

# STUDENTS IN CRISIS OR CONFLICT



## STUDENTS IN CRISIS OR CONFLICT



## INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

Occasionally, faculty and staff may encounter individuals who create a disruption in their classes or work environment. This brochure offers assistance in implementing an intervention process that addresses the disruptive behavior and maintains a successful academic environment. Student Affairs Counselors and the Dean of Students Office staff can help you assess and deal constructively with disruptive individuals.

The UAA Student Code of Conduct specifically identifies standards of behavior students are expected to meet. In addition to the Code, there is a disciplinary process that applies to all UAA students. The Student Code of Conduct, found in the UAA Catalog and the Fact Finder Student Handbook is a valuable tool to assist you in identifying and addressing disruptive behaviors.



UNIVERSITY of ALASKA  
ANCHORAGE

Student Affairs Counselors are available to help you with disruptive students. We feel that the sooner such behaviors are addressed, the greater the likelihood that the solution will be a "win-win" for the student, the faculty member, and the University.

### EMERGENCY CONTACT NUMBER

**University Police Department**  
786-1120 V/TTY 24 hour availability

### SUPPORT SERVICES

Please call any of the following offices for assistance:

**Student Affairs Counselors**  
786-6158 V/TTY

**Dean of Students Office**  
786-1214 V/TTY

*The Dean of Students may be contacted outside of these hours through the University Police in emergency situations.*

## **(Q) What should I do if I have concerns about a student?**

**(A)** You will find important information in this guide. What's most important to remember is that trained colleagues are standing by to help. The campus police will respond to threats of violence or any other violations of law.

Students must be treated fairly and responsibly – just as administrators and faculty members would expect if they were the subject of comparable inquiry – but the campus is not powerless or reluctant to act decisively when threats arise. Our overall process in this regard is managed by the Dean of Students Office. You may reach the office by calling 786-1214. In all emergencies, call campus police first at 786-1120.

## **(Q) How can I identify potentially violent students?**

**(A)** This is not a task to be undertaken alone. Expertise is available on campus to help. See the contact information below and in our first answer.

It's important to resist the temptation to try to "profile" potentially violent students based on media reports of past shootings. The 2003 National Research Council [NRC] report *Deadly Lessons: Understanding Lethal School Violence* (a project undertaken by the councils of the National Academy of Sciences, the National Academy of Engineering, and the Institute of Medicine) contains the following guidance:

One widely discussed preventative idea is to develop methods to identify likely offenders in instances of lethal school violence of school rampages . . . The difficulty is that . . . the offenders are not that unusual; they look like their classmates at school.

This has been an important finding of all those who have sought to investigate these shootings. Most important are the findings of the United States Secret Service, which concluded:

There is no accurate or useful profile of "the school shooter" (Emphasis supplied) . . .

- Attacker ages ranged from 11-21.
- They came from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds.
- They came from a range of family situations, from intact families with numerous ties to the community to foster homes with histories of neglect.
- The academic performance ranged from excellent to failing.
- They had a range of friendship patterns from socially isolated to popular.
- Their behavioral histories varied, from having no observed behavioral problems to multiple behaviors warranting reprimand and/or discipline.
- Few attackers showed any marked change in academic performance, friendship status, interest in school, or disciplinary problems prior to their attack.

A more promising approach is "threat assessment," based on analysis of observable behavior compiled from multiple sources and reviewed by a trained assessment team. The report "Threat Assessment in Schools: A Guide to Managing Threatening Situations and to Creating Safe School Climates" (developed by the U.S. Secret Services and Department of Education in 2002) contains the following overview: Students and adults who know the student who is the subject of the assessment inquiry should be asked about communications or other behaviors that may indicate the student of concern's ideas or intent. The focus of these interviews should be factual:

- What was said? To whom?
- What was written? To whom?
- What was done?
- When and where did this occur?
- Who else observed this behavior?
- Did the student say why he or she acted as they did?

Bystanders, observers, and other people who were there when the student engaged in threatening behaviors or made threatening statements should be queried about whether any of these behaviors or statements concerned or worried them. These individuals should be asked if they have become increasingly concerned about the student's behavior or state of mind.

