



**SPARK Presentation**  
**Empowering Program Advisers and Faculty:**  
**Navigating Student Challenges &**  
**Leveraging University Resources**



**PennState**  
Student Affairs

# Today's Presenter

**Natalie Hernandez**, Senior Director, Counseling and Psychological Services

- [Counseling and Psychological Services | Penn State Student Affairs](#)

- Alum from the College of Education at Penn State (Ph.D.)

- Was every level of trainee at Counseling & Psychological Services during graduate school

- Hired as Coordinator of Multicultural Programs/Services in 2010

- Senior Director since 2022

- CAPS (located in Student Affairs) also has the distinct honor of housing the largest research-practice network in the world for MH data, CCMH:

- <https://ccmh.psu.edu/>

- Please see the annual report from 2025 for national data and helpful contextual details about the state of collegiate mental health today





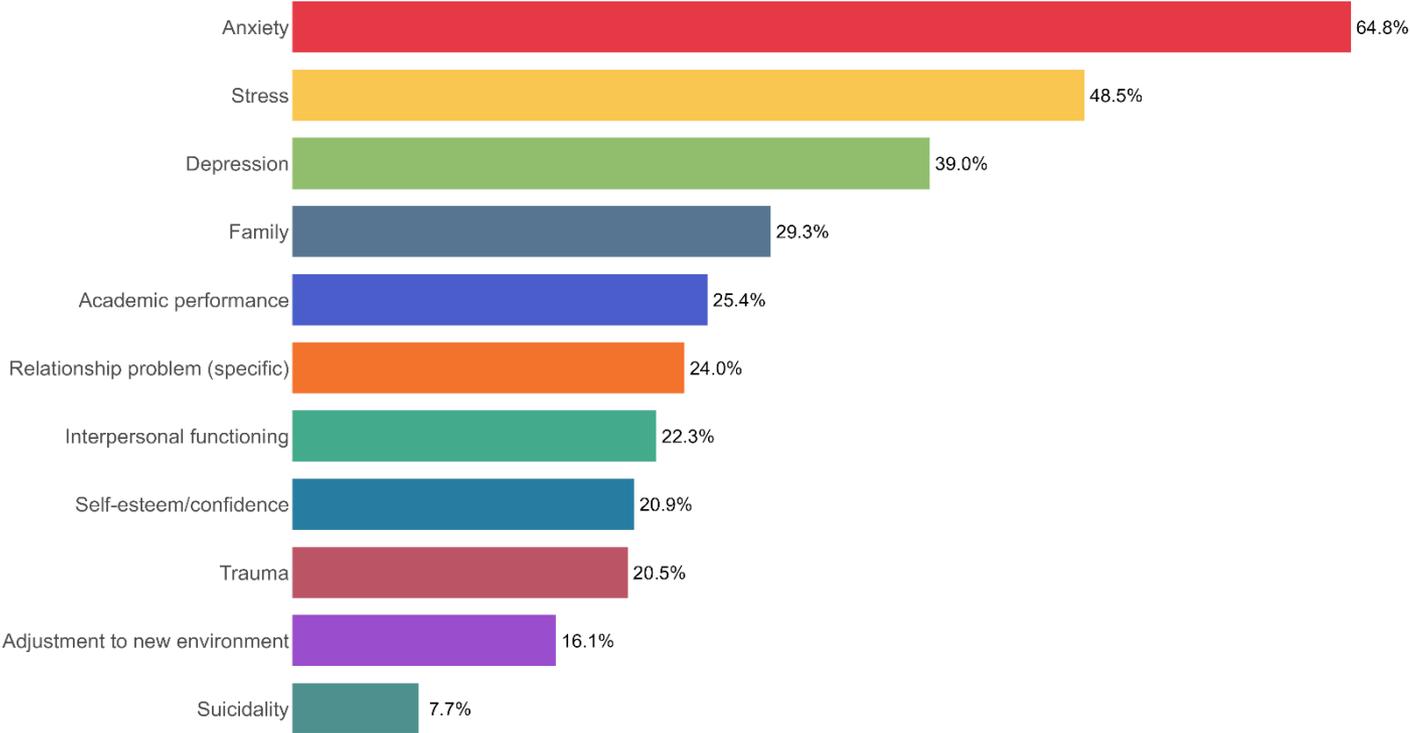
# Evolution of the College Classroom

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# Top Concerns Identified by Clinicians at Counseling Centers (2024-2025)



