Managing Disruptive Students

Barbara Meehan, Ph.D.
Counseling & Consultation

The Role of Faculty

- To educate
- To establish high academic standards
- To create a safe and respectful environment to promote academic and professional development

Disruptive Behaviors

- Cell phones - calls and texts
- Side conversations
- Interruptions
- Offensive comments
- Threats of violence / intimidation
- Verbal abuse
- Poor hygiene
- Inappropriate requests for extensions / accommodations
- Property damage

Distressed Students

- Abrupt/unexpected changes in behavior and/ or appearance
- Spending more time alone/ withdrawing from others
- Changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Increase in alcohol and/ or drug use
- Engaging in behaviors that jeopardize health and/ or safety
- Difficulty paying attention
- Poor class attendance
- Changes in study habits
- Changes in communication

"Oh hi. I'm on a training course."

"What's going on? — First you say we should show originality, and then you mark my spelling wrong!"
Distressed Students
- Anxious/panicky
- Irritability
- Outbursts of anger
- Periods of crying
- Depressed mood
- Suicidal thoughts or feelings
- Thoughts of death and/or dying
- Fatigue or low energy
- Low self-esteem
- Talk of failing or leaving the university

Perils of Overlooking Disruptive or Distressed Behavior
- Escalation
- Inadvertent reinforcement of disruptive behaviors
- Contagion

What to Do?

Be Proactive
- Know the student code of conduct and campus safety information
  - Campus safety presentation
  - Emergency Response Guide
- Familiarize yourself with campus resources
  - Student Rights and Responsibilities
  - Student Advocacy
  - Counseling and Consultation
  - ASU Police Department
  - Disability Resources
  - Student Assistance Coordination Committee

Be Proactive
- Communicate expectations for class
  - Use the syllabus
  - Discuss academic and behavioral expectations at beginning of semester and revisit periodically
  - Provide opportunity for questions regarding expectations

Mild Disruptive Behaviors
- Address the class in general rather than single out an individual
- Speak with the student in private to:
  - Share your observation of the unacceptable behavior
  - Remind student of expectations
  - Ask for behavior to cease
- Consult with others
- Document your observations/concerns and actions taken to address these
Moderate Disruptive Behaviors

- Talk with the student in private during the class to communicate observations, expectations and request to meet after class
- Provide student with written warning of unacceptable behavior, expectations, and possible consequences of continued disruption
- Consult with others
- Document your observations/concerns and actions taken to address these

General Tips for Dealing with Mild to Moderate Disruptive Behaviors

Set the Stage

- Give yourself time to think
- Attend to your own emotions (e.g., anger, anxiety)
- Don't feel pressured to have the answer or resolution immediately
- Understand you may not be able to please everyone

Attentive Listening

- Nod your head
- Maintain eye contact
- Address student by name
- Remain relaxed
- Ask for elaboration or clarifying phrases to avoid assumptions
  - Tell me more
  - What happened then?
  - What have you tried so far?
  - Can you explain...?

Giving Feedback

- Be descriptive, not judgmental
- Be specific, not general (avoid words like “always” and “never”)
- Comment on the behavior not the person
- Avoid long explanations or excuses
- Be assertive

Paraphrase

- State the general idea of the person's message
- Use some of the person's own words when summarizing or restating their message
**Reflect the Feeling**
- Make a brief statement relaying what you think the person is feeling
  - “You sound frustrated with the situation”
  - “Seems like you’re feeling confused about what to do next”

**Put it in Writing**
- Provide written instructions/feedback
- Document behaviors, conversations and actions taken

**Reassure and Check-in**
- Suggest alternative and emphasize the individual’s power to choose
- Provide reassurance
- Check in with other person
  - Does that make sense?
  - Any questions?

**Consult and Report**
- Stay within your role
- Consult with colleagues and department administrators
- Contact other campus resources:
  - Student Rights and Responsibilities
  - Counseling and Consultation
  - Student Advocacy

**Threatening Behaviors**
- Per ASU policy, you are obligated to report threatening behaviors to campus police.
- Call 911
- Remove yourself from the situation

**Typical Difficult Situations**
Scenario # 1
- Susie has sent you several e-mails requesting a change in her grade. You have provided a rationale for her grade and have informed her that her grade will remain the same. Today, she approaches you before class and demands her grade be changed.
- What do you do?

The Sherman Tank
- Don't get mowed down.
- Stand up to them without being drawn into a battle

Scenario # 2
- Johnny comes to your office hours in an agitated state. In a raised voice, he expresses concern about completing his assignment by the due date.
- How do you respond?

The Exploder
- First calm person down
- Then move into problem solving mode

Scenario # 3
- Mark approaches you after class and expresses his dissatisfaction with his assigned group work and the class in general. You try to respond to his concerns but he does not appear to be listening. Rather, he continues to complain about several aspects of the class and his overall experience at ASU.
- What do you do?

