



What early educators need to know about responding to BIG behavior in the moment

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National Center for
**Pyramid Model
INNOVATIONS**

ChallengingBehavior.org

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When Big Behaviors Happen



Responding to Challenging Behavior

Even when these practices are in place, some young children will engage in challenging behavior.



De-Escalating Behaviors



Escalating Challenging Behavior

A sequence of challenging behaviors that increase in intensity, and/or frequency, and/or volume

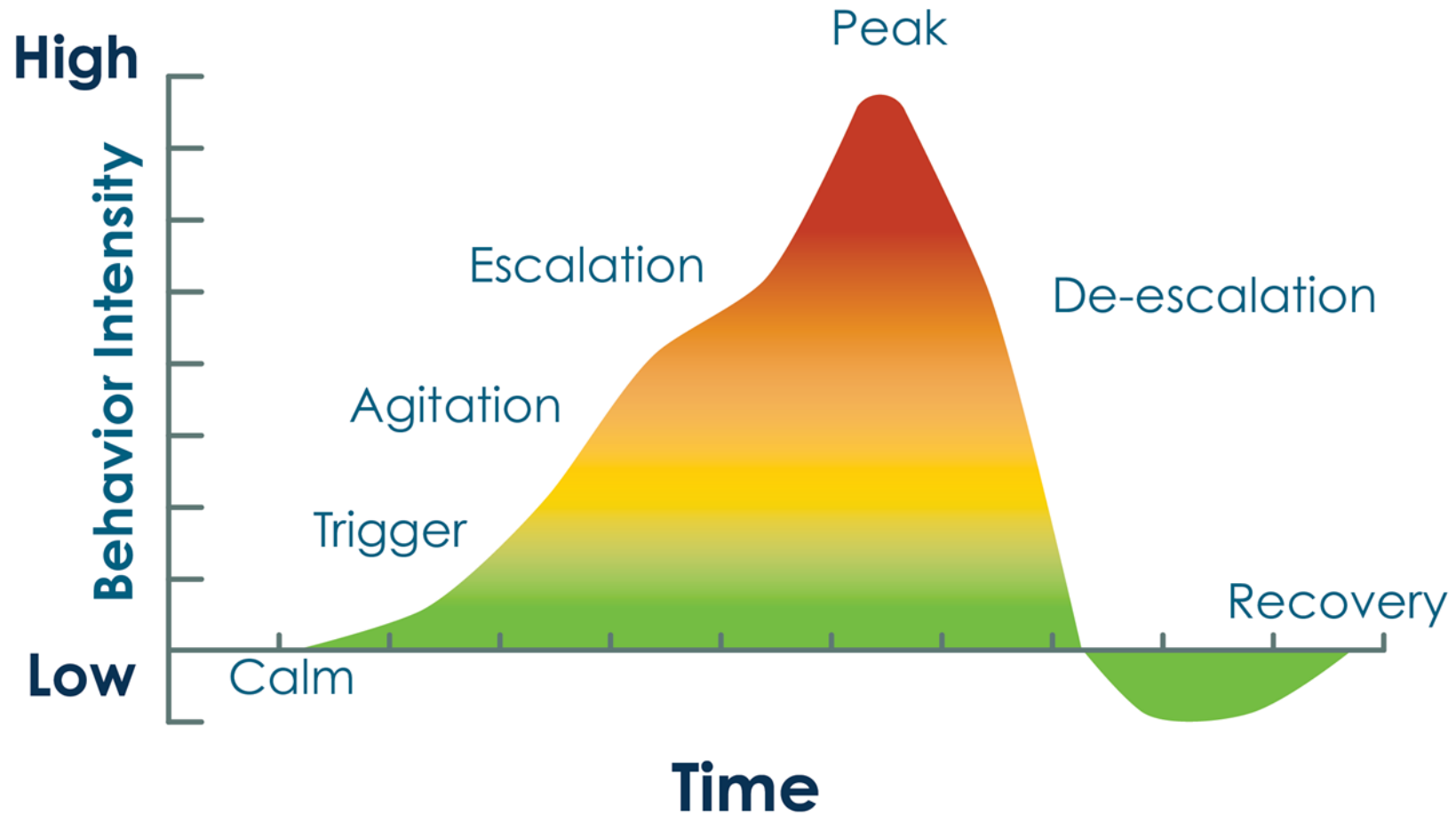
De-Escalating Challenging Behavior

A sequence of challenging behaviors that decrease in intensity, and/or frequency, and/or volume

Example of Escalation Cycle

- **Calm:** Laura is playing in the house area
- **Trigger:** Austin comes over and begins opening the cabinets and playing with the pots and pans. Laura says “I am playing with that”
- **Agitation:** Laura yells loudly “No, I am playing here. Don’t touch!”
- **Escalation:** Austin continues touching the toys. Laura grabs a pan out of Austin’s hand and throws it. She continues to shout “no” and “don’t touch”.
- **Peak:** Laura falls to the floor, cries, and tries to kick the teacher who comes to intervene and help her get up.
- **De-escalation:** The teacher redirects Austin to find another center. Laura continues to sob and has her arms crossed.
- **Recovery:** Laura sits for a few minutes and then get’s up and begins putting the pots and pans back in the cabinet..