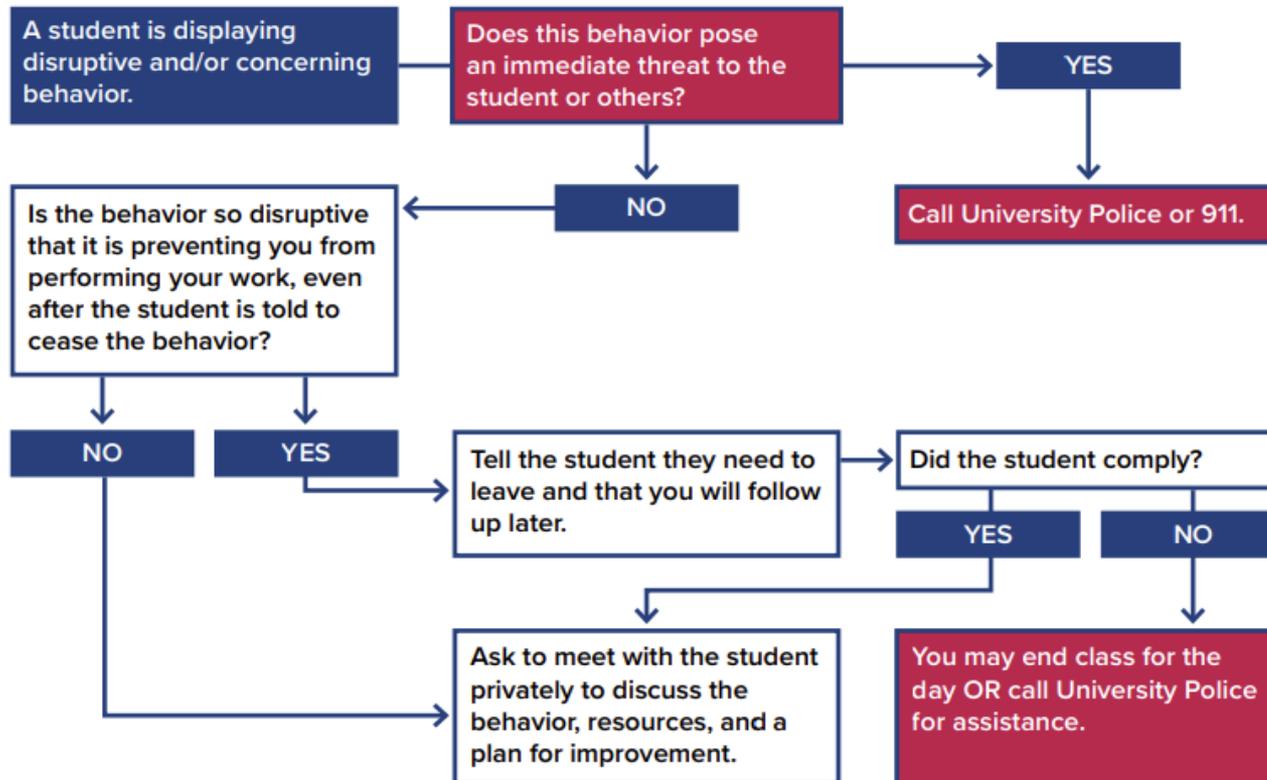
Source: The Center for Collegiate Mental Health







# Managing Disruptive Behavior



# Behavioral Meetings with Students

## Follow-Up Meeting with a Student

A private meeting with the student is generally the best way to resolve an incident of disruptive behavior. You may ask another person, such as a department chair or colleague, to join the meeting if you are concerned about the student's immediate reaction or allegations of misconduct from the student.

### During the meeting:

- Be steady, consistent and firm while clearly identifying the disruptive behavior(s).
- Refer to your syllabus, the Student Code of Conduct and/or other University regulations and discuss appropriate expectations and/or boundaries.
- Discuss an action plan for improvement.
- Determine if you can take additional steps to assist the student and provides referrals that may help.
- Remain calm, respectful and acknowledge the student's feelings. If at any time during the meeting you feel unsafe, you should immediately end the meeting.

### After the meeting:

Consider following up with an email to summarize the conversation and determine if you need to raise a flag in Starfish, make a referral to Student Care and Advocacy or report the incident to the Office of Student Accountability and Conflict Response. If there is an emergency, immediately call University Police or 911.





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Educational Equity



## **Classroom Disruption Protocols: Guidelines for Instructors and Academic Units**

[The Office of the Vice Provost for Educational Equity](#) values the wide range of pedagogical approaches represented across Penn State's disciplines, colleges, campuses, and departments, and affirms the standards that promote faculty success in the classroom.

