

Responding to Disruptive, Threatening or Violent Behavior

What is Disruptive, Threatening or Violent Behavior?

Disruptive behavior disturbs, interferes with or prevents normal work functions or activities. Examples: Yelling, using profanity, waving arms or fists, verbally abusing others and refusing reasonable requests for identification.

Threatening behavior includes physical actions short of actual contact/injury such as moving closer aggressively, general, oral or written threats to people or property, (“You better watch your back” or “I’ll get you”) as well as implicit threats (“You’ll be sorry” or “This isn’t over”).

Violent behavior includes any physical assault, with or without weapons; behavior that a reasonable person would interpret as being potentially violent (e.g. throwing things, pounding on a desk or door, or destroying property) or specific threats to inflict physical harm (e.g. a threat to shoot a named individual).

Indicators of Problem Behavior

If you observe a **pattern** or **change** in behaviors, attitudes or appearance that cause you concern, contact Student Health or Counseling immediately for a consultation.

Behavior:

- Upset over recent events(s) (work or personal crisis)
- Recently has withdrawn from normal activities, family, friends, co-workers
- Intimidating, verbally abusive, harasses or mistreats others
- Challenges/resists authority
- Blames others for problems in life or work; suspicious, holds grudges
- Use/abuse of drugs and/or alcohol
- Unwelcomed obsessive romantic attention
- Stalking
- Makes threatening references to other incidents of violence
- Makes threats to harm self, others or property
- Weapons – has or is fascinated with weapons
- Has a known history of violence
- Change in appearance (disheveled, sudden weight loss/gain)

Attitude:

- Is isolated or a loner
- Morally superior, self-righteous
- Feels entitled to special rights and that rules don’t apply to him/her
- Feels wronged, humiliated, degraded; wants revenge
- Believes to have no choices or options for action except violence

Responding to disruptive, threatening or violent behavior

STEP 1: General response to disruptive behavior (no threats or weapons)

- **Respond quietly and calmly.** Try to defuse the situation.
- **Do not take the behavior personally.** Usually, the behavior has little to do with you, but you are used as a target in the situation
- **Ask questions.** Respectful concern and interest may demonstrate that aggression is not necessary
- **Consider offering an apology.** Even if you've done nothing wrong, an apology may calm the individual and encourage cooperation. *"I'm sorry that happened. What can we do now that will solve the problem?"*
- **Summarize what you hear the individual saying.** Make sure you are communicating clearly. In a crisis, a person feels humiliated and wants respect and attention. Your summary of the individual's concerns reflects your attention. **Focus on areas of agreement to help resolve the concern.**
- If this approach does not stop the disruption, assess whether the individual seems dangerous. If, in your best judgment, he/she is upset but not a threat, set limits and seek assistance as necessary.

STEP 2A: Step 1 response ineffective, individual **DOES NOT** seem dangerous

- **Calmly and firmly set limits.** *"Please lower your voice. There will be no disruptions in this office." "Please be patient so that I can understand what you need and try to help you."*
- **Ask the individual to stop the behavior** and warn that official action may be taken. *"Disruption is subject to District action. Stop or you may be reported."*
- **If the disruption continues** despite a warning, tell the individual that he/she may be disciplined or prosecuted, state that the discussion is over, and direct them to leave the office. *"Please leave now. If you do not leave, I will call the Police."*
- **If the individual refuses to leave** after being directed to do so, state that this refusal is also a violation subject to discipline, exclusion from work or arrest.

STEP 2B: Step 1 response ineffective and the individual **SEEMS DANGEROUS**

- **If possible, find a quiet, safe place to talk** but do not isolate yourself with an individual you believe may be dangerous. Maintain a safe distance, do not turn your back and stay seated if possible. Leave the door open or open a closed door and sit near the door. Keep furniture between the two of you. Be sure a co-worker is near to help if needed.
- **Use a calm, non-confrontational approach** to defuse the situation. Indicate your desire to listen and understand the problem. Allow the person to describe the problem. *"I can see you are really upset."*
- **NEVER touch the individual yourself** to try to remove him/her from the area.
- Even a gentle push or holding the person's arm may be interpreted as an assault by an agitated individual who may respond with violence toward you or file a lawsuit later.

- **Set limits to indicate the behavior needed to deal with the concern.** *“You certainly have the right to be angry but breaking things is not OK.” “Please lower your voice.” “Please stop shouting (or using profanity) or I’ll have to ask you to leave.”*
- **Signal for assistance.** The individual may be antagonized if you call for assistance so use a prearranged ‘distress’ signal to have another staff member check on you to determine how you are.
- **If you need help,** the co-worker should alert your supervisor and/or the police. Use a phone out of sight/hearing of the individual.
- Do not mention discipline or the police if you fear an angry or violent response.
- **If the situation escalates,** find a way to excuse yourself, leave the room/area and get help. *“You’ve raised some tough questions. I’ll consult my supervisor to see what we can do.”*

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY

- **Do not attempt to intervene physically** or deal with the situation yourself. It is critical that police take charge of any incident that can or does involve physical harm.
- **Get yourself and others to safety as quickly as possible.**
- **If possible, keep a line open to police until they arrive.** The more information the police receive, the more likely they can bring a potentially violent situation to a safe conclusion.

