

THREAT ASSESSEMENT TEAM

ACTION GUIDE FOR FACULTY & STAFF

Frequently Asked Questions About Dealing with Disruptive Behaviors

Q. What is the mission of the Threat Assessment Team?

Wytheville Community College's Threat Assessment Team will help develop policies and procedures for the prevention of violence on campus, including assessment and intervention with individuals whose behavior poses a threat to the safety of the campus community.

Q. What are some signs that a student may be in distress?

A student in distress may not be disruptive to others, but may exhibit behaviors which indicate something is wrong, show signs of emotional distress and indicate that assistance is needed. They may also be reluctant or unable to acknowledge a need for personal help. Behaviors may include:

1. Serious grade problems or a change from consistently passing grades to unaccountable poor performance.
2. Excessive absences, especially if the student has previously demonstrated consistent attendance.
3. Unusual or markedly changed patterns of interaction, i.e., avoidance of participation, excessive anxiety when called upon, domination of discussions, etc.
4. Other characteristics that suggest the student is having trouble managing stress successfully, e.g., a depressed, lethargic mood; very rapid speech; swollen, red eyes; marked change in personal dress and hygiene; falling asleep during class.
5. Repeated requests for special consideration, such as deadline extensions, especially if the individual appears uncomfortable or highly emotional while disclosing the circumstances prompting the request.
6. New or repeated behavior which pushes the limits of decorum and which interferes with effective management of the immediate environment.
7. Unusual or exaggerated emotional responses which are obviously inappropriate to the situation.

Q. How to make a referral.

While many students go to counseling or to the Office of Student Services on their own, your exposure to them increases the likelihood you will identify signs and/or behaviors of distress in an individual. What can you do?

- Recommend campus services to the student and then call the Student Services Office in Bland Hall.
- Determine the student's willingness to go to a helping resource. Reassure the student that it is an act of strength to ask for help.
- Dispute the myth that only "weak" or "crazy" people go for counseling or use others help.
- Remind them that counseling resources are affordable (often free or reduced for students) and are confidential.
- Offer to help make the initial contact with the helping resource. Designated person in Student Services is:
 - Student Services Counselor, 276-223-4758
 - Renee Thomas, Dean of Student Success and Academic Development, 276-223-4752

Q. What are warning signs of disruptive behavior that requires immediate attention?

Severely troubled or disruptive students exhibit behaviors that signify an obvious crisis and that necessitate emergency care. These problems are the easiest to indentify. Examples include:

1. Highly disruptive behavior (e.g. hostility, aggression, violence, etc.).
2. Inability to communicate clearly (garbled, slurred speech; unconnected, disjointed, or rambling thoughts).
3. Loss of contact with reality (seeing or hearing things which others cannot see or hear; beliefs, or actions greatly at odds with reality or probability).
4. Stalking behaviors.
5. Inappropriate communications (including threatening letters, e-mail, messages, harassment).
6. Overtly suicidal thoughts (including referring to suicide as a current option in a written assignment).
7. Threats to harm others.
8. Appearance of being under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Q. What are the warning signs of alcohol and substance abuse that might lead you to refer a student?

Physical warning signs of drug abuse

- Bloodshot eyes or pupils that are larger or smaller than usual
- Changes in appetite or sleep patterns. Sudden weight loss or weight gain
- Deterioration of physical appearance and personal grooming habits
- Unusual smells on breath, body or clothing
- Tremors, slurred speech, or impaired coordination
- Has burned fingers, burns on lips, or needle track marks on arms
- Exhibits impaired coordination or unsteady gait (e.g. staggering, off balance)
- Speaks more rapidly or slowly than normal

Behavioral signs of drug abuse

- Drop in attendance and performance at work or school
- Unexplained need for money or financial problems. May borrow or steal to get it
- Engaging in secretive or suspicious behaviors
- Sudden changes in friends, favorite hangouts, and hobbies
- Frequently getting into trouble (fights, accidents, illegal activities)
- Has difficulty concentrating, focusing, or attending to a task
- Frequently appears distracted or disoriented
- Makes inappropriate or unreasonable choices
- Experiences short-term memory loss
- Often needs directions repeated
- Has difficulty recalling known details

