



## Addressing Disruptive Student Behaviour

One of a series of fact sheets for staff

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Dealing with disruptive or demanding behaviour is rarely straightforward however there are some strategies that make it easier.

This fact sheet provides some tips about:

- preventing disruptive behaviour;
  - responding to disruptive behaviour;
  - following up after an incident;
  - conducting a meeting with a student;
  - implementing a behaviour agreement; and
  - reviewing outcomes.
- Information about student complaints and discipline ordinances and procedures can be found on the Academic Services website at:

[acserv.admin.utas.edu.au/index.html](http://acserv.admin.utas.edu.au/index.html)

# **GUIDELINES FOR ADDRESSING DISRUPTIVE STUDENT BEHAVIOUR**

## **Prevention**

- Establish clear expectations with students from the start of the unit regarding behaviour, rights, responsibilities etc. and be consistent in responding.
- Encourage positive relationships within the group and model an inclusive approach so that individual students do not become isolated.
- Acknowledge feelings and concerns when they are raised so that students feel that they have been heard. Offer them the opportunity to discuss issues at another time.
- Ensure that you are aware of the resources available to assist in managing disruptive behaviour, professional development opportunities or support/advice from Student Services staff.

## **Initial response**

- Stay calm and ensure that you and the other students are safe.
- If the behaviour is aggressive or threatening to other students or staff, call Security with a view to defusing the situation safely.
- Communicate clearly your concern about the behaviour and what you would like the student to do or stop doing.
- Ensure that the student feels that they have been heard and acknowledge the student's feelings.
- Provide the opportunity for 'time out' and offer the student a private chat after the class.
- Assess the impact of the behaviour on other people and ensure that their needs are addressed after the incident. Advice can be sought from Student Services if required.

## **Follow up**

- As soon as possible document the specifics of the alleged incident/s (when, where, who, what) and determine whether the behaviour is serious enough to be addressed.
- Decide on appropriate follow up action – options include:
  - action under the Ordinance of Student Discipline and/or
  - referral to the student's course coordinator or Head of School for counselling;
  - meeting to develop a behaviour agreement (see guidelines);
  - further training and support for staff (if the incident was serious, staff counselling may be appropriate).
- If the situation is complex, ongoing and/or involves multiple parties; consider implementation of a case management approach. This involves key staff working together to ensure a coordinated response to managing behaviours and meeting student needs. Case management requires effective communication among those involved, consistent responses to inappropriate behaviour and clear consequences in the event of unacceptable behaviour or breaches of agreements.

## **GUIDELINES FOR MEETING WITH A STUDENT**

### **Before the meeting**

- Establish a clear understanding of the behaviours and associated problems.
- Clarify other policies or procedures that may apply (for example, Harassment & Discrimination policy, Student Discipline Ordinance).
- Consult with relevant experts and obtain advice on handling the situation.
- Set clear goals for the meeting (for example, student accepts referral for counselling, agreement regarding improved behaviour, staff deal more effectively with student).
- Invite the student to the meeting, giving adequate notice and informing them of their right to bring a support person.
- Invite other relevant people including the Course Coordinator, other staff, Counsellor, Disability Adviser and/or other professional.
- Arrange for a notetaker if necessary.
- Be aware of gender-related issues and any disability-related factors and seek assistance from Student Services if necessary.

### **During the meeting**

- Describe clearly to the student the incident(s) and nature of the disruptive behaviour, its effect on others and any associated problems, for example:

*We are meeting because of complaints that you have had angry outbursts in class and that they disrupt the learning for other students. It is expected that all students manage their emotions so as not to disrupt the class.*

- Encourage the student to respond to the allegations aiming to identify underlying issues of concern.
- Discuss options for resolving the situation and if appropriate ask the student to suggest a solution.
- When agreement is reached, this should be clearly articulated and written down, possibly as a signed Behaviour Agreement.
- If a behaviour agreement is to be negotiated, consider including details under the following headings:
  - expectations of student behaviour;
  - support to be provided by the University;
  - actions to be taken if the Agreement is not followed; and
  - review dates and processes.
- Clearly inform the student of their rights under relevant policies and ordinances and the consequences of continued disruptive behaviour.
- Agree on any follow-up action required which may include referral or further review meetings.

### **After the meeting**

- Inform other parties only as necessary.
- Monitor and review as agreed.

## **CHECKLIST FOR USE IN DIFFICULT SITUATIONS**

Here is a quick checklist that indicates key factors in resolving difficult situations. The checklist can also be used in reviewing the outcome of complaint/discipline processes:

- The student's views have been heard and their feelings have been acknowledged.
- The student is fully aware of their rights under relevant policies and ordinances.
- Clear expectations have been established regarding behaviour and procedures.
- Options for referral to other services have been pursued.
- Processes have been fair and equitable and timely for the student and others involved.
- Responses have been coordinated and communication is clear.
- Any disability related factors or potential discrimination have been addressed.
- The emotional and practical needs of staff involved have been safeguarded.
- Training and support needs of staff and other students have been considered.
- The University's legal liability has been protected.
- Any broader issues have been addressed and implications considered.
- Incidents and responses have been adequately documented, reporting requirements have been met and confidentiality has been protected.

# **SAMPLE BEHAVIOUR AGREEMENT**

## **(MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING)**

### **Expectations**

- It is expected that Ned Kelly will not disrupt the class with angry outbursts. Questions and comments may be directed to his lecturers regarding particular areas that are relevant to the current class.
- If Ned begins to feel angry, he will take time out for a few minutes, if possible.
- Complaints or feedback can be made in writing to the Head of School.

### **Support to be provided by the University**

- Ned is offered five weekly sessions with a University Counsellor to address anger management issues.
- If Ned is beginning to show signs of an angry outburst in class, his lecturers will suggest to him that he take time out for a few minutes.

### **Actions to be taken if the agreement is not followed**

- If Ned further disrupts the class through angry outbursts he will be asked by his lecturers to leave class.
- Lecturers will report any angry outbursts to the Head of School who will review the situation and may implement Student Discipline procedures.
- Student Discipline procedures can lead to exclusion from certain classes or the entire campus.

### **Review**

This behaviour agreement was developed on <insert date> and will be reviewed at a meeting to be held on <insert date>

*It is not intended that the provisions of this memorandum of understanding are to be legally binding and enforced in a court of law.*

Student: \_\_\_\_\_ Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Head of School: \_\_\_\_\_ Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_