However, individuals interviewed generally should not be asked to characterize the student or interpret meanings of communications that the student may have made. Statements such as "I think he's really dangerous" or "he said it with a smile, so I know that he must be joking" may not be accurate characterizations of the student's intent, and therefore are unlikely to be useful to the assessment team.

Proper assessment is a team effort requiring expertise from experienced professionals, including law enforcement officers. Assessment on our campus is done through the Dean of Students Office (786-1214) and through the University Police Department (786-1120). Faculty members should contact either office whenever they believe a student may pose a risk of violence to self or others. Contact the campus police immediately in an emergency 786-1120.

## **(Q) Are more students coming to college with mental disorders?**

**(A)** Probably yes. Caution is required because increases in counseling center visits and use of psychotropic medications may mean contemporary students are more willing to seek help for mental illness. In any event, college health center directors have been calling particular attention to larger numbers of students reporting the characteristics of clinical depression. A 2004 American College Health Association study found that forty-five percent of the students surveyed "felt so depressed" that it was "difficult to function." Nearly 1 in 10 students reported that such feelings occurred "9 or more times" in the past school year. Likewise, about 10% of college students report they "seriously considered suicide" and about 1.4% reported they had attempted suicide (Morton Silverman, Clinical Associate Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Chicago; 2006 presentation at the University of Vermont Conference on Legal Issues in Higher Education).

## **Is there an association between mental illness and violence?**

**(A)** Research shows some association between severe mental illness and violence, especially when mental illness is accompanied by substance abuse. The 1994 American Psychiatric Association "Fact Sheet on Violence and Mental Illness" contains the following observation:

People often fear what they do not understand, and for many of us, mental illnesses fall into that category. This fear . . . [often] stems from the common misconception that the term 'mental illness' is a diagnosis, and that all mental illnesses thus have similar symptoms, making all people who suffer with them equally suspect and dangerous . . . Recent research has shown that the vast majority of people who are violent do not suffer from mental illnesses. However, there is a certain small subgroup of people with severe and persistent mental illnesses who are at risk of becoming violent . . . (emphasis supplied).

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services document "Understanding Mental Illness" (April 20, 2007) contains the observation that:

"compared with the risk associated with the combination of male gender, young age, and lower socioeconomic status, the risk violence presented by mental disorder is modest." Such a "modest" correlation won't be sufficient to draw conclusions about the future behavior of any particular student. Again, individualized

assessment will be imperative, focusing on a specific diagnosis, demonstrable behavior, compliance in taking prescribed medications, patterns of substance abuse, and any recent traumatic events or stresses, among other factors.

### **(Q) How dangerous is college teaching?**

**(A)** A 2001 Bureau of Justice Statistics [BJS] report (the latest in series available) on "Violence in the Workplace" (data for 1993 through 1999 from the National Crime Victimization Survey) shows that employees of colleges and universities have a violent crime victimization rate of 1.6 per 1,000, compared to 16.2 for physicians; 20 for retail sales workers; 54.2 for junior high teachers; 68.2 for mental health professionals; and 260.8 for police officers. The BJS report states that "among the occupational groups examined . . . college teachers were victimized the least."

### **(Q) How frequent are homicides and other violent crimes on campus?**

**(A)** According to data from the U.S. Department of Education, the Census Bureau, and the FBI, "the murder rate on college campuses was 0.28 per 100,000 people, compared with 5.5 per 100,000 nationally" (U.S. News and World Report April 30, p. 59). The magnitude of Virginia Tech shootings (32 people killed) is highlighted by the fact that the total number of murders on American college campuses (approximately 4,200 institutions enrolling 16 million students) "fluctuated between 9 and 24" [a year] between 1997 and 2004" (Virginia Youth Violence Project, School of Education, University of Virginia, 2007).

In terms of other types of violent crime (robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault against students), a 2005 U.S. Department of Justice study by Katrina Baum and Patsy Klaus (Statisticians for the Bureau of Justice Statistics) reported that:

For the period 1995 to 2002, college students ages 18 to 24 experienced violence at average annual rates lower than those for nonstudents in the same age group (61 per 1,000 students versus 75 per 1,000 nonstudents). Except for rape/sexual assault, average annual rates were lower for students than for nonstudents for each type of violent crime measured . . . Rates of rape/sexual assault for the two groups did not differ statistically.

