

*Teachers may use a variety of strategies for understanding and dealing with difficult behavior.*

## Strategies for Dealing with Difficult Behavior

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We may imagine ourselves to be sage professors with rapt students hanging on our every word; however, the reality of classroom life may be very different. All faculty are confronted with students who engage in behaviors that are disruptive to the educational process. Students may be late for class, leave early, talk inappropriately, or sleep during class. Recently faculty have reported more threatening behaviors, including stalking, intimidation, physical or verbal attacks, and “hijacking” classrooms (Schneider, 1998). If ignored or handled poorly, even a single act of incivility can have a long-term impact on classroom atmosphere. Misbehavior may escalate to intolerable or dangerous levels. Following is a problem-solving strategy for dealing with disruptive student behavior, based on clinical and classroom experience.

The approach uses a series of steps or questions designed to provide perspective on the problem behavior and aid in generating responses. The first questions are concerned with clarifying the problem, identifying critical elements, describing the context in which the behavior occurs, and analyzing your emotional and behavioral responses to the behavior. Next, we review factors that might contribute to disruptive classroom behavior. Once the situation is fully understood, the final steps are to select a response and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy. The steps can be followed like a checklist. The process of checking off the steps or questions can be repeated with new problem situations until the process is second nature.

## Describing the Problem Clearly

Jumping to conclusions about the source and nature of a problem is a recipe for failure. Becoming irritated or highly emotional may lead you to react without understanding the situation. Disruptive student behavior may have nothing to do with the instructor or the class. Instructors tend to personalize the behavior, however, feeling that they did something to cause a student to react. Evaluating behavior before taking action is a skill that takes practice and reflection. You may feel pressure to handle the problem behavior immediately. Taking the time to understand the behavior and to consider various options often results in a more constructive resolution. After an event is past, taking time to evaluate the effectiveness of your response can help to improve your reaction in the next situation.

Ideally you would answer the following questions about a situation before taking action. There will be times, however, when delay is not desirable. For example, if emotional agitation escalates rather than reduces with time and discussion, then your immediate professional intervention may be best.

**What Is the Behavior? What Is the Situation?** Behavior is that which can be directly sensed, such as seen or heard. Often people's "descriptions" of behavior include inferences ("He was aggressive," "She is lazy"). Instead, describe the behavior itself. Say, "He kicked the chair" rather than "He was aggressive" or "She turned in only one of five assignments" rather than "She was lazy." The problem with inference is that it includes the prescription before the facts are known and allows for misinterpretation. In one case we know of, instructors regarded a grossly overweight student as behaviorally disruptive in class. His actual in-class behavior was within normal ranges, but the instructors made false generalizations from his physical appearance. The inverse problem is also common. A very attractive student may be given more leeway than is appropriate, encouraging misbehavior in other students. Examine the labels you give to students, and rephrase them as objective behaviors rather than categories. Objective behaviors can be recorded by an inanimate recording device, such as a video camera. If you have trouble with rephrasing, you might be making an inference.

**When Does It Happen?** Behavior is often time dependent. Time patterns may suggest possible solutions or clues for why the behavior is occurring. For example, lateness, by definition, occurs near the beginning of class and may be due to another instructor's dismissing class late. Disruptive talking may be more common near the end of class. Planning a small group activity in the latter half of class may reduce restlessness. Students who are sitting next to friends are more likely to chat. Using a seating chart may reduce extraneous chatting and help you to know your students by name, further reducing disruption.

**What Is Going on Before, During, and After the Behavior?** Behavior typically occurs because of some environmental signal or because the behavior has been rewarded in the past. When exams or assignments are returned,

students are more likely to speak out, for example. If grading criteria or remarks are vague, there is more room for disaffection. If the instructor bends the rules for one student and others see, then they may demand similar treatment. Is the problem behavior the result of unclear or inappropriate signals?

The consequences that a student experiences during and following a behavior influence her future ways of responding. A student may have received teacher attention in high school for making remarks regardless of their relevance. Now the student frequently mentions irrelevant material. Is the college instructor encouraging this problem behavior to continue with smiles or nods or further questions?

Consequences can also work to eliminate desirable behavior. If students are silent but you want discussion, what is discouraging that behavior? Are you making remarks that could be interpreted as critical of those who speak?

**Who Is Involved or Affected?** A behavior may be annoying to you, but other students may not notice it. Or students may be bothered by something you have not seen. If you are the only one annoyed, reexamine your assumptions about what must and must not happen in a classroom. Perhaps the behavior is not as serious as you believe. Conversely if a considerable portion of the class is bothered and you do not address the need, then you lose some ability to manage the classroom.