Active Shooter Defense

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5VcSwejU2D0>

If you hear the shots or see the shooter, and feel you can run away, safely, do it. Remember – there could be more than one shooter, so assess the situation before making your decision. If you are not sure where the shooter actually is, lockdown.

If you can run away, safely, do it.

- Run in zig-zag pattern – not a straight line. You will be harder to shoot.
- Get natural barriers like walls, large signs, counters, doors, poles, vehicles, trees and bushes between you and the shooter as you run. If you are running through a wide open area, you can hide behind them as you time your escape.
- Warn others to get away as you go.
- Do not signal an evacuation by pulling the fire alarm; this may cause those that are in secure places to exit into the view of the gunmen.
- If you are running toward police, keep your hands up and open.

IN A CLASSROOM OR OFFICE (for lockdown)

- If the door has a lock use it. If the door opens in, barricade it closed with heavy furniture or any items located in the area. You may also use something to wedge under the door to help barricade it.
- If the door opens out, tie a belt or other items to the door and then to a heavy piece of furniture that cannot be pulled through the doorway. This will help to keep the door from being opened from the hallway. Again cover the door with furniture or other items in the area.
- If the door has a window, cover it if you can.

- Depending on the gunman's location, consideration may also be made to exit through ground floor window openings. **Have someone watch** as you get as many people out of the windows as calmly and as quietly as possible.
- If the windows don't open, or you can't break them, or you are not on a ground floor, get out of sight from the door, stay away from windows, take cover behind or under furniture, stay low, keep quiet, and act as if no one is in the room. Silence your cell phone.
- Do not answer the door. Do not unlock the door until you get an official message through the classroom emergency phones or other means.

Possible defense tactics if the shooter enters your area

- Run
- Hide (Lockdown)
- Play dead
- Distract and attack
 - If fighting is your only option, fight in a group (swarm) and use any available items to attack or secure the shooter. Again this is NOT A RECOMMENDATION to attack the shooter but rather a choice to fight when there is only one other option.
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2tleRUbRHw>

Last Resort Defensive Measures

Quote from Tim Larkin, TargetFocusTraining.com

"Let's remove reason and morality from the equation and imagine **YOU** are the active shooter.

What do you want? *An unrestricted field of fire in a target-rich environment. To be the only one dictating the tempo so you can maintain all of the above.*

Like a shark cleaving through a school of fish, you want everyone responding to what you do in such a way as to reinforce your operational dominance. In other words, you want the crowd to surge away from you.

When they run they move into your work area and provide a target better than the broad side of a barn... the backside of a crowd. They clear out space in front of you so you are free to fire at will. And best of all, they leave you alone to do what you came here for, and in spades.

This understanding—as reprehensible as it is to dwell on it—is valuable because **it tells us what we really need to do in these situations: we must, as a group, swarm the shooter.**

We have to tackle him, weigh him down with numbers, immobilize him with our sheer mass. This is the only way to limit his access to victims, interrupt his ability to operate and strip him of control over the engagement—essentially reversing the roles and **forcing him to worry about defending himself from a panicked mob.**

If you're the shooter, you want distance, not people closing, close or right next to you, spoiling your aim, restricting your field of fire, imposing a time-limit on how long you're operational. If you're the shooter, you want time and space within which to work.

If you're in the crowd, you want to restrict, constrict, and eliminate that time and space.

While it looks great on paper, it should be understood that **the swarm tactic won't reduce casualties to zero**. But if it's the difference between three or 13 dead then the cold equations say it's better that we lose a few instead of many. It certainly can't be any worse than what we currently have (and experienced once again in Colorado)... **the herd-tactic of hoping he has so many targets you'll be the lucky one who's overlooked**.

Swarming an active shooter isn't an easy thing, compounded by the fear that you'll be the only one who goes for it. It's only going to work if you know at least some of the people around you are going to pile in with you, that it's not just you vs. the shooter, but the entire crowd."

Brainstorming Ideas:

Weapons in the classroom that could injure or incapacitate.

Methods of creating distractions.

Strategies to establish an advantage.

Authority:

1994 California Division of Occupational Safety and Health issued Guidelines on Workplace Security, which requires employers to include, as part of their safety program, measures designed to make the workplace more secure from acts of violence.

References:

Assisting the Emotionally Distressed Student, 2010-2011 West Valley College. Developed by Student Health Services