Between 1995 and 2002 rates of both overall and serious violence declined for college students and nonstudents. The violent crime rate for college students declined 54% (41 versus 88 per 1,000) and for nonstudents declined 45% (102 versus 56 per 1,000).

Among the "characteristics of violent victimizations of college students" Baum and Klaus reported that "93% of crimes occurred off campus, of which 72% occurred at night".

### **(Q) School shootings are often suicides. How widespread is suicide among college students?**

**(A)** Multiple studies have found that college students commit suicide at half the rate of their nonstudent peers. One of the most cited surveys "found an overall student suicide rate of 7.5 per 100,000, compared to the national average of 15 per 100,000 in a sample matched for age, race and gender" (Silverman, et al., 1997 "The Big Ten Student Suicide Study: a 10-year study of suicides on Midwestern university campuses," *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior* 27[3]:285-303).

Generally, the national suicide rate for teenagers and young adults has been declining – after an extraordinary increase since the 1950s. More baseline studies pertaining to college students are needed, but experts believe the suicide rate in that group has been declined as well.

### **(Q) Shouldn't we routinely remove depressed students, especially if they reported suicidal ideation?**

**(A)** No. Routine dismissal wouldn't make sense. A 2006 article by Paul S. Appelbaum, Professor and Director of the Division of Psychiatry, Law, and Ethics at the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons (and a past President of the American Psychiatric Association) highlights some of the particular issues involved: No matter how uncommon completed suicides are among college students, surveys suggest that suicidal ideation and attempts are remarkably prevalent. Two large scale studies generated nearly identical findings. Roughly 10 percent of college student respondents indicated that they had thought about suicide in the past year, and 1.5 percent admitted to having made a suicide attempt. Combining data from the available studies suggests that the odds that a student with suicidal ideation will actually commit suicide are 1,000 to 1. Thus policies that impose restrictions on students who manifest suicidal ideation will sweep in 999 students who would not commit suicide for every student who will end his or her life – with no guarantee that the intervention will actually reduce the risk of suicide in this vulnerable group. And even if such restrictions were limited to students who actually attempt suicide, the odds are around 200 to 1 against the school's having acted to prevent a suicidal outcome". (Psychiatric Services: "Depressed? Get Out!" July 2006, vol. 57, No. 7, 914-916)

Aside from unjustified removal of thousands of individuals – including some of our best and most creative students – routine dismissals for reported depression or suicidal ideation would also discourage students from seeking professional help. Good policy, good practice, and adherence to state and federal laws protecting people with disabilities require professional individualized assessment and a fair procedure before students or employees can be removed on the grounds that they have a mental disability that poses a "direct threat" to themselves or others.

### **(Q) Should I talk with a student about my concerns?**

**(A)** Exercise judgment on case by case basis, preferably after consultation with colleagues, including Student Affairs Counselors or Dean of Students Office staff.

An effort at conversation is generally advisable. Students are often oblivious to the impressions they make. Careful listening and courteous dialogue – perhaps with participation by a department chair or student conduct administrator – will often resolve the problem. At a minimum, the discussion may prove valuable in any subsequent threat assessment process.

Please do not give assurances of confidentiality. A student who appears to pose a threat to self or others needs to be referred for help and supervision. College teachers should not abrogate their traditional role as guides and mentors, but they must not assume the responsibilities of therapists or police officers.

One danger in the aftermath of the Virginia Tech shootings would be a climate of fear and distance between teachers and students, especially students who seem odd, eccentric, or detached. Research on violence prevention suggests schools and colleges need more cross-generational contact, not less. The NRC report stated that:

In the course of our interviews with adolescents, we are reminded once again of how 'adolescent society,' as James S. Coleman famously dubbed it 40 years ago, continues to be insulated from the adults who surround it . . . The insularity of adolescent society serves to magnify slights and reinforce social hierarchies; correspondingly, it is only through exchange with trusted adults that teens can reach the longer-term view that can come with maturity. . .

