

**Creating a Culture of Safety**  
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**Assessment, Intervention, Management of Safety (AIMS) Team, Co-Chair**

There are many different aspects to creating a culture of safety on a college campus. Students, faculty, staff and administration are all part of the culture and have roles to fulfill that impact the safety of the community. Faculty and staff are on the front lines of contact with students and are in positions to observe students' behaviors on a consistent and frequent basis. Most of the time, the behavior of our students' falls within an expectable range. But, there are going to be some students who will display behavior outside of that expectable range and these are the individuals we want to hear about. Before going into the various forms of problematic student behavior, we would like to emphasize the importance of setting out the guidelines for your class at the front end i.e. in your syllabus. This is a document that every student will receive and a good place to clearly state your expectations, or do's and do not's and consequences. Reviewing these guidelines verbally in the first class is also recommended. We can only hope to follow the rules if we know what they are. So, develop what you can and cannot tolerate and communicate that to your students.

So, what does outside the expectable range look like? It can look like a student who is tearful or a student who is physically aggressive or a student who appears agitated, for example. In other words, the behaviors that come to your attention will be on a continuum from mild to moderate to severe distress. At times, it will be clear how to respond. A referral to Student Health or contacting campus police or student conduct may be options that you can utilize relatively seamlessly. At other times, it may not be so clear as to the most useful way to respond. These are more difficult situations and, in this regard, we would like to offer some information and suggestions. For example, if you believe that there is a risk of danger to self or other, one must err on the side of caution and notify campus police, especially if the student is agitated, withdrawn or uncooperative. It is all right to tell the student that you are concerned about them and that you want them to be safe. If a student asks you not to tell anyone, the best response is to tell them that you cannot make any promises.

**Difficult student behavior generally is classified into three broad categories which are:**

**Distressed Student**

**Disruptive Student**

**Dangerous Student**

The **DISTRESSED** student may be upset, tearful, distracted. They may be late or absent frequently. They may look fatigued or unkempt. They may be noticeably anxious as in moving around, fidgeting. For this student, talking to them privately and in a calm voice and sharing your observations without judgment are useful interventions. Additionally, reminding them that they can seek out mental health services at Student Health is important. If possible, offer to walk them over to the health center. Alternatively, the faculty or staff member can call for a phone consultation with Jan Schaeffer, PHD. If you have any concern for their safety, ask them directly if they are able to remain safe. It is a perfectly reasonable

concern to express. It is rare that an upset individual will be surprised by the question or expression of concern. It is a good idea to document your interaction with the student and any interventions you made or suggested.

The **DISRUPTIVE** student may be someone who interrupts others, asks questions or makes comments excessively, talks on their cell phone during class, uses obscene language, walks around the room, is openly confrontational and/or agitated. The disruptive student is distressed but cannot keep that distress under control and it impacts those around them, like you and the other students. For this student, a private talk is necessary but only if you feel safe. Share your concerns calmly and without blame. You can do this by describing the behaviors that are problematic rather than criticizing the character of the person. Let the student know what you expect in as clear a way as possible and gently but firmly let them know the consequences if they continue to demonstrate the disruptive behaviors. Share your concerns with other faculty and your chair in case others have experienced the same or similar problems with the student. Consult with the AIMS Team. If the student shares a personal problem with you, offer to walk them to the health center and/or consult with Jan Schaeffer, PhD. Inquire about safety and document.

The **DANGEROUS** student is in severe distress. They may be verbally and/or physically abusive in the classroom. They are loud, visibly agitated and possibly threatening to self or other. Try to remain calm, dismiss the class and call campus police immediately. If you are comfortable, talk to the student in the hallway, but only do so if you believe your safety and that of others is not in question. With an out of control student, the priority is to restore some sense of balance and safety. It is only after equilibrium is restored that problem solving can begin.

As the AIMS team moves along in its development, we will continue to post information, articles and recommendations for handling student management issues and how we, as a team, can be useful.