Tools for Maintaining a Successful Learning Environment

DIFFICULT STUDENTS, DISRUPTIVE STUDENTS AND STUDENTS IN DISTRESS

Behavioral Evaluation and Threat Assessment

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO
DENVER | ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS

ADAPTED IN PART FROM OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
GOALS FOR THIS SESSION

• Know who we are and what we do
• Gain a clear understanding of your role as stewards of the learning environment
• Begin to Recognize signs and symptoms of stress and distress
• Gain an understanding of how to assist students in distress and access resources on campus
• Learn basic skills for how to de-escalate a situation
YOUR ROLE

- Often the first to recognize that a student needs help
- Important to have knowledge of campus and community resources for referral
- Responsibility to maintain appropriate learning environment
WHAT TO EXPECT

- Our response will vary greatly depending on:
  - Nature and Severity of the behaviors and concerns
  - Actions and attempts made by faculty/staff to address concerns
  - Determination of Code of Conduct Violation

- Our response may include:
  - Counseling Referral and/or case management
  - Conduct hearing and/or mediated conversation with student and faculty
  - Consultation and guidance
  - Referral to Chair or Dean for Academic Review
  - Summary Suspension or other immediate action where there is an immediate threat
  - Criminal background check

Our goal is to resolve issues informally whenever possible.
SIGNS OF STRESS/DISTRESS

- Depression and/or suicidal expression
- Agitation
- Anxiety
- Aggression or Violence
- Delusions, Poor contact with reality
- Substance Abuse
TIPS ON COMMUNICATION

- Listen to students and show interest when they are expressing concerns or needing assistance—be gracious, smile!
- Use friendly, open ended questions and “I” statements.
- Reflect back what you heard when a student expresses concerns or asks questions.
- Be aware of the non-verbal messages you are sending.
- Remove objects from between you and the student whenever possible.
- Remember you can model good communication skills.
  - Meeting the student where they’re at—body language, tone, volume, etc.
FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- You are encouraged to document incidents and concerns in writing
  - We look for patterns of behavior—you may not be the first person to submit a report about this student
  - Second and third hand reports can present numerous challenges
    - Reports should address concerns directly – if there is a concern it needs to be expressed as a concern
  - Objectivity is essential in documenting disruption
    - The report should be very factual and void of personal opinions and feelings
    - Detail, detail, detail. The more details included in the report that easier it is to make an informed decision.
TIPS FOR THE CLASSROOM
SETTING THE TONE FOR A PRODUCTIVE AND RESPECTFUL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

- Articulate clear classroom expectations in the syllabus, and review during the first class
- Develop agreements as a class during the first session
- Respond to problems quickly and consistently
- Look to non-disruptive students for cues: is the class following material?
STUDENT CODE OF CONDUCT

- Read and understand the Student Code of Conduct
- Some concerns do not necessarily fit into this code and may need to be evaluated in more than one context
- Creative expression vs. conduct/behavioral/mental health concern
- ISIS negative service indicators
ADDRESSING DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

- Do not wait for patterns to form. Address concerns immediately
- Correct innocent mistakes and minor first offenses gently
- Give a general word of caution the group
- If possible, speak with the student in private
- If in a group, correct the student courteously and indicate that further discussion can occur later
- Documentation and Warnings
ADDRESSING DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

- Consult your Department Chair, supervisor, or other colleagues for guidance and suggestions
- In the face of persistent disruption, you may ask the student to leave your environment
- In instances where a student is asked to leave, make sure to document the time, date and circumstance and inform your supervisor.
- If there is threat of violence or other unlawful behavior, call Campus Police 303-556-5000 (6-5000)
WHEN TO CONSULT WITH BETA?

- After initial attempts to address the behavior have failed
- You know that you cannot handle the behavior
- You believe personality differences will interfere with your ability to resolve the situation
- You are unsure how to proceed
HOW TO MAKE A REPORT OR REFERRAL TO BETA?

- Submit the “Student of Concern” form at https://cudenver-jams.symplicity.com/care_report/
  OR visit www.ucdenver.edu/beta and click on “Submit a Concern”

- Document the situation in writing, including your attempts to resolve it
  - Dates, times and locations
  - What was said and by whom

- Call 303-556-2444 for assistance
WAIT A MINUTE…

- The student trusts me, am I getting that person “in trouble?”
- This student scares me, will I be safe?
- This student scares me, will I be anonymous?
- How does this report affect the student’s academic record and/or transcript?
DO’S AND DON’TS

NO ONE WINS A WAR BETWEEN EGOS

The Depressed and/or Suicidal Student

Approximately 20.9 million Americans suffer from a mood disorder in a given year. [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