We could not put it better than the words of a beloved long-term teacher [at one of the schools studied]: 'The only real way of preventing [school violence] is to get into their heads and their hearts . . .'

Getting into the "heads and hearts" of students goes beyond individual conversations. It entails fostering a community of engagement, defined not by codes of silence or barriers of indifference, but by an active sense of mutual responsibility. This critical endeavor depends upon the faculty. Now more than ever faculty members must demonstrate skills in reaching outward, not retreating inward.

*"Hear the case before you decide it."*

-Alfred P. Murrah, (Chief Judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit and Director of the Federal Judicial Center)

## Recommended steps for faculty and staff

As soon as it is evident that a student's behavior is disruptive, address it with the student. Be specific in describing the disruptive behavior and offer alternative methods of dealing with the cause of the behavior. If the student understands your concerns and demonstrates an appropriate change of behavior, acknowledge it. It is usually enough to call the student's attention to the disruptive behavior. Document the behavior and the subsequent meeting for your own records.

If the disruptive behavior continues, you may wish to consult with a colleague, supervisor, department chair, Student Affairs Counselor, or the Dean of Students Office. Repeated disruptive behavior must be met with clear limit setting, consequences for continued disruptive behavior and a more formalized approach. You may also request formal intervention from the Dean of Students Office.

Student Affairs counselors are prepared to assist you in successfully dealing with your disruptive individual. Counselors can assist with:

- **Defining the disruptive behavior.**
- **Designing strategies to use during class time to set behavior limits to facilitate the desired change.**
- **Determining when the time is right for a student/teacher conference to address the behavioral issue.**
- **Mediating the student/teacher conference.**
- **Determining how to confront the student and still maintain a professional posture.**
- **Determining how and when to remove a student from class until the disruptive behavior is addressed by the Dean of Students Office.**

## Emergency Techniques

*If a behavior has become so disruptive that you are unable to continue what you are doing:*

**Call University Police, at 786-1120, for immediate assistance;**

**Take a five to ten minute break in class and request privately that the student not return to class until both of you have met with a supervisor, your department chair, or a counselor;**

**Request disciplinary action by the Dean of Students Office.**

*The Q&A portion of this guide originally appeared in the ASJA Law and Policy Report, No. 254, on May 11, 2007. It has been edited and personalized for UAA and is reprinted with permission of the Association for Student Judicial Affairs.*



