

Responding to a Student in Crisis

If you encounter a student in your class who appears to be emotionally troubled, the most important thing you can do is to **refer the student to appropriate resources for intervention**. Until that intervention occurs, you will be faced with the challenge of interacting with that student in your class. Your objective should be to **DO NO HARM**. The following chart gives some guidelines on responding to students experiencing various forms of emotional -crisis. You may wish to keep this [printer-friendly version](#) with you as a readily-accessible reference.

The AGGRESSIVE STUDENT

Student Symptoms	Instructor Response	
<p>Feelings of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - frustration, - inadequacy - being out of control <p>Passive-aggressive</p> <p>Violent outbursts</p> <p>Verbally aggressive</p> <p>May see you as trying to control them</p> <p>Angry at his/her world; lashes out</p>	<p>DO</p> <p>Focus on diffusing situation.</p> <p>Reduce stimulation</p> <p>Allow student to ventilate.</p> <p>Establish boundaries for behavior.</p> <p>Alert the Dean of Students and College Safety and Security of any suspicion or threat of physical aggression.</p> <p>Be prepared to call Safety and Security if necessary.</p> <p>Refer student to Counseling or Health</p>	<p>DON'T</p> <p>Try to resolve the student's crisis.</p> <p>Jeopardize your safety.</p> <p>Get into an argument</p> <p>Touch the student</p> <p>Make threats, dares or taunts</p> <p>Insist on explanations of student's behavior.</p>

Services.

The DEPRESSED STUDENT

Student Symptoms	Instructor Response	
<p>Feelings of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- self anger- guilt- worthlessness- helplessness, hopelessness <p>Difficulty concentrating, remembering</p> <p>Changes in appetite</p> <p>Sleep disturbances</p>	<p>DO</p> <p>Encourage student to express feelings.</p> <p>Encourage utilizing a support network.</p> <p>Tell students of your concerns.</p> <p>Talk about suicide if it's on student's mind.</p> <p>Refer student to Counseling or Health Services.</p> <div data-bbox="618 1220 987 1604" style="border: 2px solid green; padding: 10px; text-align: center;"><p>CALL FOR HELP IMMEDIATELY IF THE STUDENT APPEARS SUICIDAL.</p></div>	<p>DON'T</p> <p>Say</p> <p>"Don't worry."</p> <p>"Crying won't help."</p> <p>"Everything will be better tomorrow."</p> <p>Become overwhelmed by student's problems.</p> <p>Try to take responsibility for or solve their problems.</p> <p>Ignore their feelings.</p> <p>Continue to see student without making appropriate referrals.</p>

The STUDENT IN POOR CONTACT WITH REALITY

Student Symptoms	Instructor Response
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<p>Feelings of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - special importance or power - being controlled or harmed by others - confusion, distorted perceptions - unjustified fearfulness <p>Unaware or unconcerned with classroom protocol or acceptable social behavior</p> <p>Hallucinations</p> <p>May appear to be on drugs.</p>	<p>DO</p> <p>Respond to them with warmth and kindness.</p> <p>See them in a quiet atmosphere if you are comfortable doing so.</p> <p>Acknowledge their feelings.</p> <p>Reveal when you have difficulty understanding them.</p> <p>Focus on the here & now.</p> <p>Refer student to Counseling or Health Services.</p>	<p>DON'T</p> <p>Deal with the issue in front of the class.</p> <p>Argue or try to convince them of their irrational thinking.</p> <p>Play along with their beliefs</p> <p>Encourage further revelations of craziness.</p> <p>Demand they change their ideas or behavior.</p> <p>Continue to see student without making appropriate referrals.</p>
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The [ANXIOUS STUDENT](#)

Student Symptoms	Instructor Response	
<p>Feelings of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - worry - fear - anticipation of misfortune, doom <p>Panic attacks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - sweating - dizziness - choking - chest pain - cold, clammy hands 	<p>DO</p> <p>Let them discuss their feelings or thoughts.</p> <p>Help them define their stressors.</p> <p>Be clear and explicit about what you're willing to do.</p> <p>Talk slowly, remain calm.</p>	<p>DON'T</p> <p>Deal with the issue in front of the class.</p> <p>Argue or try to convince them of their irrational thinking.</p> <p>Play along with their beliefs</p> <p>Encourage further revelations of craziness.</p>

<p>Difficulty concentrating</p> <p>Memory distortions</p>	<p>Encourage them to use a support system.</p> <p>Refer student to Counseling or Health Services.</p>	<p>Demand they change their ideas or behavior.</p> <p>Continue to see student without making appropriate referrals.</p>
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The **MANIPULATIVE STUDENT**

Student Symptoms	Instructor Response	
<p>Feelings of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - inadequacy - seeks to control your time <p>Self centered</p> <p>Time spent with them is a reflection of personal worth.</p> <p>Immature</p>	<p>DO</p> <p>Set clear and precise limits. e.g., "I am able to spend 10 minutes with you now. My regular office hours are..."</p> <p>Strictly adhere to the established limits no matter how much student protests.</p> <p>Allow student to make his/her own decisions.</p> <p>Encourage them to use a support system. e.g. friends, other class members, college-based clubs.</p> <p>Refer student to Counseling or Health Services if necessary.</p>	<p>DON'T</p> <p>Take responsibility for them.</p> <p>Break the boundaries you set for the student.</p> <p>Allow student to use you as their only source of support.</p>

The **PARANOID STUDENT**

Student Symptoms	Instructor Response	
<p>Feelings of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - being the focal point of everyone's behavior - tension - nervousness - caution - inadequacy <p>Misinterpret minor oversights as significant personal rejection.</p> <p>Overreact to insignificant occurrences.</p> <p>Overly concerned with fairness, being treated equally.</p> <p>Difficulty with closeness or warmth.</p> <p>Project blame onto others.</p> <p>Express anger in roundabout ways.</p>	<p>DO</p> <p>Send clear, consistent messages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - what you will do - what you expect <p>Express compassion without intimate friendship.</p> <p>Maintain a professional distance from the student.</p> <p>Refer student to Counseling or Health Services if necessary.</p>	<p>DON'T</p> <p>Become a personal friend of the student.</p> <p>Become overly warm, nurturing or personal.</p> <p>Flatter, humor or "be cute" to relieve your own anxiety.</p> <p>Reinforce their beliefs.</p> <p>Try to argue against their beliefs.</p>

The [STUDENT UNDER THE INFLUENCE](#)

Student Symptoms	Instructor Response
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Susceptible to peer pressure

Irresponsible or unpredictable behavior

Health and social impairments

- hygiene
- consciousness
- ability to function

Changes in academic performance.

DO

Confront student with behavior that is a concern.

Address the substance abuse issue if the student is open and willing.

Offer support and concern for the student's overall well-being.

Consider maintaining contact with student after a referral is made.

Refer student to Counseling or Health Services if necessary.

DON'T

Convey judgment or criticism about the student's substance abuse.

Make allowances for the student's irresponsible behavior.

Ignore signs of intoxication in the classroom.

Confront the student in front of the class.