Although only the students and instructors are present, relationships and events outside the classroom (for example, the death of a family member, being stalked by an ex-boyfriend, or falling in love) may have an impact on a student's classroom behavior. Be alert to cultural differences in what constitutes a significant relationship. For example, relationships with siblings and roommates can be very important to students. The classroom instructor is not and should not act as a therapist. Delicate questioning may be sufficient to reveal that the source of the problem lies outside your purview (try saying, for example, "I noticed you seem distracted in class. Is everything okay?"). You and the student can then move on to determining how to avoid having the outside issue affect classroom behavior. Often nonjudgmental listening is enough, with a referral to local campus and community resources for counseling if it seems warranted. Ask your local counseling center if it will share its list of referral sources.

**Is the Behavior Harmful to the Student, to You, or to Others?** The ideal is to prevent threatening behavior from ever occurring. It is important to notice the early signs and redirect the energy or address the problem as soon as possible. Such things as clear instructions and appropriate instructor behavior can help avoid many unpleasant situations.

Sometimes a potentially harmful situation develops despite your efforts. If you detect high-risk behaviors such as drinking and driving, promiscuity, or eating disorders, you should be concerned and consider referral. How do you determine danger? No one is very good at it. In general, a history of harmful behavior is the best predictor, coupled with a clear plan to commit harm. There is a range of potentially harmful situations, from a vague threat of suicide to a

student walking into class with a gun. The more concrete and immediate the threat is, the more urgently that expert intervention is needed.

Delaying action is not appropriate when harm is imminent. If a student shares her concern with you, it is typically a sign she wants help. There is a limit, however, to the help you can and should provide. Seek professional advice on how to obtain professional intervention for the student. Ideally the dean of students, mental health counseling personnel, and the campus police work together and have a response for potentially harmful situations. The time to learn if such a plan exists is now, not when you have a student in danger. Take the time to learn whether your institution has a policy for evicting students who are threatening. Record the telephone numbers of appropriate services in an easily accessible location (the bottom of the telephone perhaps). Our university's faculty development center provides a door hanger to new faculty with basic referral sources and telephone numbers. Finally, if a dangerous situation does arise, document your interactions in case there is a need for a record of your involvement. Avoid making inferential statements in the document.

**How Do You Feel About the Behavior?** If you are upset about an incident and fail to acknowledge your emotional reaction, you will be a poor problem solver (see Chapter Two, this volume). Heightened emotion interferes with problem solving and the capacity to generate multiple effective solutions. A teacher who is upset is likely to say or do things that escalate the problem and alienate students and administrators. For example, if you feel that a student's behavior is a personal attack on you (and even if it is), you may be tempted to regain control by getting tough or intimidating the student. Counteraggression will not usually solve a problem, and it often buys into the conscious or subconscious desires of the student. You will end up reacting to the student rather than making a proactive decision. A strong personal reaction calls for a cooling-off period before taking action. If you are tired or burned out, do not deal with the problem until you are emotionally able. It is better to acknowledge the student's anger and suggest that the two of you approach the problem at a specific later time. To avoid the student's suspicion that you are merely putting him off, demonstrate your commitment to that appointment by writing it in your schedule.

Another question you should ask at this point is, "What have I contributed to the disruptive incident?" Instructors typically perceive their behavior to be reasonable and appropriate. The power differential existing between instructors and students, however, suggests that what may appear unimportant to you could be very painful to the student. You will be a better mediator if you examine your behavior from the perspective of the student (see Chapter Eight, this volume). Examining your behavior includes knowing that you cannot always be objective and may need to seek an honest outside opinion, not merely a supporting opinion. Instructors who can recognize a true error and correct it will likely have better student relations.

**What Changes Would Make the Behavior or Situation Acceptable?** Often people try to change a situation without knowing their objectives. They simply want something different. The consequence may be directions

to students that are vague, confusing, and contradictory, resulting in further unsatisfactory behavior. If you are clear about desired behavior, then students can comply more readily. Balance clarity with giving students choices. Students also like to feel in control and tend to take more responsibility when they make the initial choice.

