

# Helping Faculty Members Deal with Distressed and Disruptive Students

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# College Students

- More diverse backgrounds
- Often don't know how to "do" college
- Increased sense of college pressure
- Less prepared for adversity (sheltered; parent directed; more peer-oriented)
- Consumer and career oriented
- More psychological and physical health issues

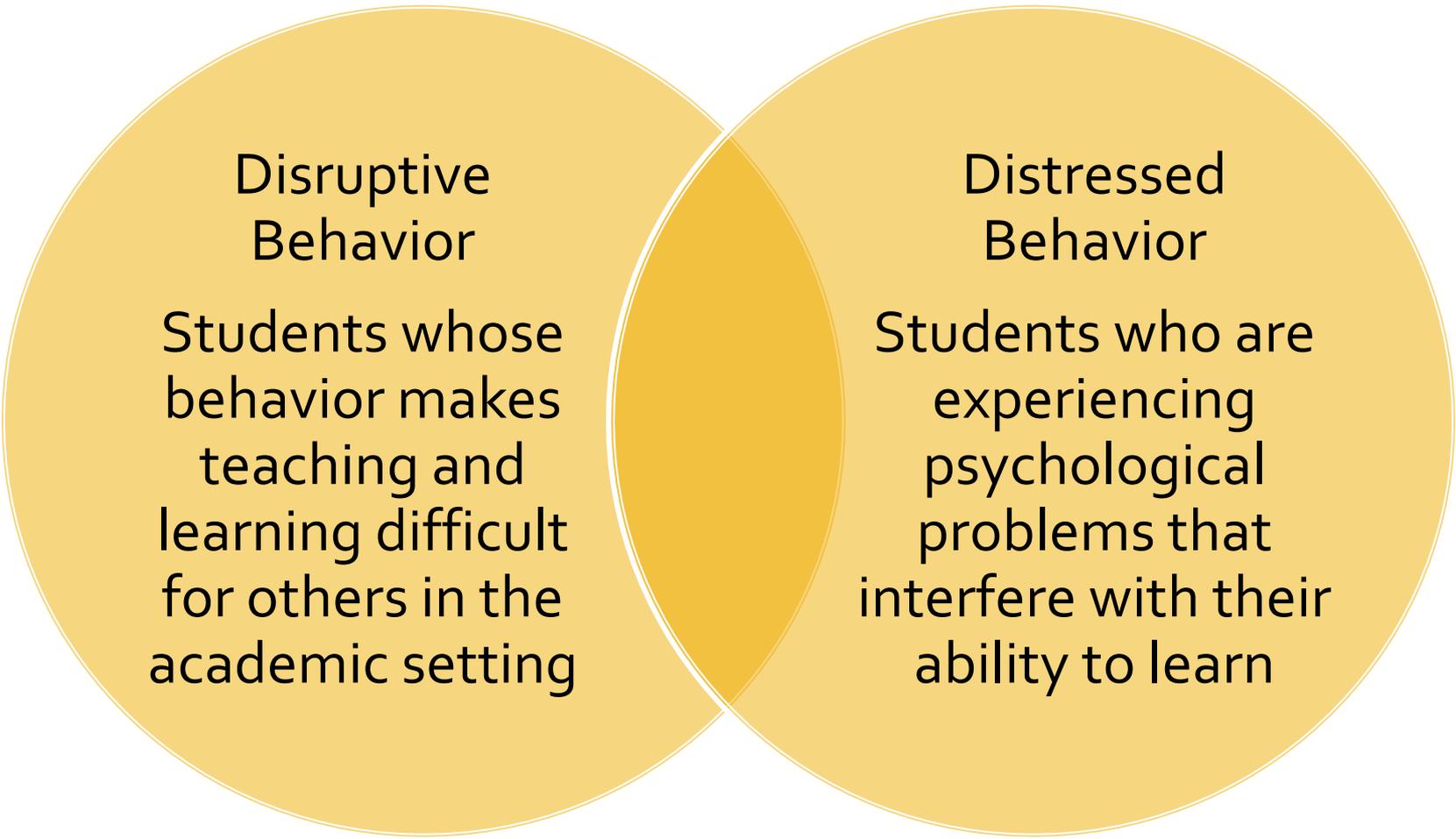
# The Campus Environment

- Greater concern for safety issues
- Increased expectation of faculty members regarding student conduct
- Increased emphasis on building culture of student services

# The Upside

- Greater receptivity to seeking help
- Increased faculty and staff interest in dealing with these issues
- Campuses ramping up resources to deal with student issues

# Difficult Behaviors



## Disruptive Behavior

Students whose behavior makes teaching and learning difficult for others in the academic setting

## Distressed Behavior

Students who are experiencing psychological problems that interfere with their ability to learn

# The Facts Are

- Faculty-student interaction is critical to learning
- Most students do fine with courses
- Most faculty members do fine with instruction
- Most conflicts are addressed in due course
- Most students will respond to intervention

# It Just Wears You Down

- I love my subject – why don't they?
- Why don't students know how to study?
- Why don't they see learning is important?
- Why can't you read the syllabus?
- Can't individualize for everyone

