all students. If you are in a role where you are already working on goals related to emotion regulation, FYBS can flexibly integrate into interventions or strategies you are already using—in fact, we encourage such uses! For more ideas, check out our guides on Making the Most of the Toolkit for [Educators](#) and [Community Providers](#).

Although there are many potential uses of FYBS that are responsive in different situations, there are many situations where we don't need to, and shouldn't, suggest putting a FYBS strategy in place (at least, certainly not in the moment). Sorting out decisions about when, where, and how to use FYBS can be nicely illustrated using the cycle of escalation.

Imagine this:

You have just had the longest day at work; nothing seemed to go your way! You hit traffic on your way home and are sitting there restlessly. As the clock ticks on, you start impatiently tapping your steering wheel. After another 10 minutes, you can't help but sigh loudly and say: "Really? Come on!" in a very frustrated tone. BAM - someone rear-ends your car! You let out a scream - your heart is pounding, face is hot, and every muscle in your body is clenched tight. You get out of your car, ready to yell at the person who rear-ended you. You see there is only a tiny scratch and turn to face the driver of the car. The driver is a scared teenager that

immediately bursts into tears, so you settle a little. Your heart rate starts to slow, and your muscles relax a bit, but you feel a little dizzy and delirious. After exchanging insurance information, you get in your car and continue to calm down as you finish the drive home. You walk into your house and immediately collapse on the couch, closing your eyes and taking some deep breaths to continue calming. A few minutes later, you open your eyes, ready to go about your evening routine.

Congratulations, you just took a lap through the Cycle of Escalation ([Colvin & Scott, 2014](#)), at least in your mind! We have all taken this lap at one point or another – which means this is something we also can observe, and expect, our students to do too. We'll use this example to look at when and how to be responsive in integrating FYBS strategies, and when other intervention may be more appropriate in targeted situations.

In the car example, we didn't see the **Calm** phase until the very end, where you were finally able to return to the status quo of your evening routine. That's exactly what this phase represents. The Calm phase means you are functioning at your best and able to engage effectively; for example, you are ready for work, social interaction, etc.

We started our imaginary journey at the **Trigger** phase when the trigger of a traffic jam was encountered. This led you to get restless, stirring in your seat and watching the clock. As time went on, you became frustrated with the delays, and you entered the **Agitation** phase. You tapped your fingers on the steering wheel impatiently. After another 10 minutes, you entered the **Acceleration** phase. You couldn't help but audibly express your frustration at the traffic, even though no one else could hear. When the other car rear-ended yours, you entered the **Peak** phase – you involuntarily screamed, felt a physiological reaction, and were ready to yell at the other driver. However, when you saw that the accident simply left a small scratch, and that the driver was just a scared teenager, you began to enter the **De-escalation** phase. You started to feel less agitated, and your body started to calm down. As you got home to the comfort of your living room, you entered the **Recovery** phase. You took a few minutes alone as your body and mind returned to a state of homeostasis.

Using the FYBS Strategies Across the Cycle of Escalation

Now that you have an idea of what the Cycle of Escalation looks like, let's consider the responsive use of FYBS in targeted situations across the different phases. On the next page, we share what responsive use of FYBS looks like at each phase in the Cycle of Escalation.

Escalation Phase	Use of FYBS Strategies
<p>Calm The student is functioning at their best and can focus and engage with others appropriately and effectively.</p>	<p>This phase presents a <u>recommended</u> opportunity to proactively teach and practice FYBS strategies.</p>
<p>Trigger Faced with a trigger (i.e., unpleasant or upsetting situation or event), the student becomes uncomfortable and may show signs of being restless or off-task.</p>	<p>This phase is the first <u>recommended</u> opportunity to responsively suggest use of a FYBS strategy.</p> <p>Immediately following a triggering event or situation is a great time to remind a child of one of the strategies they can use to regulate their emotions and return to the Calm phase.</p>
<p>Agitation The student is now frustrated, anxious, etc. and shows signs of this (e.g., tapping fingers, disengaging from social interaction).</p>	<p>This phase presents the second <u>recommended</u> opportunity to responsively suggest use of a FYBS strategy.</p> <p>For example, a discreet, neutral reminder to use a Calm Your Self strategy while in proximity to a child can again help them regulate their emotions and return to the Calm phase.</p>
<p>Acceleration Frustration, anxiety, etc. have ramped up further, and the student shows additional signs of these feelings (e.g., calling out, provoking others)</p>	<p>This phase is usually the last opportunity to intervene by suggesting a strategy in a way that can de-escalates behavior. FYBS strategy use <u>might be recommended</u>.</p> <p>Like in the Agitation phase, you might provide a discreet, neutral reminder to use a strategy. However, it is important to then give the student space—walk away, attend to another student, and allow them time to respond. As soon as we see the student respond, we acknowledge this in a positive way, like by saying: “Really great job using Ground it Down to get back on track.”</p>
<p>Peak The student is now the most escalated they can be. There is a risk of danger to self and others and a risk of property damage due to the instability in this phase.</p>	<p>Sometimes, despite attempting to intervene, students will continue escalating to the Peak phase. Prompting use of a FYBS strategy is <u>not recommended</u> in the Peak phase.</p> <p>In the Peak phase, the focus should be on addressing and managing disruptive or dangerous behaviors.</p>
<p>De-Escalation The student is coming down from Peak escalation. They may be disoriented, withdrawn, attempt to restore any damage done, or deny any negative actions.</p>	<p>FYBS strategy prompting is <u>not recommended</u> in the De-Escalation or Recovery phases.</p> <p>In these phases, other restorative activities, like completing an independent activity, reflecting on the situation with a supervising adult, and repairing any damage done to the environment (e.g., cleaning up marker that was drawn on a desk) should take priority over prompting a FYBS strategy.</p>
<p>Recovery The student is getting ready to re-engage but still needs time to transition back to the Calm phase.</p>	

Descriptions of phases adapted from IRIS Center (n.d.). For more information about strategies to address behavior challenges in the Cycle of Escalation, we recommend reviewing the Comprehensive, Three-Tiered Model of Prevention (Ci3T)'s [Professional Learning Resources](#) and the IRIS Center module, [Addressing Challenging Behaviors \(Part 1, Elementary\): Understanding the Acting-Out Cycle](#).