The Complainer
- Interrupt cycle of complaining
- Don't agree or apologize
- Move them into problem solving mode
Scenario # 4

- Sally has earned grades of B or better on past assignments but she failed her most recent exam. You have noticed that Sally looks disheveled, tired and distracted in class. Per her request, you meet with Sally during office hours to discuss the coursework. Sally is very shy and timid during the meeting and you are having a difficult time identifying the specific challenges she is experiencing.
- What can you do?

The Clam

- Ask open-ended questions
- Don't fill in silence
- Use the friendly silent stare

Scenario # 5

- Albert is usually a bit aggressive in his comments in class. One day he repeatedly interrupts you to refute the information in your lecture.
- How do you respond?

The Know-It-All

- Acknowledge the student's comments and validate his interest in the topic.
- Suggest a meeting after class to further discuss his questions.

Scenario # 6

- Students engage in active discussions in your psychology class. Generally, things go well. Today, Marissa says she thinks that juvenile offenders should be prosecuted as adults. Damien replies, "That's a stupid, ignorant remark."
- What's your reaction?

The Bully

- It's best to remind the class of academic values and respect.
- Ask the student to reframe her comment using supporting material from the class.
Other Scenarios?

Counseling & Consultation
Arizona State University

Counseling & Consultation: (480) 965-6146  
Student Services Building 3rd Floor, Rm 334  
Afterhours on call to all Residence Halls

EMPACT: (480) 921-1006  
Serves as 24-hr direct Crisis Line support for ASU students across all campuses.  
Any student, staff, faculty, parent, or friend may call at any time.

Campus Safety Resources

ASU Police Department
Emergency: 911  
Non-emergencies: (480) 965-3456

Student Judicial Affairs: (480) 965-6547  
Reviews and handles student disciplinary complaints and concerns.

Student Advocacy and Assistance:  
Kaylen Cons, Assistant to the Dean (480) 965-5852  
Guides students in resolving educational, personal and other campus impediments toward successful completion of their academic goals.

Student Assistance Coordination Committee (SACC):  
Coordinates the delivery of appropriate resources to students with behavioral and/or mental health problems in order to reduce the occurrence, duration and intensity of crisis related trauma.  
Composed of representatives from the following units:  
ASU Police  
Counseling and Consultation (Chair: Laura Jesmer, LCSW)  
Disability Resource Center  
Residential Life  
Student Advocacy and Assistance  
Student Judicial Affairs  
Office of the General Counsel

Syllabus Guidelines

Syllabus Checklist:
http://site.asu.edu/resources/delicious/syllabus%20checklist.p df

Disruptive Students Policies:
http://www.asu.edu/studentaffairs/vp/safety/disruptive_student_behaviour.html
Some Do’s and Don’ts for Coping With Angry and Emotional Individuals

The "Sherman Tank"

To cope with Sherman Tanks you must stand up to them without being drawn into a fight or an argument.

- Give them a little time to run down.
- Don't worry about being polite; get your point across any way you can.
- Get their attention by calling them by name, sitting down, or standing up deliberately or abruptly.
- If possible, get them to sit down and discuss the problem with you.
- Maintain eye contact.
- State your own opinions and thoughts forcefully and without apology.
- Don't argue with what the other person says.
- Don't try to cut him or her down.
- Be ready to be friendly and receptive to negotiation.

The "Exploder"

To cope with Exploders you must first get them to wind down and then switch to a problem-solving mode of interaction.

- Give them time to run down and gain self-control on their own.
- If they don't wind down on their own, break into the tantrum state by saying or shouting a neutral phrase such as "Stop!" or "Quiet, please!"
- Show that you take them and their concerns seriously by using your active listening skills.
- If necessary, suggest moving to a private setting for further discussion.

The "Complainer"

To cope with Complainers you must interrupt their cycle of persistent blaming and insist that their problems be managed in a problem-solving manner.

- Listen attentively to their complaints even if you feel guilty or impatient.
- Acknowledge what they are saying by paraphrasing and summarization, then check to see if your perceptions are accurate.
- Don't agree with or apologize for their complaints.
- Avoid the accusation-defense-reaccusation pattern.
- State the facts without comment.
- Try to move to a problem-solving mode by asking specific questions, assigning fact-finding tasks, or asking for certain complaints to be put down in writing.
- If all else fails, ask the Complainer "How do you want this discussion to end?"
The "Clam"

To cope with Clams your major task is to get them to open up and begin to discuss what it is that is on their mind or what is bothering them.

- Ask open-ended questions.
- Wait for a response. Use "counseling questions" to help reluctant clams to open up and be more talkative.
- Do not fill in the silence with idle chatter that will indicate your own discomfort with the situation.
- Plan for extra time that will allow you to wait with composure.
- If no responses are forthcoming, ask another open-ended question and wait.
- Comment on what is happening in the interaction between the two of you.
- Develop your skills in using the Friendly-Silent-Stare technique.

The "Wet Blanket"

To cope with Wet Blankets your major task is to engage them in rational problem solving without getting drawn into the negativism and pessimism yourself.