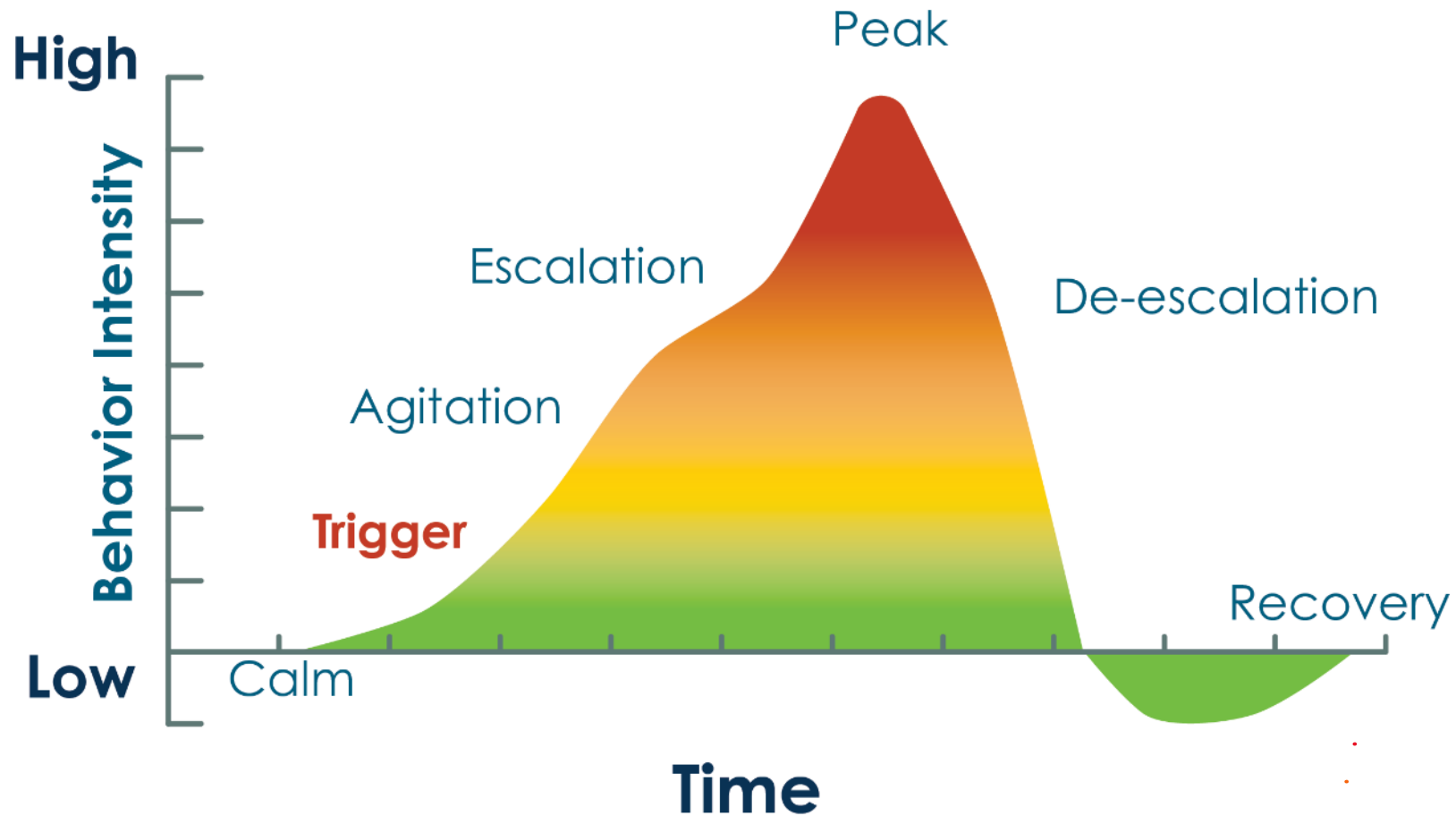
Escalation Cycle



Calm is When we Teach



Escalation Cycle: Trigger



Trigger: Strategies to Use?

- What practices or strategies might be used to support a child who is **beginning** to become distressed? How do you ensure they are trauma-informed?