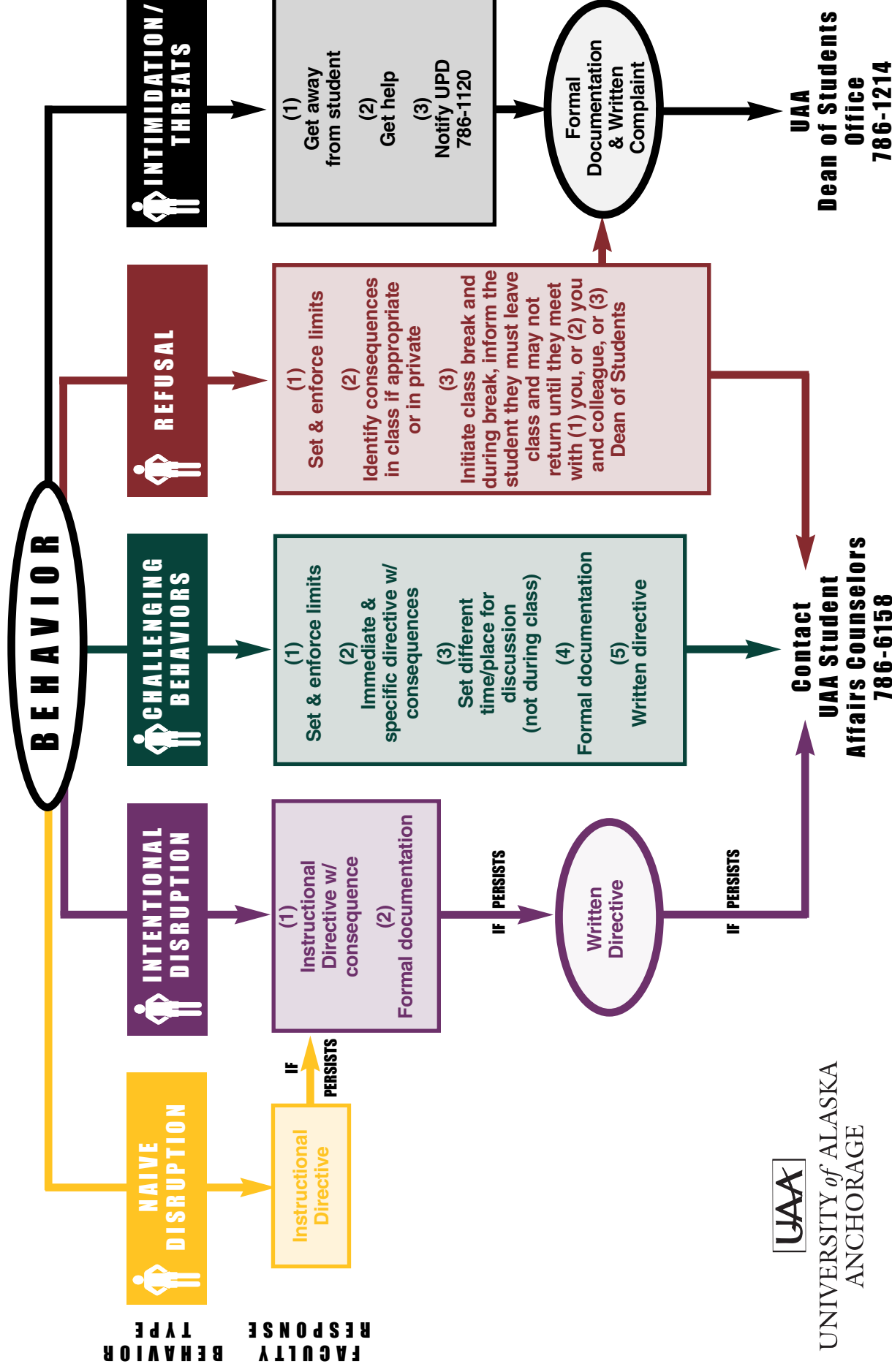
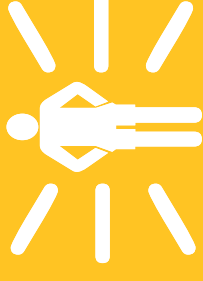
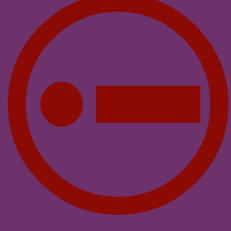
UNIVERSITY of ALASKA  
ANCHORAGE

Dean of Students Office  
3211 Providence Drive, SU 204  
Anchorage, Alaska 99508  
(907) 786-1214

[aydos@uaa.alaska.edu](mailto:aydos@uaa.alaska.edu)

