Announcer:

The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Emily Yeap:

While kids misbehaving in the classrooms isn’t unusual, many school systems have reported a lot more challenging behaviors in recent times. Why is this happening? And how can disruptive classroom behaviors be prevented? I’m Emily Yeap.

Joining me today to answer these questions and more is Dr. Reesha Adamson from Missouri State University. She’s associate professor in the Department of Counseling, Leadership and Special Education at Missouri State.

Dr. Reesha Adamson:

We’ve always had students that have struggled in our schools and have gotten to this level, but we’re seeing more and more of that. One, because there’s been a lot of lack of exposure, and we also see that there’s kids that have unmet needs. So, lots of times, our schools were kind of those first responders knowing how to hook up kids with additional supports and services beyond just kind of the educational pieces that you think about school. And in these past two years, especially around COVID and students not having that same level of interaction with the school environment or the school setting, students have been removed from that level of supports. Not intentionally, but that’s just the nature of what virtual instruction, or lack of instruction at some times during the pandemic, look like.

I also think that it’s important to consider that when we think about these kids that are having these issues, it revolves around who they are in their core. And so, for some of these kids, just the pieces that came with COVID provided a level of trauma to these students and their lives that we haven’t experienced before. And when you think about trauma and how that manifests, it manifests sometimes in kids as that acting out behavior.

Emily Yeap:

When students act out in the classrooms, many schools deal with the negative behaviors through restraint and seclusion.

Dr. Reesha Adamson:

Historically, our schools underreport restraint and seclusion of students. So typically, physical restraint involves the restricting of movement of a child and seclusion is when there’s isolation or a student is removed from that academic context. And so, that’s the issue but how do you prevent that? Ultimately, to prevent it you’re going to focus on de-escalation. So, you’re going to try to make sure that a student never gets to that point that they’re out of control, that they need additional supports, and they may need some additional interventions. To prevent that acting out behavior, de-escalation becomes the most important key component.

Emily Yeap:

De-escalation involves using the seven phases of a crisis cycle – calm, triggers, agitation, acceleration, peak, de-escalation and recovery – to individualize prevention and recovery strategies.

Dr. Reesha Adamson:

When we think of the crisis cycle, we think of it as a bell curve, and lots of times, we think of it as a traditional bell curve. And so, a student starts out and they’re calm, and they move up to kind of a peak phase, and then ultimately, they’re back into that recovery phase. And there’s some steps there along the way, but that’s kind of the easiest way to look at it and when you think of that as a traditional bell curve, it looks like it should be the same for every person. But when we think about people, they’re not the same. And so, that curve looks very different, and it may be skewed where there’s an escalation that happens quicker or maybe they’re a kid that builds all day long and that escalation happens after a long period of time. But when it goes, it goes. And so, I think about that as that model of just kind of the representation of what these kids look like as they’re going through this process.

What we’ve really mapped out are specific strategies for teachers and school supports at each phase within that cycle to think about: if a kid is calm, what should you be doing with that kid? Well, when they’re calm, you should be teaching. You should be teaching not only those academic pieces because kids – when they’re calm, they’re ready to learn – but you also should be practicing and teaching for what happens if. What happens if you do get upset? How could we try something different or go someplace different when we’re upset that maybe it’s going to limit getting higher on that escalation curve. And so, really focusing on each of those pieces and specific strategies that can help support teachers and school personnel.

Emily Yeap:

According to Adamson, many commercialized programs exist to address the escalation cycle and strategy. However, they don’t focus on prevention.

Dr. Reesha Adamson:

Many of these programs are there for more liability purposes than anything. They’re there for if you go to those extremes of that seclusion and that restraint, that it makes sure that you have that kind of liability coverage that individuals are trained so that they are doing that in a therapeutic way.

But ultimately, even though that’s important, more important is preventing kids from ever getting to that phase. And so, what I encourage schools and districts that I work with to think about, is how much time are you spending on some of those commercial programs and refocusing to make sure you’re spending just as much, if not more, on preventing from ever getting to that point.

Emily Yeap:

That was Dr. Reesha Adamson, an education expert from Missouri State. I’m Emily Yeap for the Missouri State Journal.

Announcer:

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