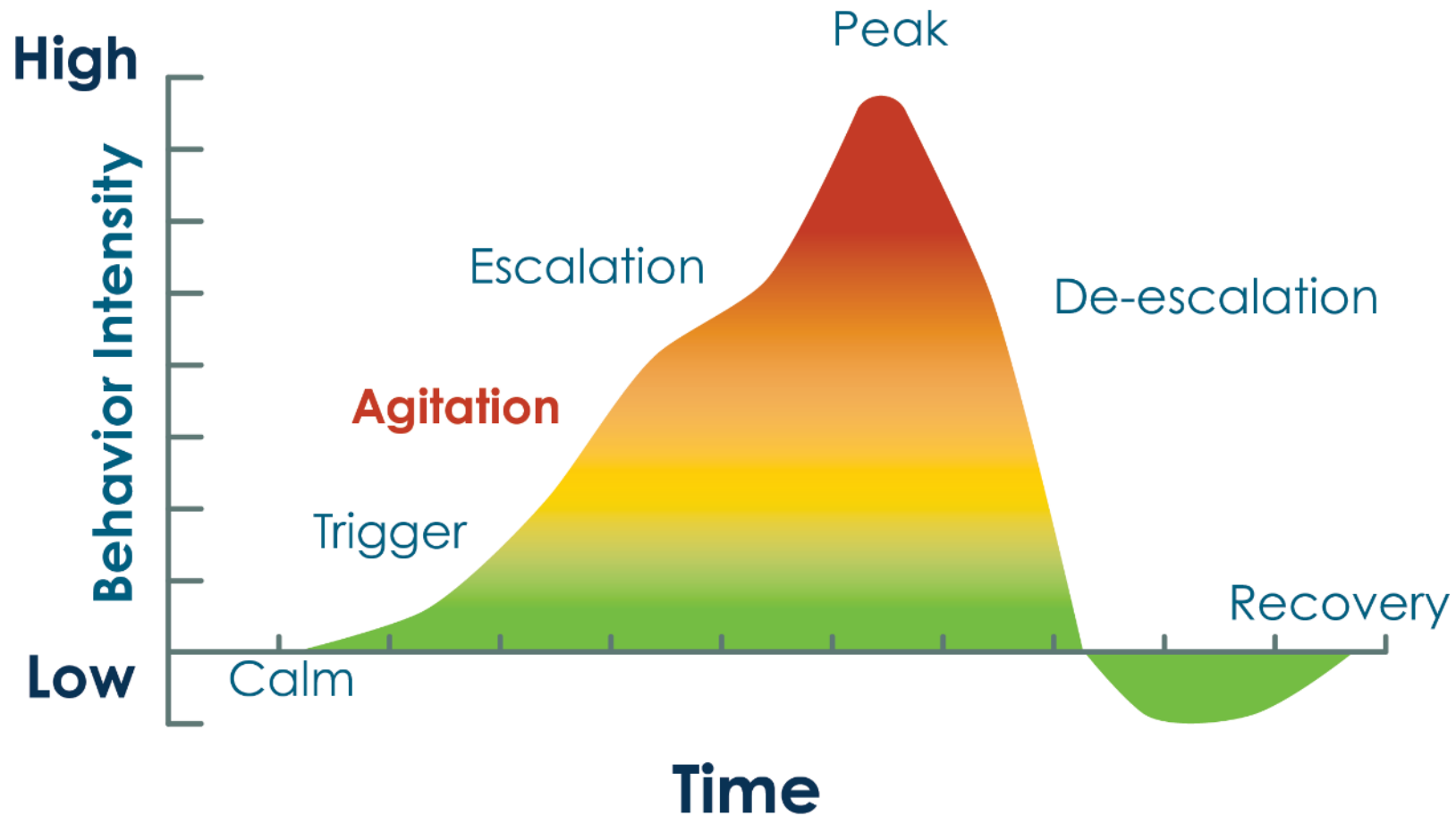


Tips for Limit Setting

- **Acknowledge, Validate, and Match Intensity**
“You really want to play with that toy.”
- **Communicate** the limit (brief, clear, neutral tone).
“We keep our hands to ourselves to be safe.”
- **Target** an acceptable alternative that meets the function of the behavior.
“You can ask for a turn, or you can pick another toy to play with.”



Escalation Cycle: Agitation



Agitation

- What strategies or practices can be used to assist the child become calm or less anxious/distressed?



Regulate Yourself

- Breathe deeply or access a regulation strategy to support your own regulation and model for the child
- Use a calm, confident voice
- Try your best to avoid showing frustration or a big emotional response
- Be mindful of non-verbal cues and body language
- We want to convey the message of
- **"You're safe. I'm here to help"**

Developing Neutralizing Routines

- Identify behaviors that push your buttons
- Develop a routine that:
 - Includes an if-then
 - If I feel tired, overwhelmed, or agitated by the child's behavior, then I will...
 - Is brief
 - Is clear
 - Is doable
 - Interrupts the chain of events
- Plan for your response ahead of time



