

- DISRUPTING DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR (Adapted from John Ritchie, Ph.D.)
- Resources
- Academic (or other)Department: Head or Chair of department, and your departmental and college guidelines and expectations
- Office of Student Life 512-863-1582
- Counseling Services 512-863-1252
- University Police 512-863-1944
- Disability Services 512-863-1536
- Religious Life 512-863-1527
- DISRUPTING THE DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR IS ESSENTIAL
- If a disruptive behavior is allowed to occur without a disruptor, then by default that behavior becomes normal or ok
- The best predictor of future behavior is not past behavior but post-intervention behavior
- Disrupt the disruptive behavior by 1)Questioning or witness statements (to let them know you are watching their behavior), 2) Confronting (to stop their disruptive behavior), or 3) giving Consequences (after first establishing consequences or sanctions)
- Sometimes Faculty, Staff or Students do not address the disruptive behavior
- Possibly attributed to: Fear of receiving inadequate administrative support (clarify departmental procedures and expectations)
- Fear of harming the psychologically fragile student (an out-of-control student needs limits from others)
- Fear of law suit (you can defend your actions if the focus is on “behavior” (what) rather than person (who)- e.g. odd, mentally ill, psychotic, bipolar)
- Assuming counseling will help the student significantly (lack of interest or capability, previous or current counseling not helpful, will attend only to please you)
- DISCIPLINE VS. COUNSELING
Advantages of Discipline – adapted from Dr. Gerald Amada’s Coping with Misconduct in the College Classroom: A Practical Model
- The student learns he/she is accountable to others for his/her actions while on campus, and code of conduct violations can result in loss of educational benefits
- A disciplinary system upfront distinguishes between civil and unacceptable conduct and states the consequences of misconduct in written policies

- A good disciplinary system can be easily understood and assimilated by, and is easily accessible to, most students
- Counseling may be very beneficial to the majority of persons seeking counseling but we can't assume it will be helpful to all students for the following reasons:
- Many students lack the capability, commitment, or interest to significantly benefit from psychotherapy
- A referral to psychotherapy often assumes the student has not had psychotherapy; or if they have, that it has been, or will be, significantly helpful related to their disruptive behavior
- The student may "attend" psychotherapy only because he/she feels "coerced" to attend, or to obtain a more favorable status with the instructor
- PROHIBITED CONDUCT
- Disruption or obstruction of teaching, research, administration, disciplinary proceedings, or other university activities on or off campus
- Physical abuse, verbal abuse, threats, intimidation, exploitation, harassment, sexual harassment, stalking, coercion, and/or any other conduct which threatens or endangers the health or safety of any person (including one's self)
- Damage to property or the university
- Illegal or unauthorized possession of harmful or dangerous items
- PREVENTION OF DISRUPTIVE STUDENT BEHAVIOR
- Articulate clear classroom and email expectations in the syllabus, and review during class
- Invite class discussion of your classroom expectations as students are generally very supportive of instructor efforts to create and maintain a positive learning environment
- Articulate how disruptive classroom behavior will be addressed and the consequences of disruptive behavior
- Respond to innocent mistakes and minor offenses gently, quickly, and consistently
- PRIVATE DISCUSSION TIPS
- Select a place and time where you can give your full attention
- Express concern for his/her well-being and behavior
- Listen with sensitivity and understanding; paraphrase his/her comments
- Be non-judgmental, as criticism will push him/her away from you and the help he/she needs

- Clarify you can't promise complete confidentiality
- Give hope that things will get better and identify available help on campus
- Help develop an action plan (if appropriate and desired) to start to address his/her main concern
- Maintain clear teacher-student relationship boundaries and consistent academic expectations
- Refer to professional help (if appropriate)
- Follow-up with student to check how he/she is doing
- FACILITATING A REFERRAL AND STUDENT FOLLOW-UP
- Identify campus and/or community contacts and resources
- Tell student what he/she can expect in terms of services and procedures at other departments
- Give referral phone numbers and locations and encourage the student to call today or soon
- Have the student call and make an appointment in your presence; and/or (when appropriate) offer to go with them if that would help
- Tell the student you would like to follow-up with them to hear how they felt about their meeting
- INTERVENTIONS WITH DISRUPTIVE STUDENTS Self-Focused Attitude and Problem Defining
- **Remain calm and respectful**
- Instead of defining the problem as the disruptive behavior (e.g. "You are constantly interrupting me and your classmates"), **redefine the problem as your experience** of the consequences of his/her disruptive behavior (e.g. "I cannot maintain a positive and open class discussion when I am being frequently interrupted")
- **Use "I" statements** (e.g. "I couldn't finish my sentence" or "I would like to finish making my statement"), rather than "You" statements (e.g. "you again interrupted me" or "you need to stop interrupting me"), so he/she will feel less defensive
- **Set the limits in how you'll respond** to his/her disruptive behavior (e.g. "If I feel unsafe or I experience you as being aggressive, I will ask you to leave the room"), rather than set limits on his/her behavior (e.g. "You must stop your yelling and aggressive behavior"), so the criteria for action is your experience rather than his/her behavior which can be debated by him/her
- Confrontation Steps

- **Describe** the behavior in neutral, objective, specific, and concrete terms (don't be judgmental, subjective, general)
(e.g. "You started talking before I finished my question", rather than "You weren't listening to what I had to say.")
- Clarify your **intentions** related to your motives and goals
(e.g. "I want us to find a way so that we both can feel heard by the other.")
- **Request** specific behaviors to change (e.g. "Please wait to speak until after I have finished what I'm saying, or raise your hand to let me know you want to speak.")
- State the **consequences**- what s/he has to gain or lose if s/he changes or doesn't change the identified behavior (e.g. "If I continue to be interrupted I will ask you to remain silent for the rest of class and then we'll talk together after class so that we can resolve our communication issues.")
- Use good judgment to protect your safety and the safety of others (e.g. do not attempt to keep the perpetrator from leaving the classroom; you may want to dismiss all students from the class; avoid escalating the tension or conflict)
- Ask the student to stop the threatening/dangerous behavior
- If there is no immediate threat, ask the student to meet with you after class or later in your office
- If the behavior persists, ask him/her to leave the classroom
- If the student refuses to leave, or the behavior escalates, call police; and consider asking a co-worker to help
- **POST INTERVENTION**
- Document both what you discussed and the identified behavior in the classroom (or elsewhere)
- Document any witnesses to each incident
- Consult with appropriate persons and departments
- Follow-up with the student to keep open communication, show continued interest in working with the student, and show appreciation for their change in behavior; or administer consequences if their disruptive behavior does not change