Giving effective directions is difficult to do well. Examples of common but vague instructions include these: “Contribute to class interaction” or “Good.” Effective directions are specific in terms of the target behaviors (for example, try saying, “Offer a question, an opinion with an example, or a response to another student’s statement”). Effective directions are also specific about the amount of behavior (for example, “On discussion days offer at least one comment”) and the direction of the behavior (for example, “The comment should be relevant to the selected topic and substantive”). A student may “misbehave” by always offering questions and never giving opinions; by talking too much or not at all; by bringing up irrelevant material or offering a joke. If you are seeing widespread misbehavior, examine your instructions. It is probably not possible to write instructions that will never be misinterpreted, but you can reduce the odds of misinterpretation.

Schneider (1998) suggests including a section in your syllabus detailing appropriate classroom behavior. One function of this section is to instruct students, and it should be mentioned on the first day of class. Another function is to demonstrate to appeal committees, should a student ever complain, that you have clearly described appropriate behavior to students. A clear syllabus can be protection for you. Grunert (1997) provides suggestions for syllabus development.

**What Did You Do? Did It Work?** Objective evaluation of your efforts is critical for improvement and for effective follow-up. Asking for honest, critical reflection by a party not personally involved can help you generate alternatives. This reflection could be used in future similar circumstances to avoid or resolve problems more effectively. Classroom assessment techniques (Angelo and Cross, 1993) can help you to evaluate the effectiveness of some interventions.

## Understanding the Reasons for Difficult Behavior

Asking why a behavior occurs is not typically as useful as popularly believed. It is usually sufficient to describe the behavior without inference, identify emotional responses, and appreciate the effect of the behavior’s consequences. At times, however, understanding the variety of causes that could contribute to disruptive behavior in the classroom can help you select the most appropriate solution. Although the following list is not exhaustive, it should provide a reasonable sampling of explanations for problem behavior and may help the instructor respond more empathically and, thus, more calmly.

**Physical Causes.** Although the instructor does not necessarily have any control over the following contributions to uncivil behavior, understanding their impact can be helpful.

*Medication, Drugs, and Other Substances.* College students ingest legal, illegal, or tolerated substances that alter their behavior in myriad ways. It is naive to think the substance will be cleared from their systems before attending class. I (Layne) once took students on a tour of a mental hospital, and one student arrived drunk. Students whose behavior has gone to extremes (drowsy, overly active) from their typical behavior may be reacting to or recovering from some substance. Student tolerance for others' behavior may also be reduced by ingested substances.

Unfortunately, recall of learning is state dependent. Students are more likely to recall information when they are in the same state (drunk, for example) as when they learned it (Eich, 1989). (Of course, the overall level of learning is likely to be impaired by some states, so what the student recalls is less than she would remember if she had learned it while sober.)

Do not assume that all substance reactions are due to recreational drugs. Medication schedules may be disrupted due to the normal stresses of academic life. In turn, this could cause behavioral changes such as irritability or loss of ability to focus. These, then, may produce disruptive behavior. A diabetic student may not monitor his diet and appear drunk. Someone with a mild closed-head brain injury may have increasing difficulty focusing when stressed.

*Illnesses.* College students tend to be poor at taking care of their health. Those living in residence halls are exposed to many sources of illness. Feeling ill can make anyone irritable, although confusion and inattention may be more typical reactions. Students may also have life-threatening illnesses and could be coping with very serious health problems such as cancer or AIDS. Some chronic illnesses, such as diabetes, or chronic pain, perhaps from injuries or arthritis, can produce increased irritability. Some illnesses may result in sleep disruption, which can lead a student to fall asleep in class. I (Layne) had an excellent student with narcolepsy who occasionally fell asleep when her medication was not adjusted properly. Such a student may stop coming to class rather than confess a personal medical history to an instructor angry over her "misbehavior."

College students may suffer from any of a variety of mental illnesses, from depression to schizophrenia. In general, persons with mental illness are less dangerous than the rest of the population. Their behavior may be unusual but is not generally purposefully disruptive. They may, in fact, be at greater risk of being overlooked in the classroom because of their inhibitions.

One category of emotional problem does present special problems. Those who have personality disorders are by definition disruptive in their interpersonal relationships. In general students with these pervasive problems are among the most challenging to deal with, particularly because they appear at first to be typical students. With time, however, it becomes apparent that it is beyond the typical instructor's skills to manage their behavior. At that point, it may be advisable to refer a student to professional help. Characteristics of a personality disorder include always being in extreme crisis, interpreting innocent material in a paranoid manner, repeated deceitfulness (often combined

with superficial charm), being inappropriately sexually seductive or interpersonally exploitative, or needing an excessive amount of advice to make decisions (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). You should not make a diagnosis from this list of characteristics, but it might give you an idea of the nature of personality disorder and why professional referral is necessary.