# Penn State Guidance

[classroom-disruption-protocols-09-28-2025](#)



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# Minor vs. Major Disruptions

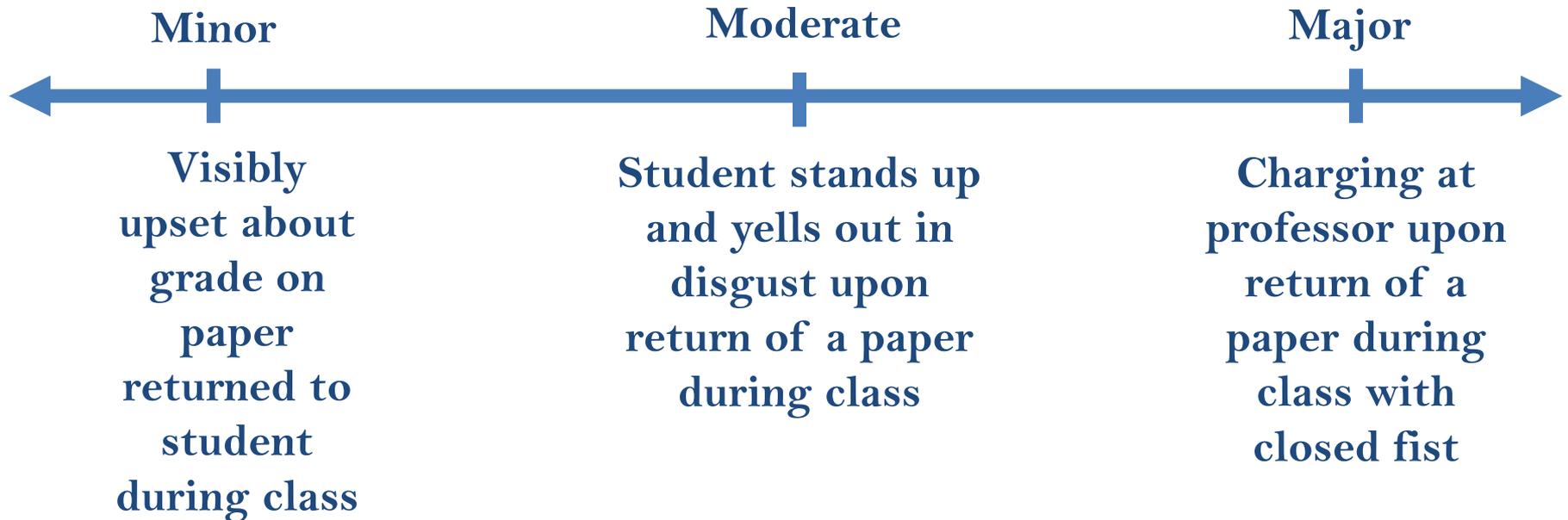
Examples of Minor Disruptions	Appropriate Faculty Responses
Sleeping in class	Speak with the student privately
Reading material unrelated to class	Clarify for the student what behavior is acceptable
Chronic lateness	Remind student of their classroom behavior

Examples of Major Disruptions	Appropriate Faculty Responses
Progressive or chronic minor disruptions	Speak directly to the student
Refusing to leave the classroom upon the reasonable request of the faculty member	Ask the student to leave class
Erratic or irrational behavior	Dismiss class

# Range of Behaviors & Ways to Respond



# Challenging Grade on Assignment



# Deeply Held Beliefs & Speech

Minor

Moderate

Major

Providing abortion related commentary that is irrelevant to classroom content

Calling someone out in class for having an abortion & imploring others to gang up on the student

Threatening to stop someone from having an abortion



# Emotional Distress & Threat to Self



# Barriers to Addressing Concern

- Hesitant to hurt feelings
- Don't want to make it worse
- Violate rights
- Limited understanding of culture
- Unclear on campus policies
- Don't have enough information/context



# What's Our Response?

- Gather information
- Share information free of silos
- Identify next steps
- Denote responsibilities
- Take action & report back
- Monitor & reassess, as needed





# Alternate Routes



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# RED FOLDER

Brought to you by  
Student Affairs/Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) &  
University Park Undergraduate Association (UPUA)

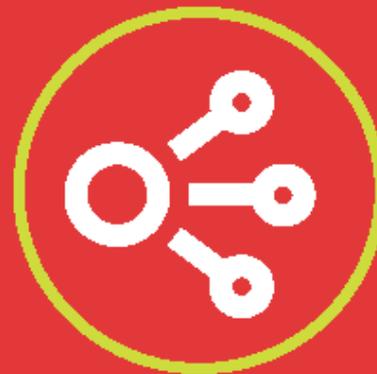
A quick reference guide for recognizing, responding to, and referring distressed students.