<http://www.uaa.alaska.edu/studentdevelopment>

# STUDENT BEHAVIOR CLASSIFICATION





<div>BEHAVIOR EXAMPLE</div> <div>NAIVE DISRUPTION</div> <div>Talking, passing notes, distracting behaviors (i.e., fidgeting, muttering to self/neighbor, noise making)</div>	<div>FACULTY RESPONSE</div> <div>INSTRUCTIONAL DIRECTIVE</div> <div>Clear, concise, with expectation for termination of the behavior. Constructive, non-bellitting comments.</div>	<div>EXAMPLE</div> <div>"It is time to stop ____."</div> <div>"We need to move on now."</div> <div>"That is inappropriate."</div> <div>"That is disruptive."</div>
<div>BEHAVIOR EXAMPLE</div> <div>INTENTIONAL DISRUPTION</div> <div>Continuing behavior despite directives, persistent questions, arguing, attention getting comments, derisive comments</div>	<div>FACULTY RESPONSE</div> <div>ISSUE DIRECTIVE</div> <div>State consequences, verbal or written if necessary to re-issue directive, begin setting limits.</div> <div>MEET WITH STUDENT</div> <div>during break, after class, or office hours</div> <div>DOCUMENT</div> <div>note behavior, conversations, directives, dates/times</div>	<div>EXAMPLE</div> <div>"Your line of questioning is off-topic. Please refrain from asking further questions."</div> <div>"Your side comments are disruptive. I expect you to listen to the discussion and not be disruptive."</div> <div>"Please speak with me after class."</div> <div>"I know you want to do the right thing."</div>
<div>BEHAVIOR EXAMPLE</div> <div>CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS</div> <div>Questioning your position, a test, "unreasonable" expectations, your credentials, grading policy</div>	<div>FACULTY RESPONSE</div> <div>SET &amp; ENFORCE LIMITS</div> <div>stay on topic, don't get pulled into the fray, give immediate &amp; specific directive with consequences</div> <div>MEET WITH STUDENT</div> <div>during break, after class, or office hours</div> <div>DOCUMENT</div> <div>note behavior, conversations, directives, dates/times</div> <div>GET HELP</div> <div>colleague, department chair, Dean, Student Affairs Counselor, Dean of Students Office</div>	<div>EXAMPLE</div> <div>"Your line of questioning is off-topic. Please refrain from asking further questions."</div> <div>"Your side comments are disruptive. I expect you to listen to the discussion and not be disruptive."</div> <div>"Please speak with me after class."</div> <div>"I know you want to do the right thing."</div>
<div>BEHAVIOR EXAMPLE</div> <div>REFUSAL</div> <div>Student will not stop the behavior, student unwilling/unable to follow directive, student says "NO"</div>	<div>FACULTY RESPONSE</div> <div>SET &amp; ENFORCE LIMITS</div> <div>immediate &amp; specific directive with consequences</div> <div>INITIATE CLASS BREAK</div> <div>during break, inform the student they must leave class and may not return until they meet with:</div> <div>(1) you, or</div> <div>(2) you and colleague, or</div> <div>(3) Student Affairs Counselor, or</div> <div>(4) Dean of Students</div> <div>DOCUMENT</div> <div>After the situation is under control, document and notify the Dean of Students Office of the incident.</div>	<div>EXAMPLE</div> <div>"Doing ____ during class is continuing to be disruptive. I asked you to stop ____ and you refused. Therefore, you may not attend this class anymore until you meet with the Dean of Students and receive permission."</div>
<div>BEHAVIOR EXAMPLE</div> <div>INTIMIDATION AND/OR THREATS</div> <div>"You best watch out, I know what your car looks like."</div> <div>"If you know what is best for you, you will give me an 'A.'"</div>	<div>GET HELP</div> <div>get away from student, get another faculty or staff person to escort you to safety</div> <div>NOTIFY UNIVERSITY POLICE</div> <div>786-1120</div>	<div>FACULTY RESPONSE</div> <div>DOCUMENT</div> <div>After the situation is under control, document and notify the Dean of Students Office of the incident.</div>
<div>HINTS</div> <div>- look for behavior reinforcements (i.e., friends), and precipitating factors.</div> <div>- frame the behavior in terms of the Student Code of Conduct</div> <div>- cite the Student Code of Conduct in course syllabus</div> <div>- make notes of events, behaviors, directives</div>		
<div>HINTS</div> <div>- use Student Code of Conduct as reference</div> <div>- identify behavior, impact on class/lecture/students</div> <div>- state consequences, referral to Dean's office temporary restriction from attending class</div> <div>- student/professor conference with possible third person, meeting in open space, notify colleague of meeting</div> <div>- student's reaction will tell you a lot!</div>		
<div>HINTS</div> <div>- watch for when the content of the challenge changes from ____, to you!</div> <div>- have a plan in mind before you need one</div> <div>- know where the telephones are near your classroom</div> <div>- know the telephone number for University Police, 786-1120</div>		
<div>UAA</div> <div>UNIVERSITY of ALASKA</div> <div>ANCHORAGE</div> <div>© 2007/08 UAA Dean of Students Office</div>		