*Fatigue.* It is common in academic life for irritability to increase as exams approach. As time pressures increase, civility is often lost. Students may be working multiple jobs or night shifts in addition to studying. For some, “pulling an all-nighter” is almost a rite of passage, with attendant potential loss of alertness and interpersonal sensitivity. I (Kuhlenschmidt) had a student working close to a full-time job, taking a full course load, applying to graduate schools, and living with an infant son and a troubled nephew.

*Discomfort.* Classrooms that are too hot or cold, seats that are uncomfortable, or a class schedule that prevents a student from eating regularly can cause irritability, which may be expressed toward others. I (Layne) recently had a pregnant student whose severe nausea made it difficult for her to learn in class.

*Vision and Hearing Problems.* Mild visual or hearing disabilities may not be readily apparent to an observer. A student with such a disability may appear disruptive. This issue was made all too apparent to me (Kuhlenschmidt) when a student whom I had confronted for constant whispering volunteered that she was hard of hearing. Instead of punishing the student, I started handing out a printed outline of my class material. Unfortunately, recent generations of students are at particular risk for hearing loss from exposure to loud concerts and headphones. Large classrooms may be especially frustrating for these students. Vision or hearing problems (particularly unidentified ones) of either a student or the instructor increase the possibility of miscommunication and the likelihood that offense will be taken.

**Emotional Challenges.** An instructor has to decide whether to become personally involved when emotional challenges are the cause of uncivil behavior. Being empathetic in the face of distress or anger can defuse some situations. Talking confidentially with colleagues or the counseling center can help the instructor decide when a student needs referral for professional help.

*Loss.* College students have reached an age at which they are considered adult in our culture. As a result they are given increasing responsibility for major life decisions and they may feel isolated when faced with loss. Although some “grandmother deaths” are excuses, students do face some very real losses, including loss of the protection of childhood, loss of childhood home, and loss of loved ones. Grief may be expressed as anger or as high levels of activity as well as guilt, depression, withdrawal, and denial. When persons of any age feel a loss of control, they are likely to try to regain control by any means possible.

On occasion an entire class (including you) may need to deal with a loss (for example, the death of a classmate). You will need to inform the class of the facts surrounding the loss. The group will likely benefit from some class time to absorb the news. Those who might need to leave should be allowed to, but rather than dismissing the class, you should give them an opportunity to discuss

the event and express their feelings. They may wish to memorialize the event or person (for example, by planting a tree), perhaps as a group. Students who wish to do so should be allowed to attend funeral services. Common emotional reactions are shock, numbness, guilt, and anger. There is no “right” way to grieve or a “correct” amount of grief. Grief will generally come in its own time. You may see signs of mourning through the remainder of the semester, including some disruption. Remember that you need to grieve also.

*Maturity.* College students on the cusp of adulthood still have much to learn about taking on adult responsibilities and balancing demands. Under stress, some students are likely to revert to childlike ways of coping, including strong emotional outbursts. Some individuals have a hard time stopping themselves once they begin to get upset. You may find yourself teaching these students how to behave and setting limits for them as if they were much younger.

*Attention Seeking.* Students who are lonely or feel isolated may have learned to obtain attention through disruptive behaviors. You may have some success by carefully attending to this type of student when the student is behaving appropriately and ignoring him when disruptive. As the student learns how to elicit appropriate attention, the disruptive behavior may be reduced.

*Redirected Aggression.* Students may be upset over some event unrelated or peripherally related to the class. A small event in the class (for example, forgetting the textbook) may trigger a disproportionately large response. The teacher is simply an available target for the expression of their emotion. A classroom debate may feed an already existing state of emotional arousal. It is easier for this student to blame a problem on someone else than to take personal responsibility. This is very common with regard to poor performance on course papers and exams and is expressed in phrases such as, “The teacher gave me an F.” You might be tempted to point out that the student earns the grade, but that may not likely be convincing. If the student were emotionally ready to accept responsibility, then he or she would likely have done so without prompting.

Traditional college students face the developmental task of building identity (Erikson, 1968). They are learning the meaning of independence. We have been teaching them to be critical thinkers, and they have learned they can challenge authority. Students may feel safer challenging an instructor—a surrogate parent—than challenging their actual parents. In some sense, the student may be “practicing” on the instructor and on the college environment.