# Common Disruptive Behaviors

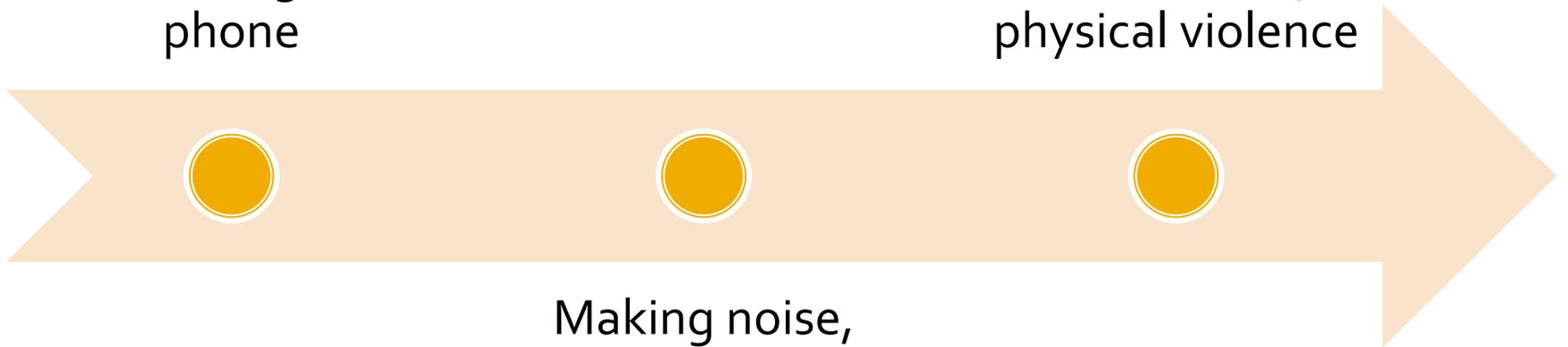
- Grandstanding/monopolizing discussion
- Talking during class
- Excessive lateness or leaving class early
- Use of cell phones, texting, pagers etc.
- Challenging instructor's authority or expertise
- Violations of syllabus expectations/rules

# Intensity and Severity

Late, reading the  
paper, sleeping,  
texting,  
answering cell  
phone

Threats,  
harassment,  
physical violence

Making noise,  
repeatedly  
interrupting,  
personal insults



# Disruptive Behavior is Not

- Cultural differences
- Mere disagreements or differences of opinion
- Simple stress reactions
- Needing extra time or attention for a special reason

# Student Related Causes

- Difficult transition to university classroom norms and academic standards
- Confusion about class expectations
- Sense of entitlement
- Classroom incivility
- Poor academic and personal coping skills
- Underlying psychological problems

# Instructor Related Causes

- Poor structuring of classroom routine
- Overreliance on passive learning
- Distant or disrespectful
- Poor interpersonal relationships with students
- Unrealistic expectations
- Lack of behavioral intervention skills

# Preventing Disruptive Behavior

- “population-level” intervention
- Clearly articulate behavioral and academic expectations in syllabus and review expectations in class
- Course structure and class interaction
- Build relationships
  - Reduce anonymity
  - Interact with students before and after class

# Addressing Disruptive Behavior

- Difference between miscall and DB (Seeman 2010)
- How will you respond?
  - Fear of legal or physical reprisal
  - Discipline not “my problem”
  - Concern for student “getting in trouble”
  - Uncomfortable with “talking about those types of things”

# Examples of Miscalls

- Student daydreams
- Student has head on desk
- Student does math work in history
- Student hasn't done homework/reading
- Key questions
  - Is the behavior interfering with others' learning
  - Is the behavior interfering with my teaching
  - Do I have to intervene right now

# Graduated Discipline

- Know your options
- Correct early
- Give general word of caution to class
- Know your campus policies
- Different response for minor, persistent and serious disruptive behavior
- Document, document and then document some more

# Distressed Behavior

- Repeated requests for special consideration, extensions etc.
- Unusual or exaggerated emotional response
- Withdrawal from activities or friends
- Declining academic performance
- Excessive absences
- Markedly changed patterns of interaction
- Change in mood, hygiene, speech

# Serious Distressed Behavior

- Excessive talking/difficulty communicating
- Loss of contact with reality
- Persistent peculiar thoughts
- Suicidal thoughts
- Homicidal threats
- Hostile, threatening, violent
- Withdrawn

# Addressing Distressed Behavior

- Talk to the student in private
- Express concern in nonjudgmental terms
  - “I’ve noticed you’ve been absent from class lately and I’m concerned”
  - Listen and avoid early reassurances or solutions
  - Ask for agreement to refer to another campus resource

# When to make a referral

- The behavior is beyond your skill level
- The behavior persists
- The behavior is getting worse
- You feel overwhelmed or unsure of how to proceed
- You feel the need to talk with someone about your observations or concerns

# How to Make a Referral

- Tell student that it is not necessary to know exactly what is wrong in order to seek assistance
- Assure student that seeking help does not necessarily mean they are crazy or something is wrong
- Make a phone call from your office
- Make sure student in crisis gets help now

# Campus Resources

- Dean/dept head
- Student conduct office
- Campus police
- [Counseling and Testing Center](#)
- Student health services
- Behavioral/Threat Assessment Teams
  - CARE
  - [EHS](#)
  - [IVSART](#)

# Making a Counseling Referral

- Confidential
- No charge
- Not a long term commitment
- Offer to call from office right now
- Personal referral to someone you know at the counseling center

# Online Referrals

- Maxient
- [incident report form](https://publicdocs.maxient.com/incidentreport.php?UNCPembroke)  
(<https://publicdocs.maxient.com/incidentreport.php?UNCPembroke>)

# Issues for Discussion

- What is the procedure when a student makes a threat?
- Can a faculty tell a student to leave the class and not come back?
- What should you do if a student confides emotional difficulties?
- What should you do if a student is “acting weird”?

# End Notes

- Prevention is the key
- Collaboration is crucial
- When in doubt, just call and talk it over