

General Concepts in How to Approach Disruptive Students

- Teach student how to access services by inviting counseling, career and/or academic support services to your first classes.
- Know how to access services. Don't wait until you are in crisis to look up numbers or figure out who you are supposed to call.
- Find positives and build from these strengths.
- Identify past successes and motivations and help identify areas where they can build from past success.
- Look for supports. Find others who can assist the student and provide hope and encouragement.
- Understand they will be better at some things and struggle with others. Develop a realistic goal for what can be accomplished.
- Understand failure as part of life. Students struggle with learning this lesson. Teach them to overcome obstacles and that the most successful people learn from mistakes.
- Perfection shouldn't be a goal. It will never be obtained. Help students find reasonable goals that build on past success
- See failure as an opportunity for growth, rather than sign of weakness. Teach mistake recovery and share your own failures with students. Often they learn more effectively from these stories of overcome adversity rather than stories of our past glories.
- Assess where energy is going. Focus on success and build from there.
- Understand that non-traditional students may require a more personal connection and understanding of their circumstances to help them achieve academic success. They often struggle with balancing home, school, childcare and work schedules and need encouragement and guidance.
- Focus on building traditional college services around non-traditional needs, such as adapting a special orientation program, extended office hours, or offering extended technological support.
- Understand the importance of building relationships with students on a professional level. Don't fall into the trap of over-parenting the student by doing things for them or "taking the student home" – either emotionally or physically.
- Understand that fair doesn't mean equal when working with students.

- Policy and procedures are important, but students thrive from a personal connection. Look for ways to connect and make yourself more real to the student.
- In working with students with social problems, make sure to offer messages that are concise, short, and focused on the desired action. Offer information that is clear and avoid addressing multiple issues at one time.
- Be alert to both teasing behavior and positive behavior. When working with students with social difficulties, have a goal to decrease exposure to negative influences and increase exposure to positive ones.

Calming the Initial Crisis

Adopt a calm, cool and collected stance in the face of upsetting or frustrating behavior, activating back-up as needed and applying crisis de-escalations skills to address the concerns.

Motivating and Inspiring Change

Once the initial crisis has been addressed, you can adapt more of a supportive role with the student, helping them with problem solving and overcoming obstacles. This should be done with an appreciation for the values and boundaries that are set forth as part of the job description. In other words, how do you encourage the student to begin to develop their own critical thinking skills to better problem solve the difficulties they encounter?

Managing the Ongoing Behavior

In many ways, this is one of the more difficult challenges for faculty. The initial crisis is resolved and you have done all you can to form a relationship and help the student develop critical thinking and problem solving skills. But. They. Keep. Coming. Back. The behaviors don't change and you begin to become stressed to the point of burnout attempting to deal with the behaviors in front of you. In this stage, we encourage the use of additional resources, exploring supportive philosophies such as positive psychology, goal setting and building self-care capacity for faculty and departments.

Keep in mind

Choosing the right approach for the given situation is critical. Yelling back at an escalating, rude or entitled individual isn't the right tool (no matter how cathartic it might feel). For example, embarrassing a student who is misusing technology when it's their turn in line to be helped isn't the best way to address that behavior. It's using a screwdriver to hammer a nail into a board. You might be able to get the job done, but there are easier, more effective, ways.

It is important to appreciate the unique abilities, knowledge, and experience of staff as they apply a given technique. Some excel at using humor to engage an individual without offending them. Others' attempts at humor end up feeling forced and often make a crisis worse. Some display genuine concern and caring through personal questions. Some treat individuals with a degree of humanity and empathy that immediately garners respect. Others attempt this same stance and end up coming off as pushy or prying. The right technique, applied to the right situation with experience and skill is the ideal. A single technique or comment made at the wrong time can lead to an intervention that fails to persuade the student to comply.

Managing Aggression and Violence

How to Manage Aggression

- Have the proper mindset prior to attempting to manage any aggressive behavior.
- Realize cognitive aggressors are tactical and plan their aggression to complete the mission or objective. Primal aggressors are adrenaline driven and look to explode based on situations that unfold immediately in front of them.
- Understand how aggressive behavior is both biological and behavioral as students move from the trigger phase, through the escalation phase until reaching the crisis phase.
- Practice cycle breathing (breath in to the count of 4, hold to the count of 2, breath out to the count of 4, hold to the count of 2) in order to better control your own biological changes in terms of blood pressure and heart rate.
- Building trust with an aggressor is key to de-escalating the aggression. We must be aware of our differences but focus on our similarities.
- Display a quiet confidence and convey a willingness to help.
- Offer acceptance, respect and validation with a sense of enthusiasm and keen interest
- Understand the key motivations for the aggressor. Where is the student coming from? What is their perspective of the situation?
- Understand what the aggressor has to gain or lose. What can you use to persuade them?