**Environmental Factors.** The instructor has more control over some of these elements, which can contribute to a positive classroom experience.

*Norms for Conduct.* The first day and the syllabus are very important for establishing expectations for appropriate and inappropriate behavior and for demonstrations of the seriousness of the rules. If you do not enforce and do not demonstrate the rules in the syllabus, then the students are less likely to obey them. As a rule of thumb, an instructor can get “easier” but not “harder” and still maintain order as the semester progresses.



*Class Size.* The size of the class will influence the norms established. Large classes may encourage students to act as if they were in a movie theater or watching television. You must be clear in your directions and in deliberate crowd control (by using seating charts, for example). Cooperative learning activities may help reduce the barriers that a large class erects between you and your students.

*Culture.* Varied values and customs concerning the appropriateness of classroom behaviors need to be addressed by the instructor, particularly in larger classrooms where there may be a highly diverse student body. Different cultures have different standards concerning lateness or when it is appropriate to speak, for example. Cultural differences may also occur across economic lines. You may need to be explicit regarding your expectations. If most of the students are going to work in a particular cultural environment following graduation, then it may be easier to justify classroom norms based on that work environment. On the other hand, students planning to return to different environments may place no value on learning “foreign” behaviors. (Chapter Seven, this volume, discusses the challenges of civility in a diverse classroom more fully.)

*Task.* If disruption revolves around an assigned task, examine the task elements. Vague or confusing instructions can lead to frustration, which may be displaced. Although the task may seem simple to the instructor, the student’s ease or difficulty with the task should be the determining factor for simplicity. Global instructions are not fair if the instructor accepts only a narrow range of products. A take-home exam, for example, ought to have minimums and limits on the length and on the resources expected. Expecting too much, given the knowledge and skill level, may also result in frustration. Although a student may express anger toward you, it may be anger at self for being unable to complete a task. You could use this as an opportunity for teaching how to deal constructively with the inevitable frustrations that come in every field.

A larger issue deals with student motivation to complete the task, or even to take the course, particularly if it is a general education course. Some instructors resist using motivational techniques to increase student learning, asserting that students should arrive motivated. Although that may be true to some extent, neglecting motivational dimensions is likely to result in disruptive behavior. Teaching students subject matter usually includes teaching why the subject matter is important in the big picture. Helping students make that discovery for themselves can generate motivation and improve classroom behavior. Try asking students to write a paragraph describing why they think the course might be worthwhile. They could consider factors concerning their chosen major, their social life, or the type of life they want to be living in ten years. Having to generate and write down reasons helps them to make the reasons part of their way of thinking.

*Routine and Stimulation.* In general, too much routine produces boredom, but too little produces chaos. Too much stimulation creates problems for those who ordinarily have difficulty managing their activity level, and too

little stimulation leads others to create stimulation, disrupting the class. You can moderate these tendencies by using some varying instructional methods during a class session and across a semester.

### **Modifying Instructor and Student Behavior**

Students observe you and their classmates. They imitate behavior that generates acceptable responses. If you engage in uncivil behavior toward students, then students are more likely to behave similarly toward you or toward other students. Classmates who are uncivil without some immediate consequence from you become role models to other students, to the detriment of the class.

Conversely, rewarding desirable behavior sets the standard for appropriate behavior and creates a positive environment for learning. Unfortunately, it is easy to punish desired behavior accidentally. A student who offers a comment and is greeted with a criticism or sarcastic statement experiences an aggressive environment. You may not intend to sound or be sarcastic, but the power relationship and your greater knowledge and subsequent quickness to respond may have that effect. Asking instead for comments from other students in the class can help to depersonalize commentary.

Another challenge is to avoid rewarding undesirable behavior. An instructor who gives in to whining or to outbursts of temper is teaching students that uncivil behavior is acceptable. Ignoring clearly unacceptable behavior is also not desirable because students may interpret silence as assent.

If immediate action is necessary, you should ask the student to meet you after class or to step into the hall for a moment. The most desirable resolutions occur when both parties are calm. Delaying discussing the problem for a day may be necessary. When communicating to the student regarding disruptive behavior, use behavioral examples with no inferences. Do not label the person's behavior as "angry" or "out of control." Those are inferences and may be at odds with the student's personal experience. Secondary arguments about the nature of the problem are the result.

Focusing on what was observed is more effective. For example, say, "Three times you started speaking while I had the floor," rather than, "You are rude." State that the behavior is not acceptable and explain what the student needs to do (again a behavior, not an inference). You might say, for example, "I need you to raise your hand and wait for me to acknowledge you before speaking." A related but ineffective inference would be, "I need you to be more polite." "Politeness" is open to interpretation.