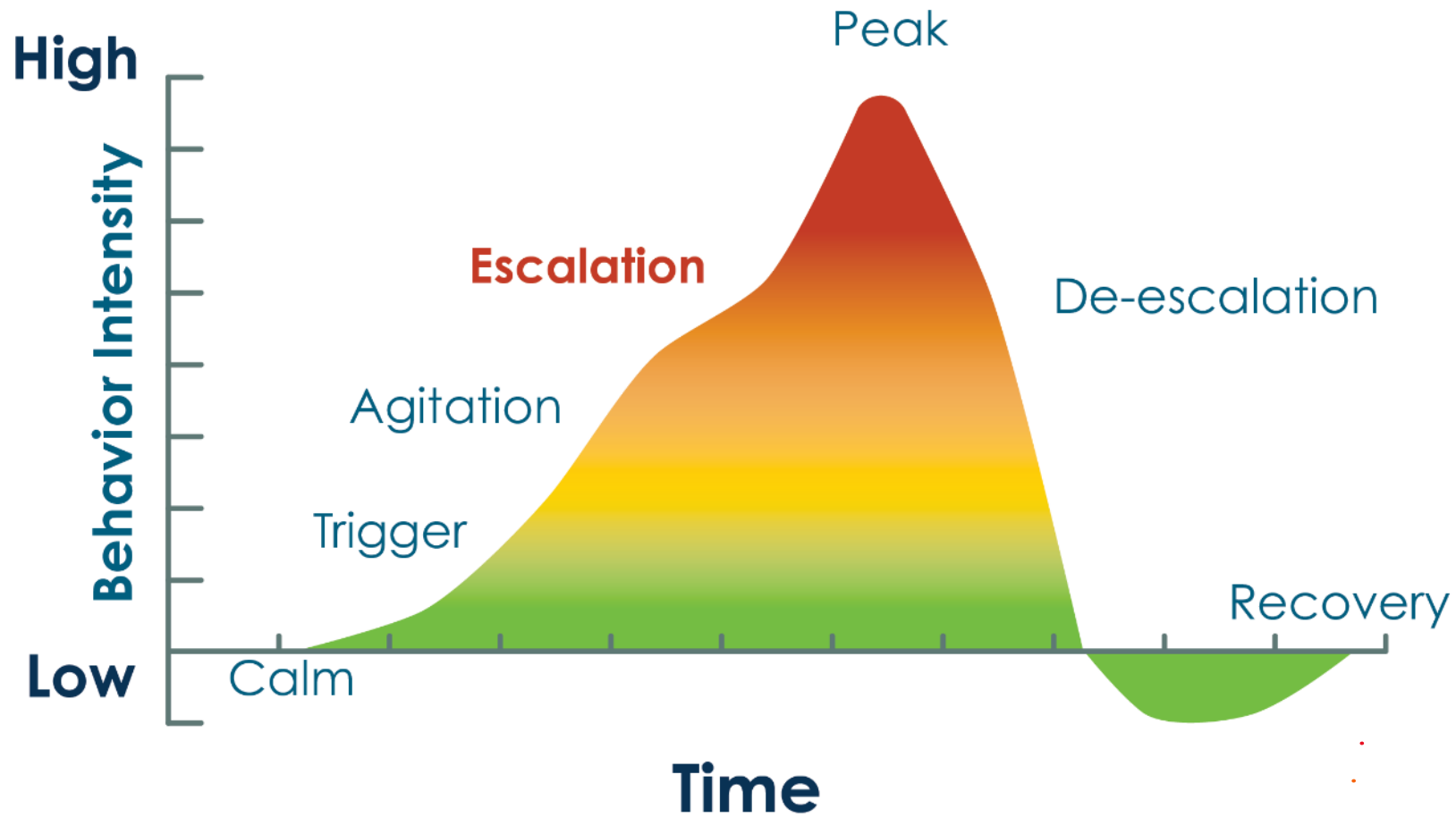
TRY

When I feel stressed by behavior that pushes my buttons, I will

- **T** – Take a deep breath
- **R** – Reflect on my emotions, reflect on the meaning of the child's behavior
- **Y** – **I will think**, You got this. You can be calm to support the child to be calm.



Escalation Cycle: Escalation



Escalation

- How might you respond to children in the escalation phase?
- What should teachers avoid doing when children are in this phase?



Avoiding the Power Struggle!

