

Confrontation

Confrontation Definition: The process of describing another person's behavior so that the person can see the consequences of the behavior and possibly change.

Goals of Confrontation:

Short Term Goals:

- ❖ To gain all the information necessary to deal with the immediate situation and/or its consequences.
- ❖ To alleviate the apparent problem, and prevent it from becoming more troublesome.

Long-term Goals:

- ❖ **Student Development:** Students become focused on others as well as self, learns how to make more responsible decisions, clarifies values, and forms a positive self-identity.
- ❖ **Community Development:** Group norms are supported; community becomes self-regulated; caring and respect are evident; and positive community identity and pride is developed.

General Confrontation Steps

- ❖ **Identify yourself: State your name and position.** Let the individual know you have some authority to approach them. Be polite and assertive. "I'm Jacinda, the RA."
- ❖ **Advise the individual of the alleged violation.** Explain why it is that you have approached them. "It is after quiet hours and your music can be heard from down the hall."
- ❖ **Request that the individual identify him/herself.** You have a right to know who the individual is and why they are in your building. Express this right if necessary. "What is your name? Please show me your ID."
- ❖ **Explain the solution to the immediate problem.** Describe the individual's alternatives as well as the consequences of their behavior. "Please turn down your music to a level that cannot be heard outside your closed door. Also, you should know that this incident will be documented. If you continue to play loud music after Quiet Hours, you will be documented again."

Common Responses of Confronted Individuals

Denial: Aggressive, hostile, somewhat threatening; challenges you “to legally prove” their responsibility.

Approach: Attempt to bring the issue to a level of common understanding using the information that you have. Tell the person you cannot resolve the situation at this point and that you will refer it to someone who can.

Change the subject or minimize: Divert attention from him or her and issue, s/he may debate the correctness of the policy.

Approach: In a factual way, explain the policy and the institution’s enforcement of it. Then return to the main issue—the person’s behavior.

Third-degree Questioning: Challenges information you have received and your observations. “How do you know that?” “What makes you think that?” “Can you prove that?” Argues over minor or irrelevant details; attempts to put you in the defensive.

Approach: Keep returning to the larger picture. Don’t argue over small details.

Personal Hostility: Challenges your motives for questioning their behavior. “You must have it in for me!” “You always single me out!” Attempts to change the subject and delay the issue at hand.

Approach: Simply relate the behavior you observed and question the person on why the behavior took place. Do not feel that you must defend your motives or yourself.

Admission of Guilt: Open acknowledgement of involvement in negative behavior and apology for causing any problem Often the goal is to get you to take no further action.

Approach: Proceed cautiously! In minor situations, not taking action after a discussion may be appropriate. However, sometimes it can create a situation where a person can evade responsibility for his/her actions by simply saying, “I’m sorry.”

Projection: Justifies one’s behavior by attributing the same actions to everyone else. “Everyone else does it and nothing happens to them”

Approach: Recognize that a few others probably do violate the policy. When their actions come to the attentions of the staff, the offenders will be held accountable.

Important Aspects in Confrontation

- ❖ **Know your stuff.** As an RA, you have an obligation and responsibility to familiarize yourself with the university and residence hall policies. Students will perceive you as being inconsistent and unfair, or worse yet ignorant, if you do not confront a situation because you do not remember the policy.
- ❖ **State your expectations in advance.** The most important thing for you to do at the beginning of each semester is to spell out, very significantly, how you will interpret your disciplinary role. For example, as an RA, it is your role to document all behavior that deviates from the stated policies. You do not have the authority to make disciplinary sanctions. Your floor should know this right away. You should let your residents know what responsibilities you have for enforcing rules. As an agent of the school, you are expected to enforce rules and hold students accountable for their actions.
- ❖ **Teach Residents the Rules and the System.** It is important that you, as the RA, explain the standards of conduct, which will be expected of each resident. That does not mean that you should read every rule at your first floor meeting, but be sure to explain where they are available in written form. Highlight the significance of the Residence Hall Manual. You should explain the purpose and intention of these rules, not as restrictions upon behavior, but rather as policies, which ensure consideration of the rights of others. It is best to instill a feeling that these policies do serve a useful purpose and, hopefully, to generate a voluntary willingness to abide by these rules. By emphasizing community, consideration, and cooperation, students will understand that they must accept responsibility for their actions and so control their behavior accordingly.
- ❖ **BE CONSISTENT!** Most RAs who have trouble with discipline do so because they are inconsistent. If two situations arise that are virtually identical and you handle one differently than the other, trouble will brew. If one person is dealt with differently than another for violating the same rule in the same way, you can expect much criticism.
- ❖ **Maintain a balanced attitude.** Nothing will get you in trouble quicker than creating an impression that you enjoy applying discipline. RAs who seem to like having authority over students will fail in disciplinary situations because students will resent their attitude.