The circumstances should help you decide whether to give a reason that the behavior is not acceptable with your request. Giving reasons can lead to arguments over whether those are valid reasons. On the other hand, providing reasons can help achieve compliance. Just because you have stated a preference does not mean the person will necessarily engage in the behavior. Students are human beings, not puppets, and they will exercise freedom of choice. If the disruptive behavior continues, the teacher may need to speak

with the department head or dean of student life about excluding the student from the class. For further help in being assertive, and not aggressive or passive, the book *Your Perfect Right* (Alberti and Emmons, 1990) may be a useful resource.

If a student is very inappropriate and disruptive (for example, shouting or being incoherent), it may be necessary to send a student to the departmental office for assistance. Do not take risks with the class or yourself. Do not meet behind closed doors alone with a student who is increasingly agitated. If the instructor and others remain calm but the student is not calming down, then professional intervention should be sought. Professional help may also be needed if the person seems illogical or the behavior is bizarre. Although this might seem like obvious advice, under the stress of an unusual situation, it is not easy to remember. A colleague reports that when he was a graduate student, a faculty member was found huddled under a desk, muttering and clearly incoherent. The frightened department chairman and our colleague drove the unwilling professor across several state lines to a relative's home. The risks the chairman took were enormous, for him, our graduate student colleague, and the disturbed professor. Periodically reviewing this material and at least mentally rehearsing the steps can help you be prepared to think of effective coping behavior when the occasion arises.

If time permits, it can be desirable to generate several plans for dealing with the problem behavior. When talking with the student, the teacher will have several options, depending on the information the student provides. Multiple plans allow the teacher to feel more in control. Select a realistic coping strategy. Once you have reviewed the various questions and possible explanations for problem behavior, you are ready to develop a list of options for dealing with the behavior. Although this problem-solving approach to disruptive classroom behavior may sound like a smooth progression, in real life the journey toward effective behavior management is a rocky road. You may need to try several approaches during a class. A solution that worked with one student may fail with another. Although a recipe for successful interpersonal relationships would be nice to have, the truth is that there are too many variables in any circumstance to achieve perfection. What you can do is increase the probability that you will find a solution by considering the variables and issues suggested here. Reflection and discussion with experienced instructors can be very important in improving your skill in this area. Interpersonal problem solving is partially a skill to be mastered and partially an art to be cultivated.

Some general characteristics apply across every strategy. Consistency in style is important because it gives students a predictable environment. (Some flexibility is desired to meet unexpected circumstances.) Attending to motivational elements can help your students buy into your course from the beginning, again reducing the chances of disruption. Finally, making an effort to connect with your students helps them to see you as a human being. Connecting also helps you to be attuned to their frustrations and upsets that lead to problem behavior.

Recognizing your limitations is part of that skill and art. Personal characteristics, such as being female, being small, having a soft voice, or being shy, may increase your challenges when dealing with disruptive behavior. Some characteristics cannot be changed, but there are instances of individuals who have demonstrated ability to manage disruptive behavior despite any of these personal characteristics. Perhaps you could identify someone sharing a quality and talk with that person about how he or she has learned to manage. My voice (Kuhlenschmidt) was very soft when I began teaching. I took a class on voice control and what was a regularly cited problem disappeared from my evaluations. Clothing selections and hair styles can undercut your authority or support it. You will be making a statement by how you appear. Whether it is the statement that is helpful to you as a teacher is your choice.

You cannot make students feel a particular emotion, but you can reassure students or attend to their emotional needs. You may not be successful in changing student behavior, but you can change yourself, your behavior, your feelings, and your expectations of coping with uncivil behavior. You can try to alter the environment or at least take action to prevent the problem from occurring again. You can remind everyone of the rules. You can change tasks or your syllabus. Sometimes you can redirect or rechannel student behavior or distract student attention. Most important you can support desirable behavior and help students in distress feel more worthwhile.

## Conclusion

Carefully considering the questions and options in this chapter can help you to become more effective in dealing with disruptive student behavior. When selecting coping strategies, be realistic in what you can accomplish as an instructor. Take a moment, if you have not yet done so, and identify the available referral resources and institutional policies on your campus concerning disruptive behavior. Contact the dean of student life, the counseling center, and the security office. Having these tools readily available will help you effectively manage disruptive behavior in your classroom.

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