- Step back
- Take a deep breath
- Stay calm
- Maintain a posture of empathy



10 Words or Less 10 Seconds or Less

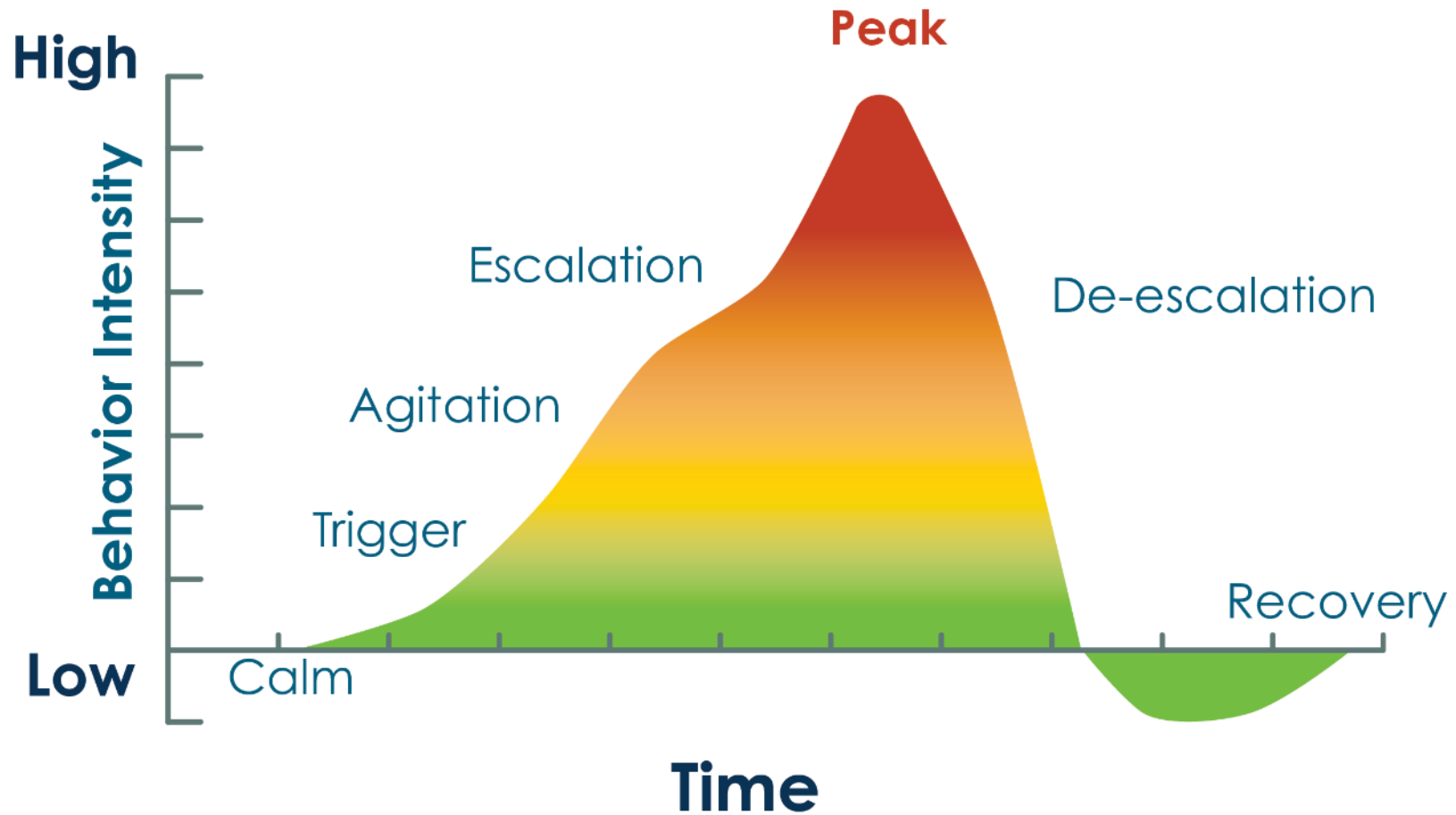
- Use clear, simple language
- Short, concrete guidance
 - "I am going to keep you safe"
 - "Safe hands"
 - "When you can sit on the floor, I know your body is safe"
- Provide **significant wait time in-between statements of support and guidance**
- Avoid:
 - Asking questions
 - Talking too much
 - Bribes or threats



Offer Co-Regulation

- Our only goal of de-escalation is to keep a child safe and to help them re-regulate
- Stay nearby to offer safety and support (try not to isolate a child, they need to inhale your calm or energy to regulate!)
- Use connection-based language:
 - "I'm right here with you"
 - "I'm a grown-up who can keep you safe"
 - "You are having a big feeling, We can work through this together"
 - "Do you want a hug or to rock?"

