

Best practices for managing disruptive and/ or concerning behaviors

Effective prevention

Establishing norms helps prevent disruptive behavior and allows you to react effectively in the moment. In addition to using your syllabus to set academic expectations, you can also utilize it to create classroom behavioral expectations. The factors that constitute appropriate and inappropriate behavior are often dependent on the nature of class and faculty comfort level, and can vary widely from lectures to labs and across content areas. Faculty have found it helpful to:

- Outline both productive and disruptive types of behavior.
- Outline the process by which disruptive behavior will be addressed.
- Outline consequences for ongoing disruptive behavior.
- Verbally address classroom expectations regarding behavior on the first day of class. It is especially effective to talk about behavior you want to see, as well as the type that's disruptive.
- Model the type of behavior you expect from your class.

How to respond to a disruption, in the moment

Your direct intervention will work for a majority of situations; however, some students and situations are ongoing and will require additional consultation and follow up. Your colleagues within Student Life are available to work with you on handling disruptive situations.

It is important to remember that if the disruption causes immediate concern for personal safety, do not hesitate to call ETSU Public Safety at 423-439-4480.

What to do

Stay calm and listen to student concerns – identifying the catalyst for disruption can help you address the situation in the moment or in a later meeting.

- Be steady, consistent and firm.
- Acknowledge the feelings of the individual.
- Remember that disruptive behavior is often caused by stress or frustration.
- Address the disruption individually, directly, and immediately.
- Be specific about the behavior that is disruptive and set limits.
- Remove the student from that class session if the student does not comply with your expectations. If the student does not leave after being asked to do so, you can call ETSU Public Safety for assistance.

- Ask the student to see you after class to address the disruption, explore the causes of the incident and discuss appropriate behavior.
- Pay attention to warning signs that the situation is nearing escalation toward violence.
- Be aware of your own limitations – operate within your own scope of comfort:
 - Faculty can contact ETSU Public Safety and have the student removed from class.
 - Faculty can bring class to an end for the day.
 - Faculty can seek out additional advice on how to handle the disruptive student.

What to avoid

- Do not allow the behavior to continue.
- Avoid making it a class issue – address only the student who is causing the disruption.
- Avoid an argument or shouting match.
- Do not blame or ridicule the student, or use sarcasm.
- Do not touch the student.

Suggestions for intervening in a disruption

- Keep your focus on the student. Rather than say, “Class, we all know that talking during lecture is disruptive,” say, “Jane, your talking during class is disrupting the lecture and I need to ask you to stop.”
- Be clear about the behavior. If the student is talking out of turn, tell them. Rather than ask, “Do you have a question?” say, “Jane, now is not the time for discussion. There will be an opportunity for questions at the end of the lecture.”
- Nip the situation in the bud, referring to the syllabus regarding expectation and behavior. “Jane, you will note that in the syllabus, talking during lecture is considered disruptive behavior. If I need to ask you to stop talking again, I will need to ask you to leave.”
- Distress is often the cause of a disruption. It is important to recognize the stress while still addressing the behavior. Rather than say, “John, you are clearly emotional right now and you need to stop arguing,” say, “John, I can see that this topic has you upset; however, we need to bring this debate to a close and move on.”
- If you need to ask the student to leave, do so clearly and directly. Rather than say, “Get out! Go! Get out of here!” say, “John, your behavior has exceeded what is acceptable for this class and it is time for you to leave. I will be in contact with you via email to discuss next steps.” At this point, it is a good idea to pause class until the student exits the room.

What to do following a disruption

While many disruptions are minor and can be managed in the moment, it can be beneficial both to document the incident and follow up with the student. Documenting what you experienced and the steps you took will be helpful if you need to pursue a violation of the student conduct code. Clear communication with the student helps to set expectations and prevent further disruption. The following are suggestions to consider following an incident:

- Document the details about the incident, including the time/date/location, the behavior of the student, the actions you took and how the situation was resolved in the moment. Send this information to the Dean of Students office if you would like further review of the matter.
- For minor disruptions, an email can serve as both a tool to remedy behavior and to document the incident. In the email, you should include the observed behavior, your expectations for class and how they differ from the observed behavior, and the consequences of continued disruption.
- If the disruption is more egregious or a behavior is ongoing, you should contact the Dean of Students office for appropriate next steps. Keeping them in the loop regarding behavior of concern is always recommended.
- In some cases, a meeting with the student is warranted. The Dean of Students office can support or lead this meeting, either inside of outside of a conduct process.
- For serious disruptions please call ETSU Public Safety at 423-439-4480.

Responding to Mental Health needs

If the disruption appears to be related to a mental health need, consider the following:

- If a student is threatening **immediate** self-harm, suicide, or homicide, call ETSU Public Safety at 423-439-4480. This is an emergency situation.
- If a student is intoxicated, disoriented, delusional, or out of touch with reality, call ETSU Public Safety at 423-439-4480. This is an emergency situation or a situation that warrants an assessment for self-care by emergency responders.
- If you are concerned about a student's mental health or if a student meets the [ETSU Counseling Center emergency criteria](#), contact the Counseling Center to advise of the situation or offer to walk with the student to the Counseling center.
- Please note that students may decline professional intervention unless criteria for emergency detention or involuntary hospitalization are met.
- Please make the Dean of Students office aware of any of the above situations so that follow up care or response can be provided to the student. You can do this by completing [a CARE report](#) or contacting the Dean of Students office directly at 423-439-5377. Please note that the CARE reporting process is not an emergency notification process.

- Additional resources are available here: [Helping Others \(etsu.edu\)](https://etsu.edu/helping-others)

Resources: Ohio State University Best practice guidelines for managing disruptive classroom behavior.

Information compiled by the Dean of Students office