

RESPONDING TO DISTRESSED OR DISRUPTIVE INDIVIDUALS

A Guide For RWU Faculty and Staff

Roger Williams
University

**FOR IMMEDIATE RISK OF HARM TO SELF OR OTHERS – CONTACT PUBLIC SAFETY
AT 401-254-3333 OR VIA THE RAVE GUARDIAN MOBILE GPS APP**

IMPORTANT RWU NUMBERS

Center for Counseling and Student Development	401-254-3124
(Monday – Friday, 8:30 AM – 5:00 PM)	
Public Safety	401-254-3333 (Emergency)
	401-254-3611 (Non-Emergency)
Dean of Students Office	401-254-3161
Vice President, Student Life	401-254-3042
Student Conduct and Community Standards	401-254-3042

DISTRESSED BEHAVIOR

The following levels of behavior are intended to give you a frame of reference and a possible action plan. Please feel free to contact the Counseling Center (401-254-3124) to consult about a student that is concerning you. Ask for the on-call counselor. If it is an emergency, please tell the receptionist that it is urgent.

LOW RISK: Although not disruptive to others, these example behaviors may indicate that intervention is needed.

- Dramatic drop in grades
- Excessive absences, especially if this is a change
- Unusual changes in behavior (e.g., withdrawn, fearful, distracted)
- Change in personal hygiene
- Depressed mood
- Death of a loved one
- Difficulties in intimate relationships
- Problems at home with family members
- Excessive alcohol or drug use

CONSIDER REFERRING TO THE COUNSELING CENTER

MODERATE RISK: These example behaviors reflect significant internal distress, a need for intervention as well as a reluctance or inability to acknowledge a need for personal help.

- Unusual or exaggerated emotional expressiveness that is inconsistent with the situation.
- Expressions of hopelessness or helplessness
- Significant changes in weight
- Significant difficulties with communicating or lack of emotional expressiveness
- Suspiciousness or excessive mistrust
- Indirect or vague threats to self or others
- Disorientation or bizarre actions, that are concerning but do not put self or others at risk

DEPENDING ON THE THREAT LEVEL REFER TO PUBLIC SAFETY OR COUNSELING CENTER

HIGH RISK: Behaviors that cause immediate concern for the safety of the individual and/or others.

- References to suicide
- References to harming someone
- Bizarre actions, especially those that may put self or others at risk
- Displaying a weapon, or references to using a weapon
- Drug or alcohol overdose, loss of consciousness, medical emergency
- Risk-taking behaviors endangering oneself or others
- Disruptive classroom behavior such as throwing object, screaming, or making threats

IMMEDIATELY CONTACT PUBLIC SAFETY

Roger Williams University

One Old Ferry Road
Bristol, RI 02809
www.rwu.edu
401.253.1040

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DISRUPTIVE AND AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIORS IN THE CLASSROOM

Disruptive behaviors are those that interfere with or prevent instruction and learning activities in the classroom. These behaviors may range from mild distraction to violence.

Students may act out or become verbally abusive when they encounter obstacles or situations that they believe they lack the ability to control. The students may also displace anger from those situations on others who sometimes have little to do with the initial source of frustration.

A professor or staff member may use their own judgment in determining what constitutes disruptive behavior and how to respond.

EXAMPLES OF DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR

- Persistent, unreasonable demands for special time, attention, allowances
- Threats of physical assault
- Harassment or intimidation
- Yelling, screaming, profanity
- Failure to comply with staff or faculty member's legitimate request
- Disruptive behaviors such as aggression, hostility, being belligerent and uncooperative with faculty/staff
- Inappropriate classroom behavior and/or communication (including threatening letters, emails, harassment)
- Violence/physical aggression

RESPONDING TO DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR IN THE CLASSROOM:

- Exercise authority with compassion and self-restraint. Correct innocent mistakes and minor offenses gently without ridiculing student remarks
- Caution the entire class rather than identifying a specific student publicly
- Calmly specify what the problem is and state that the class will not continue until the behavior stops (e.g., no cell phone use in class)
- Before resuming the class, enlist the support of others by reminding the group that disruptive behaviors take valuable time away from class (e.g., exam material may not be fully covered in class)
- Speak to individuals about disruptive behavior after class discretely. If the situation requires an immediate response, courteously ask the student to stop the behavior and speak with you after class or during office hours (e.g., if a student becomes verbally aggressive do not react in a threatening, hostile, or punitive manner)

If verbal aggression occurs, the following are guidelines to help the situation:

- Be careful not to insist the student explain their behavior
- Be careful not to become hostile or punitive in response
- If needed, seek consultation with others, such as colleagues, your Dean, Human Resources, Counseling Center or Public Safety
- Be careful not to ignore the situation. Directly address and acknowledge the student's anger or frustration (e.g., "I hear how angry you are" or "It appears that you are upset")
- **FOR IMMEDIATE THREAT TO SELF OR OTHERS CALL PUBLIC SAFETY AT 401-254-3333**

HOW TO REFER A STUDENT

- Arrange to speak to the student in private
(*keep in mind your own personal safety*)
- State clearly in behavioral terms what has led to your concerns
(e.g., "I've noticed that you have been absent lately, and I am concerned. How are you doing?")
- Express that you are willing to help, which might include a referral to other campus departments
- Listen in a nonjudgmental fashion. Students in distress often feel very vulnerable and are sensitive to real or perceived criticism
- Give the student the option to call the Counseling Center from your office or offer to call the Counseling Center while the student is with you. You can also offer to walk the student over to the Counseling Center.
- Share with the student that the Counseling Center is here for the growth and development of students. Seeking professional help is a sign of strength; a positive and responsible thing to do
- **SUGGESTED PHRASES TO USE:**
 - "We have counselors on campus. Their office is located on the second floor of the Center for Student Development"
 - "I encourage you to just try one session to see if counseling could help"
 - "Many students use the services of the Counseling Center"