Psychological warning signs of drug abuse:

- Unexplained change in personality or attitude
- Sudden mood swings, irritability, or angry outbursts
- Periods of unusual hyperactivity, agitation, or giddiness
- Lack of motivation; appears lethargic or 'spaced out'
- Appears fearful, anxious, or paranoid, with no reason
- Experiences wide mood swings (highs and lows)
- Experiences general change in mood toward a more depressed and negative or critical outlook
- Appears fearful or anxious; experiences panic attacks
- Appears impatient, agitated, or irritable
- Experiences ongoing depression
- Has paranoid thoughts

IMMEDIATE DANGER - CALL CAMPUS POLICE, EXT. 4713 or 276-613-4423 - NO RESPONSE, CALL 911

**CONCERN
FOR A STUDENT**

Incidents observed that provoke thought or concern but require no emergency response.



Report to: Dean of Student Success and Academic Development or Academic Dean

AGGRESSION

If you see or are dealing with aggressive or threatening behavior.



WCC Police Department. A WCC Police Officer will respond, assess, and assist. Police: Ext. 4713, or 276-613-4423, Rm. 107, Carroll Hall

DANGER TO OTHERS

A student expresses (verbally or in writing) a willingness or desire to harm others or a student demonstrates (in progress) or is attempting to harm others.



WCC Police Department. A WCC Police Officer will respond, assess, and assist. Police: Ext. 4713, or 276-613-4423, Rm. 107, Carroll. May also report to Dean of Student Success and Academic Development or Academic Dean Hall

DISABILITY

If you see or are dealing with a person with a disability who is in difficulty, ask them if you may contact:



Student Disability Services, , Ext. 4754, Academic Resource Center, Bland Hall.

DANGER TO SELF

A student expresses (verbally or in writing) a willingness or desire to harm himself/herself with no specific plan.

*In this situation, the danger is not imminent and only involves the person.

*Example: A student may write about or discuss a sense of desperation or hopelessness with death as a solution.



Student Services Counselor, Ext. 4758; Renee Thomas, Dean of Student Success and Academic Development, Ext. 4752 Rm. 117, Bland Hall

DANGER TO SELF

A student demonstrates (in progress) an attempt to harm himself/herself or has a specific plan to harm himself/herself.

*Here the danger is imminent or in progress.

*Example: A student advises that they have taken pills, has a weapon, has cut self or advised that when they leave they are going to implement their suicide plan.



WCC Police Department. A WCC Police Officer will respond, assess, and assist. Police: Ext. 4713, or 276-613-4423, Rm. 107, Carroll Hall

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

A student appears to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs in class, or is seen in possession of same.



WCC Police Department. A WCC Police Officer will respond, assess, and assist. Police: Ext. 4713, or 276-613-4423, Rm. 107, Carroll Hall

ILLNESS/INJURY/ACCIDENT

For medical emergencies, dial 911.

If you see or are dealing with a person who is injured, or ill, or whose behavior seems erratic.



WCC Police Department. A WCC Police Officer will respond, assess, and assist. Police: Ext. 4713, or 276-613-4423, Rm. 107, Carroll Hall

In the event of an accident on campus, an incident report must be filed with the WCC Police Department.

**THREAT
ASSESSMENT TEAM**

Chairperson:

Renee Thomas, Dean of Student Success and Academic Development
Ext. 4752

Campus Police:

Eddie Williams, Chief
Ext. 4713 or 276-613-4423

Student Services:

Renee Thomas, **Ext. 4752**
Jenny Buchanan, **Ext. 4754**

Faculty Members:

Bruce Brown, **Ext. 4726**
Lorri Huffard, **Ext. 4827**
Doc Weiss, **Ext. 4782**

Administration:

Donna Fender (Dean), **Ext. 4729**
Crystal Goad (Interim Dean), **Ext. 4829**
Shawn McReynolds, **Ext. 4810**

Human Resources:

Linda Nye, **Ext. 4869**

Workforce Development:

Melinda Leland, **Ext. 4757**

**In partnership with the Mt. Rogers Emergency Services/Crisis Program (Susan Austin)*

OR

EMOTIONAL BEHAVIOR

If you see, or are dealing with, a student who "needs to talk to someone" about a personal concern or is experiencing a psychological crisis.