Escalation Cycle: Peak



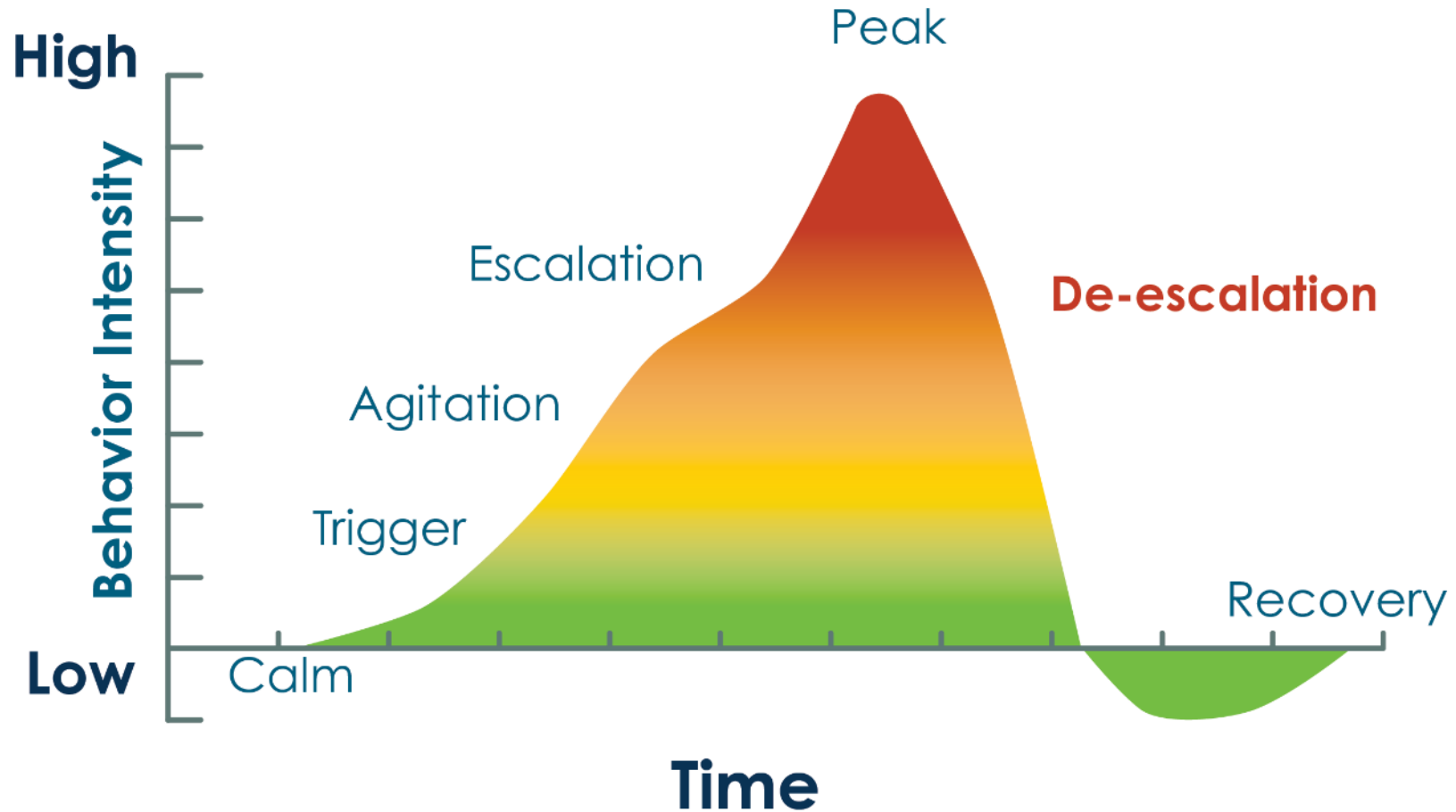
Safety-Net Procedures

- Know the procedures and policies of your program!
- If a child is in danger of harming self or others, you must first be concerned about safety.
- You might remove a child from the situation or remove other children from the situation to keep children safe.
- Safety-net procedures should be planned for children who have a history of dangerous outbursts.
- Safety-net procedures only keep children safe; they do not change behavior.
- Safety-net procedures are appropriate only when there is also a full behavior support plan or **intention to develop a plan.**

Trauma-Informed Considerations for Safety

- Remove dangerous objects in the environment and redirect a child to a safe space if needed
- Stay close without crowding or towering over a child. Offer physical proximity for co-regulation, not physical presence for pressure
- If you need to touch a child for their safety (e.g., they are climbing on a piece of furniture and you need to help them get down)
 - Offer a choice first (e.g., “you can climb down yourself or I will help you climb down”)
 - Give enough wait time for a decision to be made
 - If you need to help them come down, narrate. For example, “I am going to help you now. I am going to put my hands on your waist to help you come down safely. “