- Be alert to your own tendencies toward pessimism.
- Make optimistic but realistic statements about past successes in solving similar problems.
- Don't try to argue Wet Blankets out of their pessimism.
- Don't offer solutions until the problem has been thoroughly discussed.
- When alternatives are being discussed, raise questions yourself about possible negative consequences or outcomes.
- See the Wet Blanket in perspective, view the negativism as problems that can be solved and overcome.
- Be prepared to take action on your own and announce your plans to do so.

The "Know-It-All"

Your major task in coping with Know-It-Alls is to get them to consider alternatives without directly challenging their alleged expertise.

- Be prepared, do your homework, review all pertinent material, have all information you need available.
- Listen carefully and paraphrase the main points of contention.
- Don't resort to dogmatic statements or overgeneralizations.
- Be tentative in any disagreements, use questions to raise any problems.
- Ask exploratory questions to examine any plans for problem resolution.
- Watch out for your own Know-It-All responses.
- As a last resort, choose to give in, in order to avoid protracted conflict or static and to build a working relationship for future encounters.

These hints are adapted from "Coping With Difficult People" by Robert M. Bramson, Ph.D., Copyright 1981 by Random House/Ballantine Books.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>DEFINITION</th>
<th>EXAMPLE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>Simple expression of standing up for personal rights, beliefs, feelings or opinions.</td>
<td>When being interrupted: “Excuse me, I’d like to finish what I’m saying.”</td>
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<td>Empathic</td>
<td>Recognition of other person’s situation or feelings followed by another statement standing up for speaker’s rights.</td>
<td>I know you are feeling angry and frustrated while you wait for a response. But, the best I can do is give you a ballpark estimate of how long it will take.</td>
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<td>Escalating</td>
<td>1. Start with a “minimal” assertive response. 2. Other fails to respond. 3. Gradually escalate the assertion—increasing firm without being aggressive.</td>
<td>From the first example: “I know what you have to say is important, but I really want to finish what I was saying.” “I really want to finish before you begin to speak.”</td>
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<td>Confrontive</td>
<td>1. Describe what was to be done. 2. Describe what actually occurred. 3. Express what you want.</td>
<td>“I told you to complete the forms by November 15, and you agreed to do so. Now it’s January 15 and you are telling me that you forgot the forms but you still expect to complete our business on time. What is it that you want me to do?”</td>
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<td>I-Language</td>
<td>1. Description of behavior. 2. How it affects your own life. 3. Describe your own feelings. 4. Describe your desires.</td>
<td>1. “When you shout 2. the effect is I am unable to work with you. 3. I feel angry. 4. I’d prefer you stop shouting and tell me what you want.”</td>
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<td>Positive</td>
<td>Expressing positive feelings about yourself or someone else.</td>
<td>1. “I’m glad you came back to see me.” 2. “I did a good job working with that upset student.”</td>
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<td>Repeated</td>
<td>1. Sometimes called broken record. 2. Opposite of escalation. 3. Simple, calm, repetition saying what you want over and over again, rote repetition.</td>
<td>“You said you would complete this form and there is missing information.” A sarcastic reply: “The form has not been completed.” Another comment: “I have to have this form completed.”</td>
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<td>Fogging</td>
<td>Acknowledging possibility of truth to what other person is saying—agreeing in concept but not necessarily in fact.</td>
<td>“I know these rules may appear to make no sense, but they are the procedures I must use.”</td>
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ASSERTIVE RIGHTS*

- **Right to** say "no" without feeling guilty or selfish.
- **Right to** determine the use of your own time.
- **Right to** feel and express anger.
- **Right to** feel and express healthy competitiveness and achievement drive.
- **Right to** strive for self-actualization through whatever channels one's talents and interests find natural.
- **Right to** use one's own judgment in deciding which needs are the most important for one to meet.
- **Right to** make mistakes.
- **Right to** have one's opinions given the same respect and consideration that other people's opinions are given, even when they are different.
- **Right to** ask for help from other people.
- **Right to** be treated as a capable human adult and not to be patronized.
- **Right to** consider one's own needs to be as important as those of other people.
- **Right to** decide how one will take care of one's own responsibilities.
- **Right to** ask someone else to change his or her behavior.
- **Right to** tell someone else of one's needs.
- **Right to** be independent.
- **Right to** judge your own behavior, thoughts, and emotions, and to take the responsibility for their initiation and consequences upon yourself.
- **Right to** offer no reasons or excuses for justifying your behavior.
- **Right to** judge if you are responsible for finding solutions to other people's problems.
- **Right to** change your mind.
- **Right to** say, "I don't know."
- **Right to** be independent of the goodwill of others before coping with them.
- **Right to** be illogical in making decisions.
- **Right to** say, "I don't understand."
- **Right to** say, "I don't care."

*Credit to Patricia Jakubowski-Spector, Ed.D., University of Missouri-St. Louis*