**RECOGNIZE**



**RESPOND**



**REFER**

## HOW TO USE:

**1. Recognize indicators of distress**  
Common indicators are listed inside.  
Students may present with indicators not listed.

**2. Respond appropriately**  
Each situation is unique. Use the tips  
and decision tree to determine the most  
appropriate response.

**3. Refer the student**  
Use the list of resources on back cover  
to refer the student to the most  
appropriate campus resource.



## RECOGNIZE

### Indicators of Distressed Students

Look for groupings, frequency, and severity of behaviors, not just isolated symptoms.

#### Academic

- Sudden decline in quality of work and grades
- Frequently missed classes and assignments
- Disturbing content in writing or presentations
- Classroom disruptions
- Consistently seeking personal rather than professional advice
- Multiple requests for extensions/special considerations (a change from prior functioning)
- Doesn't respond to repeated requests for contact/meetings

#### Physical

- Marked changes in physical appearance (e.g., poor grooming/hygiene or sudden weight loss/gain)
- Strange or bizarre behavior indicating loss of contact with reality
- Visibly intoxicated or smelling of alcohol or marijuana
- Rapid speech or manic behavior
- Depressed or lethargic mood or functioning
- Observable signs of injury (e.g., facial bruising or cuts)

#### Psychological

- Self-disclosure of personal distress (e.g., family problems, financial difficulties, assault, discrimination, legal difficulties)
- Unusual/disproportionate emotional response to events
- Excessive tearfulness, panic reactions
- Verbal abuse (e.g., taunting, badgering, intimidation)
- Expressions of concern about the student by peers

#### Safety Risk

- Verbal, written, or implied references to suicide, homicide, assault or self-injurious behaviors
- Unprovoked anger or hostility/physical violence (e.g., shoving, grabbing, assaulting, use of weapon)
- Academic assignments dominated by themes of extreme hopelessness, helplessness, isolation, rage, despair, violence, self-injury
- Stalking or harassing
- Communicating threats/disturbing comments via email, correspondence, texting or phone call



## RESPOND

Use these tips to determine the most appropriate response for a distressed student.



### Mandatory Reporting

In addition to referring a student to resources, any sexual or gender-based harassment or assault requires mandated reporting. For questions regarding mandated reporting, please contact the Office of Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response at 814-867-0099.

#### Stay Safe

Call University Police Services (814-863-1111) or 911 if there is an imminent danger to the student, you, or anyone else.

#### Use Active Listening

Make eye contact, give your full attention. Restate what the student says to make sure you understand what is causing the distress and/or what they are asking for help with.

#### Stay Calm

Take a few deep breaths to calm yourself. Use a calm voice when talking and asking questions.

#### Ask Direct Questions

Don't be afraid to directly ask the student if they are having thoughts of harming themselves or others (by asking, you are **not** instilling the thought).

#### Take Your Time

If this is **NOT** an imminently dangerous situation, take time to think through what might be the most helpful next step.

#### Give Concrete Help

Help get them to the next step (e.g., contact the academic advisor with the student to make an appointment; help them call CAPS to schedule an appointment).

#### Seek Consultation

You are not alone. Ask those around you for help. Consult with a colleague, call another office on campus (see resources).



## REFER

Follow the decision tree to determine who to contact when you are concerned about a student who is distressed and/or disruptive. Emergency and campus resources are listed.

Is the student a danger to themselves/others OR does the student need some other assistance?

Yes

The student's conduct is clearly dangerous or threatening, including self-harm or harm to others.

Call 911 or Penn State Police 814-863-1111.

No

I am not concerned for anyone's immediate safety, but the student is having significant academic and/or personal issues and could use some support.

Refer student to campus resources, as appropriate.

The student is with me currently and shows signs of distress, but it is not clear how serious it is. I feel uneasy and/or really concerned about the student.

Call CAPS 8 a.m. -5 p.m. If after 5 p.m. or a weekend call Penn State Crisis Line 1-877-229-6400.

Then, refer student to appropriate campus resource.

I'm Not Sure

The student is not with me currently, but I am concerned about what they said (in an email/call) OR what they did (acted bizarrely, were aggressive/disruptive) OR how they looked (unkempt, unwashed, or as if drugged/drank).

Call Student Care and Advocacy, or report to Behavior Threat Management Team.

