

# Dealing with Difficult Student Behaviors-Guide for Peer Mentors

## Dealing with Difficult Student Behaviors: A Guide for Peer Mentors

Each student you work with will have a unique personality. Expect that you may have to deal with some challenging behaviors, especially when interacting with students in a group setting. Some of the most common issues are listed below, with some guidelines for managing:

### 1. **Rambling** -- wandering around and off the subject. POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- Refocus attention by restating relevant point.
- Direct questions to group that is back on the subject
- Ask how topic relates to current topic being discussed.
- Say: "Would you summarize your main point please?" or "Are you asking...?"

### 2. **Shyness or Silence** -- lack of participation POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- Give strong positive reinforcement for any contribution: "Thanks for sharing; Good point..."
- Involve by directly asking him/her a question: "What do you think...."
- Make appropriate, non-threatening eye contact.

### 3. **Excessive Talkativeness** -- knowing everything, manipulation POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- Acknowledge comments made.
- Give limited time to express viewpoint or feelings, and then move on.
- Give the person individual attention during breaks.
- Say: "That's an interesting point. Now let's see what other people think."

### 4. **Sharpshooting** -- trying to shoot you down or trip you up POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- Admit that you do not know the answer and redirect the question the group or the individual who asked it.
- Acknowledge that this is a joint learning experience: "I can't think of what the answer could be -- where do you all think we could find the answer on campus?"
- Ignore the behavior in public and bring it up privately during a break.

### 5. **Heckling/Arguing** -- disagreeing with everything you say; making personal attacks POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- Recognize participant's feelings and move on.
- Acknowledge positive points.
- Say: "I appreciate your comments, but I'd like to hear from others," or "It looks like we disagree."

### 6. **Grandstanding** -- getting caught up in one's own agenda or thoughts to the detriment of other learners POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- "Can you restate that as a question?"
- "We'd like to hear more about that if there is time after the presentation."

### 7. **Overt Hostility/Resistance** -- angry, belligerent, combative behavior POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- Remain calm and polite. Keep your temper in check.
- Don't disagree, but build on or around what has been said.
- Always allow him or her a way to gracefully retreat from the confrontation.
- Say: "You seem really angry. Does anyone else feel this way?" Solicit peer pressure.
- Allow individual to solve the problem being addressed. He or she may not be able to offer solutions and will sometimes undermine his or her own position.
- Talk to him or her privately during a break.

### 8. **Gripping** -- maybe legitimate complaining POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- Validate his/her point.
- Indicate you'll discuss the problem with the participant privately.
- Indicate time pressure: "We won't be able to solve that problem immediately, but let's talk during our next break"

**9. Side Conversations** -- may be related to subject or personal. Distracts group members and you  
POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- Don't embarrass talkers.
- Ask their opinion on topic being discussed.
- Ask talkers if they would like to share their ideas.
- Casually move toward those talking.
- Make eye contact with them.
- Comment on the group (but don't look at them "one-at-a-time"): "I want to make sure that everyone is paying attention while we cover something really important".
- Standing near the talkers, ask a near-by participant a question so that the new discussion is near the talkers.
- As a last resort, stop and wait.

*Adapted from: California Nurses Association, AIDS Train the Trainer Program for Health Care Providers (1988)*