- ❖ **Be Honest.** There may be times when you disagree with a rule or policy. It is important that you discuss your opinions with your supervisor and clarify the expectations that s/he may have of you. However, you should support the policies of the university in interactions with students. Honesty with students should never be an excuse for inconsistency, ambivalence, or failure to fulfill your discipline role.
- ❖ **Be decisive:** Another way to get in trouble in disciplinary situations is by being ambivalent. When action is required, you should take it. Doing nothing is almost always a mistake. Most residents will view ambivalence about what you do as a sign of weakness. Anticipating typical disciplinary situations and thinking about how to handle them will help you become decisive, as will seeking advice from other RAs and supervisors and acquiring proper training.
- ❖ **Abide by the Rules.** RAs are role models. You will considerably diminish your effectiveness as an RA if you violate the policies yourself.
- ❖ **Get help when needed.** Never be afraid to contact your fellow staff members, your A/RD, the RD on call, or UMPD if you feel as though a situation is beyond your control.
- ❖ **Know the appropriate communication channels.** Generally, all matters calling for immediate action should be reported directly to your supervisor. This includes everything from serious illness or accident, unusual or inappropriate behavior, gross violations of campus or residence hall policies, to plumbing or electrical failures, hall damage, fire, or other extreme physical plant problems.

What is Assertive Behavior?

Assertive Behavior is:

Assertive behavior involves the ability to express thoughts and feelings in an honest, straightforward fashion that at the same time shows respect for other people. People who behave assertively are capable of expressing both positive and negative feelings and opinions. It is a direct and non-manipulative way of presenting a position or need. People who behave assertively realize that they may not get things their way, but are entitled to express their needs.

Assertiveness is not:

Passive Behavior. This is the kind of behavior recognizes the demands of others while denying one's own needs. The passive person always puts other people first, even when it means sacrificing one's own needs. It is an ineffective way of communicating. People who behave passively do not express their opinions, beliefs and feelings. They don't stand up for themselves and consequently often feel like other people take advantage of them. Being passive inhibits honest, spontaneous reactions, and typically people who behave passively feel hurt, anxious, and sometimes angry as a result of their behavior.

Aggressive Behavior. Acting aggressively is another ineffective way of communicating. Aggressive behavior is often threatening in nature. It is manipulative, dominating, and often humiliates or puts other people down. Those who engage in aggressive behavior put themselves and their own needs first above all else. People who behave aggressively do not feel good about themselves, so they put others down in both blatant and subtle ways.

What Else Can Assertive Behavior Do For You?

Assertiveness Can...

- Increase your chances of having open and honest relationships
- Help you feel better about yourself by being able to express yourself openly and honestly
- Help you feel more in control of your life and life situations
- Increase your chances of getting what you need and want from life and from others
- Increase your decision-making ability
- Expand your opportunities to live more fully
- Assertive behavior affects the lives of others we interact with by respecting them and opening up opportunities for them to learn better communication skills
- People who behave assertively are usually respected and treated with respect
- People who behave assertively feel healthy, satisfied, and good about themselves

The Seven Step Plan for Confrontation

Step One: INITIATE CONTACT

The appropriate setting is very important. A private place where both individuals do not feel threatened is best. During the initial confrontation, it is advisable not to “gang-up” on the individual. A confrontation team of two or more should only be used for a re-confrontation or for individuals who are perceived to be very resistant to change and only responsive to group opinion or pressure.

Step Two: ESTABLISH RAPPORT

Next, establish a positive rapport with the person. Create a sense of mutual trust – a sense that both people present really care about each other. Attempts to create an artificial rapport will fail as people are usually more sensitive than we might believe.