Escalation Cycle: De-Escalation



De-Escalation

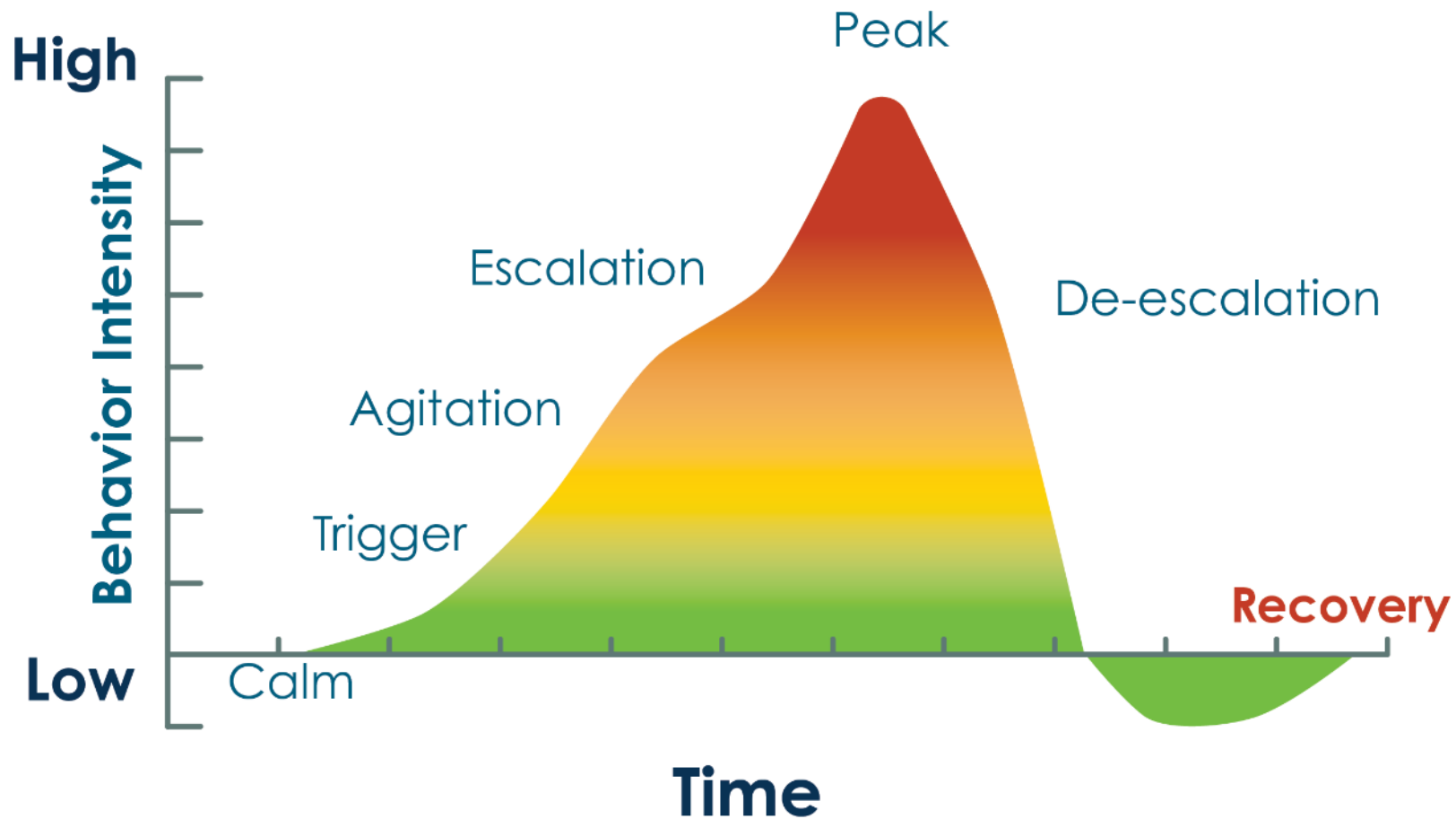
- Intervention is focused on removing excess attention
 - Be available but refrain from interaction that could re-trigger the child
 - Avoid blaming
 - Don't force an apology
 - Consider the function of the problem behavior (e.g., provide a hug, help the child access a toy)
 - Emphasize starting anew

Tips for De-Escalation

- Take a deep breath and regulate yourself.
- Walk slowly and calmly toward the child.
- Give verbal warning before approaching or touching the child.
- Be clear about the limit.
- Be patient and manage expectations.
- Praise the child when they are able to regulate.
- Repair



Escalation Cycle: Recovery



Recovery

- Child is calm and interested in returning to activities
 - Provide descriptive feedback for all appropriate behavior
 - Support the child's re-engagement with the group



Repairing with a child after a hard moment

- Hard moments happen in every relationship!
- After a hard moment children need to know they are still loved, valued, and safe in the context of their relationships with an adult.
- We can repair by:
 - Connecting
 - Comforting
 - Validating that the experience was hard or scary
 - Playing
 - Praising the effort that it took to regulate
 - Sharing that we still like and love that child no matter what



Repair

- Phrases you might use:
 - “We had a hard moment together. I have been thinking about it. I'm sorry I used a loud voice. I'm going to work on using a calm, kind voice even when I feel frustrated.”
 - “You are important to me.”
 - “I'm here to help.”
 - “It is my job to keep you safe, even when you don't like it.”
 - “Thank you for sharing how that made you feel.”
 - “Nothing you can do will change how I feel about you.”
 - “I'm a grown-up who can handle your big feelings.”
 - That behavior was scary for both of us. I'm going to keep working to help you feel safe.”



