

Advice Sheet 20

I-ASSIST: A DIFFUSING STRATEGY

This strategy can help in defusing an incident and also make it safer for everyone involved. It is a central tenet of the Therapeutic Crisis Intervention programme developed at Cornell University, New York. The mnemonic is apt – we are trying to assist the pupil to find a way out of a difficult situation which will not lead to further difficulties or conflict.

The steps are as follows:

- **I**solate the situation: try to get the pupil alone by removing him/her or removing all other pupils. This might involve asking the pupil in a non-critical tone to step outside the classroom.
- **A**ctively listen: listen to what the pupil is saying and acknowledge the emotions / feelings. Try to ignore any attempts to begin an argument or insult us / others.
- **S**peak calmly, assertively, respectfully: be respectful but firm, even in the face of insults / comments / screaming (which can be very challenging). It may be appropriate here to remind the pupil of class rules.
- **S**tatements of understanding: acknowledge the feeling / viewpoint of the pupil *"I understand that you're angry with ... because ... however, there might be other ways of responding to what you're feeling"*.
- **I**nvite person to consider positive outcomes: ask the pupil to think about what might be likely to happen as a result of their behaviour and to consider alternatives. *"As soon as you've calmed down we can talk about what we can do"*. It's about offering pupils a way out rather than backing them into a corner.
- **S**pace to person to consider: allowing the pupil physical space and silence to reflect on what the next step might be in the hope that they will choose the more appropriate / positive option. This reduces the pressure on the pupil.
- **T**ime to person to respond: once you have made a request or given choices to the pupil, give them some 'wait-time' to make a decision, rather than pushing for an immediate response, which may only serve to inflame things again.