

Supporting Students with At-Risk Behaviors

Some students bring behaviors shaped by exposure to violence, instability, or survival-based environments. Tutors support learning by maintaining calm authority, clear boundaries, and consistent structure—while staying within their professional role.

WHAT TO DO

- Maintain calm, adult authority.
 - Use a steady tone, minimal emotion, and clear directions. Calm responses communicate safety and control.
- Set clear, consistent boundaries.
 - State expectations once, clearly, and follow through. Predictability reduces escalation.
- Redirect behavior quickly and privately when possible.
 - Short, respectful redirection preserves dignity and keeps the group focused.
- Focus on the present moment.
 - Respond to what is happening now, not assumptions about background or intent.
- Use structure to support regulation.
 - Clear routines, visible goals, and predictable session flow help students feel safe and focused.

WHAT TO AVOID

- Avoid labeling or diagnosing students.
 - Do not assign labels related to behavior, background, or perceived affiliation.
- Avoid power struggles or public confrontations.
 - Escalation often increases when students feel challenged publicly.
- Avoid probing into personal lives or community involvement.
 - Tutors are not investigators, counselors, or mediators.
- Avoid threatening language or ultimatums.
 - Use firm expectations without intimidation.
- Avoid inconsistent responses.
 - Changing expectations or consequences undermines trust and authority.

ESCALATION PROTOCOL: KNOW WHEN AND HOW TO ACT

Escalate immediately if:

- A student threatens harm to themselves or others.
- You observe physical aggression or unsafe behavior.
- A student brings or references a weapon.
- You feel unsafe continuing the session.

Action: Pause instruction and follow HeyTutor emergency or site-specific safety protocols immediately.

Escalate After the Session if:

- A student threatens harm to themselves or others.
- You observe physical aggression or unsafe behavior.
- A student brings or references a weapon.
- You feel unsafe continuing the session.

Action: Document the concern factually and report it to your HeyTutor supervisor according to protocol.



Many students face challenges outside of school, including economic hardship, community violence, family instability, or inconsistent academic support. **Empathy helps tutors build trust, maintain dignity, and create a safe learning environment.** Empathy does not mean lowering standards—it means adjusting how we support students in reaching them.

ASSUME POSITIVE INTENT

Start from the belief that students want to succeed, even when behavior suggests otherwise. **View behavior as a signal, not defiance.** Respond by clarifying expectations and offering support.

BEHAVIOR VS. CHARACTER

Address the behavior, not the student's identity. Use language that **focuses on actions, not labels**, such as *"This behavior isn't helping us learn."* This protects student dignity and keeps the focus on growth and correction.

USE NEUTRAL LANGUAGE

Maintain a calm tone and concise directions, especially during redirection. **Predictable, neutral responses de-escalate behavior.**

ACKNOWLEDGE WITHOUT LOWERING ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS

Recognize challenges and emotions while holding students to clear academic standards. **Support the student without removing the task.**

BE CONSISTENT AND PREDICTABLE

Follow through on expectations and routines every session. **Consistency builds trust**, particularly for students who experience instability. When students know what to expect, engagement increases.

MODEL RESPECT AND SELF-CONTROL

Demonstrate the behaviors you expect to see. Maintain composure during challenging moments and reset calmly when needed. **Students learn how to manage frustration by observing adult responses.**



REMEMBER:

Empathy is not permissiveness. It is clarity, consistency, and care working together to support student success.

Leading with Safety, Structure & Support



Some students navigate environments shaped by violence, instability, or survival-based behaviors. Tutors are not responsible for changing these realities—but **how we show up matters**. Clear structure, calm authority, and consistent expectations help create safety and learning focus.



MAINTAIN CALM, ADULT AUTHORITY

Use steady tone, clear directions, and minimal emotion. Avoid matching student intensity or escalating power struggles. **Calm authority signals safety and control**, especially for students accustomed to unpredictable environments.

SET CLEAR BOUNDARIES WITHOUT POWER STRUGGLES

State expectations once, clearly, and follow through consistently. Avoid lengthy explanations, negotiations, or public corrections. **Boundaries protect both the tutor and the student.**

FOCUS ON SAFETY AND LEARNING

You do not need to know or investigate a student's personal circumstances to support them effectively. **Respond to what is happening in the moment**, keeping attention on safety, respect, and academic engagement.

REDIRECT BEHAVIOR QUICKLY AND PRIVATELY

When possible, redirect off-task or disruptive behavior quietly and respectfully. Short, direct redirection preserves dignity and prevents escalation. **Less attention often leads to faster correction.**

AVOID LABELS AND ASSUMPTIONS

Never assume intent, affiliation, or motivation based on behavior, appearance, or language. **Treat every student as an individual learner**, not a category.

USE STRUCTURE TO CREATE SAFETY

Consistent routines, predictable expectations, and clear session goals help students regulate behavior. **Structure reduces anxiety and supports focus**, particularly for students experiencing chaos outside of school.



REMEMBER:

Consistency is safety. Clear expectations, calm responses, and respectful boundaries create the conditions students need to learn.