More than 90% of people who commit suicide have a diagnosable mental disorder. [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DO</th>
<th>DON’T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Let the student know you are willing to help</td>
<td>• Say things like “Don’t worry” or “it could be worse.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provide your full attention when a student is expressing his/her feelings</td>
<td>• Be afraid to use the word suicide or be afraid to ask if a student has thoughts of suicide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use your referral list and express you are willing to assist in helping a student obtain a referral</td>
<td>• Ignore the problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Be afraid to use referrals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DO’S AND DON’TS

NO ONE WINS A WAR BETWEEN EGOS

The Agitated/Anxious Student

Approximately 40 million American adults have a diagnosable anxiety disorder in a given year.
www.nimh.nih.gov

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DO</th>
<th>DON’T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Allow them to discuss their feelings/frustrations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Remain calm and offer reassurance</td>
<td>• Become triggered or over-reactive or argumentative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Be clear about instructions</td>
<td>• Convey complicated instructions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ignore or patronize</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## DO’S AND DON’TS

**NO ONE WINS A WAR BETWEEN EGOS**

### The Aggressive/Violent Student

If you are between the ages of 12 and 24 you face the highest risk of being a victim of violence.  
[www.apahelpcenter.org](http://www.apahelpcenter.org)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DO</th>
<th>DON’T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Remain calm  
• Calmly acknowledge the person’s anger/frustration, “I can see you are very upset, I will try to assist you as best I can”  
• Remember you have the right to call for help  
• Stay in open areas | • Ignore warning signs of violence, e.g. yelling/screaming, clenched fists, statements like “I’m warning you”  
• Become hostile yourself  
• Threaten, taunt, ignore or corner the person, or get into an arguing match  
• Be afraid to call 911  
• EVER TOUCH THE PERSON |
**DO’S AND DON’TS**

**NO ONE WINS A WAR BETWEEN EGOS**

---

**Students Abusing Substances**

Approximately 12.8 million Americans use illegal drugs on a consistent basis. [http://www.ncjrs.gov](http://www.ncjrs.gov)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DO</th>
<th>DON’T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Share your observations and concerns with the person</td>
<td>• Ignore the problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Remember your referral list</td>
<td>• Pass judgment or criticize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Seek assistance from campus police in cases of intoxication or inappropriate behavior</td>
<td>• Criticize, lecture or offer anecdotal stories about the dangers of substance abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Remember substance abuse is often a symptom of other serious mental or emotional disorders</td>
<td>• Enable the person’s behavior by covering for him/her out of sympathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Be manipulated into believing there is not a problem</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### DO’S AND DON’TS

**NO ONE WINS A WAR BETWEEN EGOS**

**The Delusional/Psychotic Student**

Approximately 2.4 million American adults suffer from schizophrenia in a given year. [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>DO</strong></th>
<th><strong>DON’T</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Express compassion but do not offer support outside of professional boundaries</td>
<td>Challenge or agree with illogical beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain a gentle but firm and steady tone of voice</td>
<td>Panic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call for help if you feel you are in danger</td>
<td>Make fun of or belittle illogical beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be specific about what you are asking of a student or what behavior is expected</td>
<td>Play along with the bizarre behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Offer to be the student’s friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Joke with the student or attempt to be funny to de-escalate the situation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RESOURCES AND REFERRALS

- When considering a referral for a student, it is very important to remember that students may be hesitant to the idea of assistance. Unfortunately, there is still a stigma attached to mental health counseling or even academic skills assistance which prevents many students from taking advantage of the many different resources our campus offers.

- The following is a short list of the many services the center provides:
  - Individual, Couples, and Family Counseling
  - Groups on various topics including, “How to Quit Smoking”, “How Reduce Stress”, “How to Maintain a Relationship” etc. (Varies by semester)
  - Tips on reducing test anxiety and how to study better
  - Learning disability assessment
  - Think Strong Skill Building workshops
B.E.T.A. Team – 303-556-2444

Resource to help support faculty and staff working with disruptive and distressed students

Members from Community Standards and Wellness, Student and Community Counseling, Auraria Police, Legal, etc.

Training Workshops for CU Denver addressing

- classroom disruptions, emergency preparedness, mental health referrals, active listening, and the student conduct process
CONTACTS AND RESOURCES

Community Standards and Wellness
Larry Loften - 303-556-2444; larry.loften@ucdenver.edu
Jill Creighton – 303-556-2444; jill.creighton@ucdenver.edu

Counseling Center
Jenny Lynn Ellis 303-556-4372

Auraria Campus Police
303-556-5000 from a cell phone or 911 from a Campus Landline

Behavioral Evaluation and Threat Assessment Team
www.ucdenver.edu/beta