Student Services Counselor, Ext. 4758
Renee Thomas, Dean of Student Success and Academic Development, Ext. 4752
Rm. 117, Bland Hall

SEXUAL ASSAULT

A student reports they are a victim of ongoing or very recent physical or sexual abused at the hands of a relative, guardian, caretaker, spouse, boyfriend, girlfriend, or unknown.



WCC Police Department. A WCC Police Officer will respond, assess, and assist. Police: Ext. 4713, or 276-613-4423, Rm. 107, Carroll Hall ***Is a mandated report to DSS if student is under age 18.**

Disruptive Behavior

The Student Handbook outlines the standards and expectations of students' conduct and behavior. Examples of disruptive behavior are as follows:

Conduct Disruptive to the College Community

Conduct that is disruptive to the college's educational objectives, to its operations, or to its officials, staff, and faculty in the performance of their work, or to any other aspect of its mission. Such conduct includes, but is not limited to:

1. Disruption of a class, college activity, or any other normal activity held on college property or at a college location.
2. Classroom behavior that interferes with either (a) the instructor's ability to conduct the class or (b) the ability of other students to benefit from the instructional program.
3. Conduct which is disorderly or a breach of the peace.

Causing Physical or Other Harm to Any Person

1. Conduct causing physical injury or endangering another's health or safety, which includes, but is not limited to, acts of physical violence, assault, and relationship or domestic violence.
2. Actions causing physical injury or endangering one's own health or safety.

Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct

1. Sexual Assault. Any sexual act or attempt to engage in any sexual act with another person without the consent of the other person or, in circumstances in which the person is unable, due to age, disability, or chemical or other impairment, to give consent.
2. Sexual Misconduct. Any intentional intimate touching of another without the consent of the other person or, in circumstances in which the person is unable, due to age, disability, or chemical or other impairment, to give consent.

Harassment

1. Harassment or Threats--Verbal or written abuse, threats, harassment, coercion or any other conduct that places another individual in reasonable fear for his or her safety through words or actions directed at that person, or substantially interferes with the working, educational, or living environment of the individual, including staking and racial harassment.
2. Sexual Harassment--Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for favors, and/or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when:
 - a. Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment or status in a college activity or;
 - b. Submission or, or rejection of, such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment or decisions affecting such individual's employment or status in a college activity, or;
 - c. Such conduct has the purpose or effect of interfering with an individual's work or academic performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive employment or academic environment.

Q. How do I respond to a disruptive individual?

1. Remain calm and know who to call. See referral numbers on the front of this publication.
2. Remember that it is NOT your responsibility to provide professional help needed for a severely troubled/disruptive student. You need only make the necessary call and request assistance.
3. When a student expresses a direct threat to themselves or others, or acts in a bizarre, highly irrational or disruptive way, immediately call the WCC Police Chief at Ext. 4713 or 276-613-4433.

Q. How should I respond when a student is disrupting my class?

Faculty members have broad authority to manage their classrooms and establish reasonable guidelines for class discussions that ensure everyone has an opportunity to participate in an orderly manner. If you believe a student's behavior is inappropriate, consider a general word of caution rather than singling a student out or embarrassing the student. "If the behavior in question is irritating, but not disruptive, try speaking with the student after class. Most students are unaware of distracting habits or mannerisms, and have no intent to be offensive or disruptive. There may be rare circumstances where it is necessary to speak to a student during class about this behavior. Correct the student in a manner indicating that further discussion can occur after class." (Pavela, 2001, ¶ 5). Examples of disruptive behavior include interrupting or monopolizing classroom discussion, interrupting instruction, and inappropriate language.

If a student's behavior reaches the point that it interferes with your ability to conduct the class or the ability of other students to benefit from the class, the student should be asked to leave the room for the remainder of the class period. The student should be provided with a reason for this action and an opportunity to discuss the matter with you as soon as is practical. In such situations, consultation and referral to the WCC Police Chief may be appropriate. Also, report the situation to the Dean of Student Success and Academic Development and the appropriate Academic Dean.

(This item adapted from ASJA Law and Policy Report, No. 26, ASJA & Gary Pavela, 2001.)