## Emergency Resources

**University Police**  
814-863-1111 or 911

**Penn State Crisis Line**  
• 24/7 confidential service  
• Licensed mental health counselors  
• 1-877-229-6400

**Centre Safe (Formerly Women's Resource Center)**  
• Off-campus services for victims of sexual and relationship violence and stalking  
• 24/7 hotline: 814-234-5050  
• 140 W. Nittany Ave., State College

## Urgent Resources

**Behavioral Threat Management Team (BTMT)**  
• Report concerns about any person, including threatening or disruptive behavior  
• Referrals to support services  
• 814-863-2868 • btmt.psu.edu

**Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS)**  
• Crisis, consultation, and counseling services  
• Provides full range of mental health services  
• 814-863-0395 • 501 Student Health Center

### Gender Equity Center

• Confidential support for students affected by sexual and/or relationship violence, harassment/stalking, and bias  
• 814-863-2027 • 204 Boucke Building  
**Student Care and Advocacy Office**  
• Helps students facing adverse events (e.g., housing/financial distress, MH/medical/ family emergencies) & coordinates care across campus  
• 814-863-2020 • 129 Boucke Building  
• Email: studentcare@psu.edu

### Office of Student Conduct (OSC)

• Report possible violations of the Code of Conduct (excludes sexual misconduct—see OSMPR Office)  
• Support for victims of conduct violations  
• 814-863-0342 • 120 Boucke Building  
• Email: studentconduct@psu.edu

## Student Legal Services

- Free legal services (e.g., advice, referrals, & representation) for many types of criminal, civil and immigration matters
- 814-867-4388 • 248 Calder Way, Suite 303

## Additional Resources

### Academic Advising

- [advising.psu.edu/advising-centers](http://advising.psu.edu/advising-centers)

### Directorate of International Student & Scholar Advising (DISSA)

- Support for international students
- Advice on visas and immigration issues
- 814-865-6348 ext. 0 • 410 Boucke Building

### LGBTQA Student Resource Center

- Provides education, information, outreach, and advocacy services on sexual and gender diversity
- 814-863-1248 • 101 Boucke Building
- Email: [lgbtqa@psu.edu](mailto:lgbtqa@psu.edu)

### Multicultural Resource Center (MRC)

- Provides support and educational services for domestic multicultural students
- 814-865-1773 • 220 Grange Building

### Paul Robeson Cultural Center (PRCC)

- Programs and services for all students related to racial and cultural identity
- 814-865-3776 • 21 HUB-Robeson Center

### Residence Life

- 24/7 support regarding on-campus living
- 814-863-1710 (from 8-5; police after hours)
- 201 Johnston Commons or area office

### Office of Sexual Misconduct

#### Prevention and Response (OSMPR)

- Report sexual or gender-based harassment or misconduct (e.g., sexual assault, exploitation, stalking, dating/domestic violence)
- Investigates concerns; provides resources, support, and accommodations
- 814-867-0099 • 222 Boucke Building
- [titleix.psu.edu](http://titleix.psu.edu)

### Student Disability Resources

- Provides reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities
- 814-863-1807 • 116 Boucke Building

### University Health Services

- 24/7 Advice Nurse
- 814-863-4463 • Student Health Center Bldg.

# Managing Distress in Others



- Take a deep breath
  - Relax your body
- Speak in a calm tone
- Offer water or comfortable seat – even on Zoom!
- Listen and keep messages simple and grounding
- Offer student reminders to pause and breathe
- Be present and show active listening
- Know when to ask others for help/support

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# You are not alone

- Remind yourself and student that help is available, if it becomes more than you're comfortable handling you can:
  - Consult with CAPS
  - Call the Penn State Crisis Line
    - 1-877-229-6400
  - Contact Police
  - Contact the Centre County Crisis Center
    - <https://ccrinfo.org/>
- CAPS is under the umbrella of FERPA and follows the ethic of HIPAA
- You can *always* call CAPS and share information. While providers may not be able to share clinical details, we can always discuss our policies/SOP with you



# What does CAPS provide?

- Short-term individual counseling
- Rapid access for urgent concerns
- Ongoing semester-long process groups of all types
- Skills clinics
- Psychiatric Care
- CAPS Chat
- Red Folder
- Consultation



# Accessing CAPS

- (814) 863-0395 to schedule a screening call or to support someone in urgent need
- <https://studentaffairs.psu.edu/counseling>
- <https://redfolder.psu.edu>
- Hours:
- Mon-Friday from 8-5
  - Penn State Crisis Line
    - 1-877-229-6400
  - Crisis Text Line
    - Text LIONS to 741741





**GO TEAM!**



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