

Dealing with Disruptive Behavior in the Classroom

Adapted with permission from Kathleen McKinney,
Illinois State University at <<http://www.cat.ilstu.edu/resources/teachTopics/disBehav.php>>

The best place to start, of course, is to try to prevent disruptive behavior in the first place; something that is only partially under instructor control. Here are some suggestions:

- Include course and behavior norms and expectations for students and instructors in our syllabi.
- Discuss these norms and expectations on the first day of class. Tell students you expect that they will act appropriately, but that you always like to remind students of these norms.
- Serve as role models and exhibit the types of behavior we expect from students.
- Share control and responsibility with students in the class asking them on the first day what the norms for classroom behavior should be, and adding their ideas to your list.
- Draw up a "contract" on classroom behavior and ask students to read and sign it the first week of class (this can also include that they agree to attend class, participate, be prepared...).
- Be extra tough on all matters the first day and week to set the "tone." You can always be flexible and nurturing later.

If disruptive behaviors occur despite your efforts at prevention, you must act in some way and as early/quickly as possible. Otherwise, you can "lose control" of the classroom (not that you want all the control, but you want some), frustrate other students, and create a hostile learning environment.

Mild Interventions

- Walk over to the talkative students and conduct class standing right next to them.
- Stop whatever you are doing and wait (as long as it takes) for students to quiet down while you look at the disruptive students. Then begin again.
- Direct firm, but not derogatory, comments to the disruptive students during class. Ask if they have a comment or question. Ask them to be quiet. Let them know they are being unfair to their peers.
- On a given day when this behavior occurs change what you are doing. Break students in to groups for some work. Call on these and other students to come forward and lead discussion.

Extreme Classroom Interventions

- Spend some time in class discussing the whole situation openly and honestly with all the students. What do they think? Tell them how you feel. Ask how they think things should be handled.
- Note who the disruptive students are and speak to them after class or ask them to come to your office hours. Explain why/how you find them disruptive, find out why they are acting that way, ask them what they would be comfortable doing. Tell them what you want to do.
- Discuss the disruptive behavior in private outside of class with some of the concerned and non-disruptive students. Ask for their assistance in maintaining a positive classroom environment. Flattery goes a long way!
- Inform the student outside of class that their disruptive behavior does not fit your criteria for participation and that their grade will be lowered if it does not stop (this one can be tricky in terms of what your syllabus says and how you handle it).
- Ask the student(s) to leave the classroom for that class period.