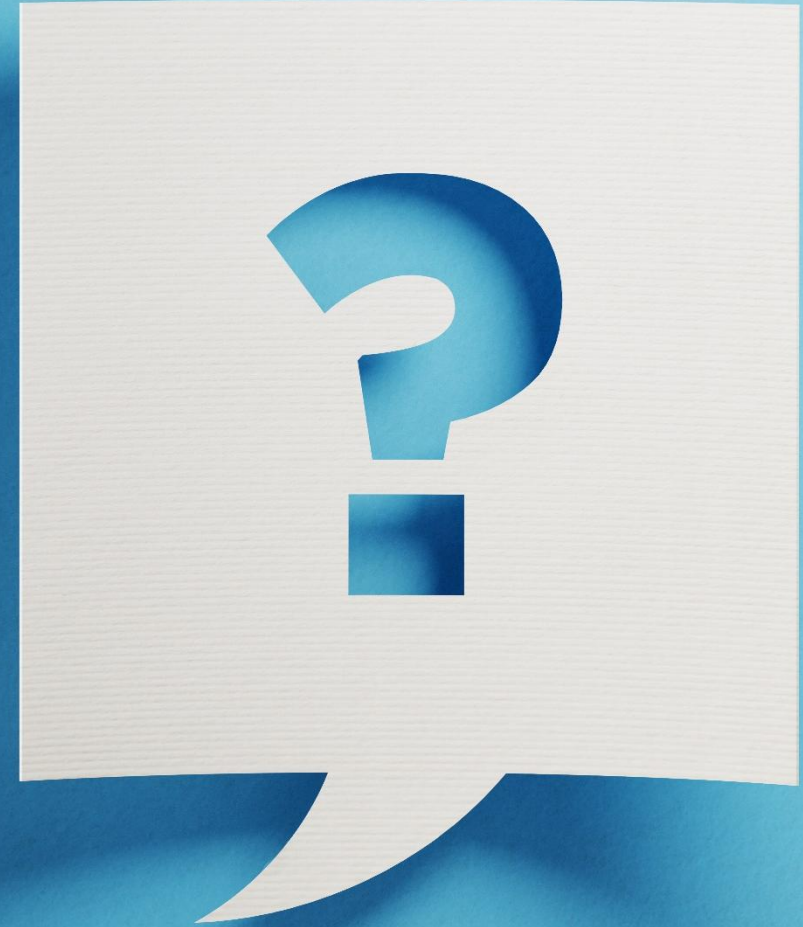
Healing Happens in Relationships Over Time

" I retired from being a preschool teacher after 25 years. I was at the park with my grandson when a girl who was 17 or 18 came up to me. She said, *I remember you, you are the teacher who used to hold me and rock me when I was little and having a hard time.*"



Questions?

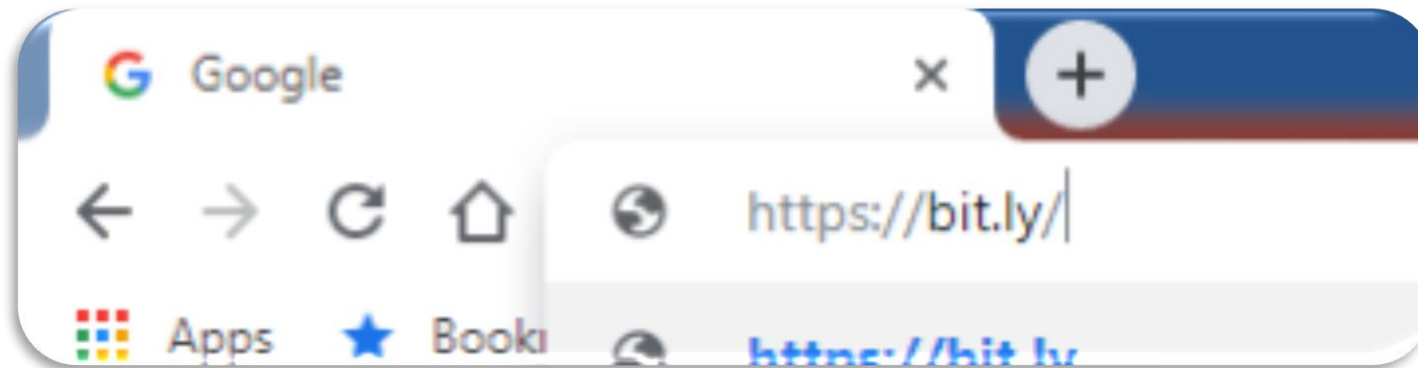
Use the
Q&A panel
to submit your
questions.



Survey and Certificate

Recording Viewers

- Type URL shown into a web browser window or scan QR Code
- *URL is case sensitive*



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The screenshot shows the NCPMI website homepage. At the top is the NCPMI logo and a search bar. Below the logo are social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, and Email, along with a 'Resource Library' button. A navigation bar contains links for 'About', 'Pyramid Model', 'Implementation', 'Training & Technical Assistance', and 'Pyramid Nation'. The main banner features a large arrow pointing right, composed of five horizontal bars: orange, green (with CSEFEL logo), dark blue (with Pyramid Model logo), teal (with TACSEI logo), and yellow. To the right of the arrow is the NCPMI logo and the text 'National Center for Pyramid Model INNOVATIONS'. Below the banner is a quote: 'When great efforts come together, amazing things happen.' with an 'About Us' button. The main content area has a heading 'The National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations' followed by a paragraph about the center's goals. To the right is a section titled 'New to the Pyramid Model?' featuring a photo of a child and a pyramid diagram, with a 'Start Here' button. An 'About Us' button is also present at the bottom of the main content area.

NCPMI

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The National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations

The goals of the National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations (NCPMI) are to assist states and programs in their implementation of sustainable systems for the implementation of the Pyramid Model for Supporting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children (Pyramid Model) within early intervention and early education programs with a focus on promoting the social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes of young children birth to five, reducing the use of inappropriate discipline practices, promoting family engagement, using data for decision-making, integrating early childhood and infant mental health consultation and fostering inclusion.

[About Us](#)

New to the Pyramid Model?

Get the basics on the Pyramid Model.

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Thank You

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