Aggression Management's Universal Approach

1. Start with getting the student away from the crowd.
2. Begin your interaction with a positive statement, not a negative one (constructive, not punitive).
3. Explain to them the documented issues in a neutral and reflective way (without sarcasm).
4. Explain that their present behavior is not in their best interest.
5. Ask how you can work together to become more productive.

Motivational Interviewing

- **Express empathy.** Respect their point of view, freedom of choice, and ability to determine their own self-direction.
- **Develop discrepancy.** Explore the consequences of their actions and how they will not lead to the desired outcome.
- **Avoid argumentation.** Instead, explore more deeply what they are saying and reduce their defensiveness with open-ended questions.

- **Roll with resistance.** Avoid direct confrontation and stay focused on goals and outcomes, supporting their developmental growth and personal responsibility.
- **Support self-efficacy.** Praise them when they take positive steps and acknowledge that a positive outcome is possible.

Transtheoretical Change Theory

- **Pre-contemplation.** At this stage, the student is unaware that there is a problem and hasn't thought much about change. Faculty can help the student increase their awareness of their need for change through discussion and helping the student understand how their behaviors may be impacting their life.
- **Contemplation.** This is the most common stage of change for students to be in. The student has thought about change and is getting ready for movement in the near future. The student realizes their current behavior is not in their best interest, but is not yet ready to begin their plan to change. The student isn't happy about their current state and wants things to be different, but has not yet explored how to do things differently or take action to make change in their lives.

In this stage, faculty can motivate the student and encourage them to think in more detail about how their behavior is having a negative impact in their life. They should explore ways they might plan for change and what resources could be helpful in implementing change.

- **Preparation for action.** In this stage, the student is aware of a problem and is ready to actively create goals to address the problem behavior in their life. Plans and goals should be focused, short term and designed to be updated and altered to ensure their success. Plans should be measurable and something the student can monitor and understand if they are moving forward, static or moving backwards. Faculty can help the student brainstorm and update their plans to ensure a better chance of success.
- **Action.** This stage of change is where the student puts their plans into action in order to change behavior. The student will attempt to alter their negative suicidal behavior and develop new positive behaviors to replace them. Faculty can support the student in trying out these action steps and encourage them to keep trying, despite setbacks and the potential failures they may encounter.
- **Maintenance and relapse prevention.** Here the goal is to continue successful plans and repeat those action steps that work, while adjusting things that don't. Change has occurred for the student, and there has been a reduction in problem behavior. They need to maintain their successful change and reduce the risk of falling back into bad habits. Faculty can help bolster student's success and develop awareness of potential obstacles that could lead to relapse.

Reality Therapy



Wants:

Explore the student's wants & needs. Look for the direction they want to head in.



Direction & Doing:

Assess what the student is doing & the direction these behaviors are taking them.



Wants:

Evaluate the student's behavior. Is it taking them closer to their wants & needs?



Wants:

Help the student formulate realistic plans & make a commitment to carry them out.

When making a plan with students, make it:

- **Simple.** It should be broken into small, easy pieces. A plan that is too big or unwieldy is a plan that will not work. Too often we set up plans focused on distant goals that give us little direct feedback. Create plans that are straightforward and easy to understand.
- **Attainable.** It needs to be realistic. Create a plan that contains goals that can be reached.
- **Measurable.** Be sure it can be assessed & evaluated. Create a plan that can be monitored and understood. For example, students plan to improve their grades, but don't always identify the exact problem. Are they missing class, not studying for tests, studying the wrong things or not motivated to be in school?
- **Immediate.** Include short-term goals. Have opportunities for mid-course corrections. We need to see progress and have feedback to reach overall goals. Make sure goals are not too vague or difficult to determine if they are progressing or not.
- **Controlled by the planner.** Ensure buy-in and offer chances for corrections. Does the student have the ability to adjust and adapt the plan to meet new obstacles?
- **Consistently practiced.** Repetition makes a habit. Is there a chance in the plan for repeatable good habits to form with practice?
- **Committed to.** The student needs to be invested in the plan. If a plan is created that the student doesn't want to do, the plan will not work. A plan is not a plan without student buy-in.