

EDITION 5

## Student Agency and Coping Strategies

Influencing student behaviour requires understanding the importance of their **intrinsic motivation**, **self-regulation** and **agency** to choose for themselves. Student agency (or voice) refers to students' active role in the process of seeking, receiving, generating and acting on **feedback** (feed up, feedback, feed forward). This ultimately builds their sense of responsibility towards their own wellness.

This Edition of practical tools / strategies for de-escalation explores the role of student agency following a stressor, for the student to solve a problem and also regulate their emotions during de-escalation. We elaborate on targeted de-escalation strategies as per DET, Victoria, involving students choosing preferred **coping strategies** to act on, supported by teacher judgement.

### Intrinsic Motivation and Taxonomy

Intrinsic motivation allows for optimal student wellbeing. It is captured in the **Self Determination Theory's Taxonomy of Motivation**, summarised as a continuum in Figure 1.0. It highlights supporting students' psychological needs of experiencing autonomy, competence and relatedness (Trenshaw, et al., 2016) for them to achieve self-regulated and sustainable pro-social behavioural changes.

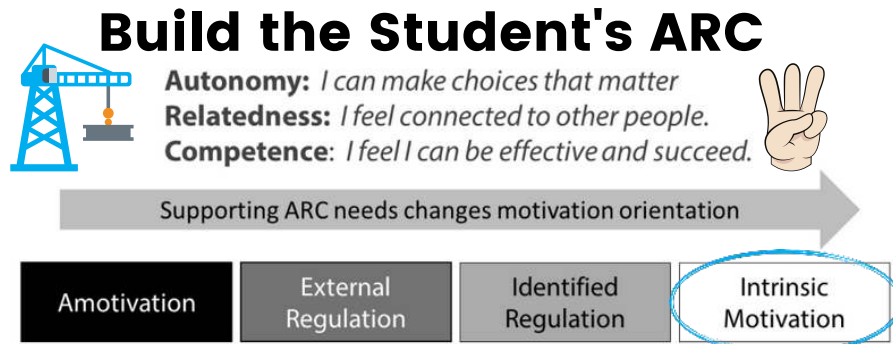


Figure 1.0 Supporting students' psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence can change students' motivational orientation toward intrinsic motivation (Trenshaw et al, 2016).

### AUTONOMY

**Refers to a sense that people control their own choices, and they can exercise their freedom of choice to proceed in whatever way they see as best.**

After a student has been triggered by a stressor into a de-escalated state, let them choose what type of coping strategy / skill to use for self-regulating their feelings and behaviour. Offer coping strategies that facilitate a student's ability to both problem-solve as well as self-regulate, using your teacher judgement.

Giving students autonomy to make decisions allows them to engage with the 3 critical of feedback questions (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Wisniewski et al, 2020), where feedback has been identified as a having one of the most powerful positive influences over student learning outcomes:

- 1. FEED-UP: "Where am I going?"**  
e.g. "How am I going to feel calmer? What ZONE am I in?"
- 2. FEEDBACK: "How am I going?"**  
e.g. "What coping strategy or skill am I going to choose?"
- 3. FEED-FORWARD: "Where to next?"**  
e.g. "What could I do differently next time?"

Learn more about student triggers, emotions, ZONES of Regulation, and even how this links to brain function, here from our [Edition 1 and Edition 2](#).

### COMPETENCE

**Refers to a sense that an individual has the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed.**

Preferred coping styles will vary from student to student, so offer a range of strategies within each style. This let's students feel competent that 'yes', they can regulate their behaviour as they can choose from options that they feel comfortable enough to apply to their own thinking and behaviour.

Offering various strategies is also an example of co-constructing meaning with the student about restorative practices, where you are co-regulating with the student by helping them 'calm their storm' and navigate the options.

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### RELATEDNESS

**Refers to a sense of community, belongingness, and shared purpose in an individual's efforts.**

Showing empathy and compassion is one of the most powerful ways to help a student feel like they belong (Walton & Brady, 2017; Yeager & Dweck, 2020; Broda et al 2018; Neff, 2011; See [Edition 2 and Edition 3 for more](#)).

Help students understand that:

- They are an important part of the team, they are seen, they are heard
- They teach others / learn from them
- The team includes their classroom peers, and wider school community.
- Our choices all effect each other, and that their contribution matters
- We all experience stress. It's natural.
- The team is on this journey, together
- Self-Compassion is critical

## Coping Strategy Options for Students

Be familiar with various coping options (styles) and strategies, so you can explain and offer them to your students. This works to motivate the student intrinsically as they take ownership over their choice and apply the strategy:

### Relaxation Options

#### Coping Strategies:

- Deep Breathing
- Mindfulness Activities
- Say a positive affirmation
- Grounding techniques
- Spend time in nature / Nature sound-bath

### Distraction Options

#### Coping Strategies:

- Doodle drawing / Colouring
- Read in a quiet spot
- Help with another task / job
- Organising an item / area
- Puzzles, Sudoku

### Sensory Options

#### Coping Strategies:

- Squeeze a stress ball, hold a toy
- Rest in a relatively quiet spot
- Listen to music / play an instrument
- Create art / Crafts
- Imagine a feel-good picture e.g. pet

### Movement Options

#### Coping Strategies:

- Get a drink of water
- Bounce a ball or build something
- Yoga Activities
- Go for a bike ride, walk or exercise
- Do some gardening

### Processing Options

#### Coping Strategies:

- Journaling - thoughts / feelings
- Write a letter
- Talk it out with someone trustworthy
- Use the 8 restorative questions ([Edition 4](#)).
- Use 'I feel...' statements to express feelings

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