Step Three: IDENTIFY ISSUE/PROBLEM

Working with the person, identify the issue or problem that prompted you to seek him/her/hir out. He or she must agree that there is a problem. If not, you must return to Step Two.

During the problem identification process, it is important that you do not ask the question “Why?” If you do, you will be told why and that becomes the reason or excuse for the behavior – the justification at least in the eyes of the other individual. You may ask “What?” but don’t let the person’s excuses trap you.

Step Four: PROBLEM IS AGREED UPON

The individual being confronted must agree that a problem does, in fact, exist. Otherwise, the person will not buy into the following steps – they will lack the necessary motivation. If they do not agree that a problem exists, you must return to either step two or step three.

Step Five: OBTAIN ATTAINABLE COMMITMENT

After the person agrees that a problem exists, you must mutually agree upon an attainable commitment on his/her/hir part. It must be a commitment which the person has the potential to fulfill. You must provide the person with an opportunity to win and/or succeed.

Step Six: KEEP COMMITMENT

On a mutually predetermined date and time, get together again with the individual to determine whether or not he/she/ze has been able to keep the commitment. If so, move to step seven. If not, return to step five and redefine what is an attainable commitment from the person.

Step Seven: PRAISE SUCCESS

When success is realized, offer praise and positive feedback. Then obtain commitment for further changes by returning to step five and extending what was an attainable commitment for further changes by returning to step five and extending what was an attainable commitment. If the individual has not been successful without being negative, again return to step five and reassess what might be an attainable commitment.

Confrontation Do's & Don'ts

Confrontation Do's

- Confront in private, praise in public
- Show respect for the person
- Indicate "I care about you"
- Carefully involve significant others
- Pick a confronter who is respected and admired by the person being confronted
- Praise the good in the person
- Condemn the behavior, not the individual
- Keep to the issue
- Gain factual knowledge of what happened
- Help the person identify the impact and consequence of his/her/hir actions
- Clearly define sanctions for the act
- Listen to what is being said
- Handle silence appropriately
- If angry, cool off before confronting
- Time the confrontation as close as possible to the inappropriate behavior
- Be sincere
- Your language should reflect "we have a problem," rather than "you have a problem." It will be less threatening
- Follow through on any agreements made
- Show empathy, not sympathy
- Be firm in the standards you set

Confrontation Don'ts

- Don't attack the individual, physically or otherwise
- Don't be condescending or sarcastic
- Don't excuse the behavior
- Don't get trapped by the person's excuse for his/her/hir behavior
- Don't set standards or announce terms that you aren't prepared to enact and enforce

How to Deal with Problem People

Although each group and situation is different, here is a *sequence of responses* that can be helpful.

Accept

When someone exhibits disruptive behavior, begin by accepting what the person is doing – don't ignore. Acknowledge the action; describe the behavior without evaluating. Check out your perceptions.

Example: Someone makes a loud noise in disapproval of a particular suggestion.
"Ann, it looks as though you don't believe we'll be able to agree on this. Am I correct?"

Legitimize

You don't have to agree with the problem person, just acknowledge that it is legitimate to have a different point of view.

Example: "Joan, I know you are concerned. Decision making can be frustrating."

Defer

Record the person's concern on the group memory (or minutes) and return to the point of business.

Example: "I understand your concern, but let's give this a chance, OK?"

Graduated Response

In dealing with problem people, always begin with the most subtle and least threatening interventions. Start low key – escalate if necessary, saving direct confrontation as a last resort.

Example: someone talking too much

Initial Intervention

- Look directly at person
- Thank them for the contribution
- Call on someone else

If the person continues...

- Move closer physically
- Invade his/her/hir private space
- Look him/her/hir in the eye
- Turn away, call on someone else

If the disturbance continues...

- Confront: "What's going on, Jo? Why are you dominating the meeting and not giving others a chance to talk?"

As a last resort...

- Confront in front of the group: "It's my opinion that you are dominating the meeting. Do the rest of you feel the same way?"

Suggestions for Handling Some of the “Problem People”

The Attacker

This person launches personal attacks on another member of the group. If two of them are arguing, interrupt by physically moving between them, getting them to talk to you rather than yell at each other. Ask questions such as “What’s all this about?” and “What’s the problem here?” Use the rest of the group to refocus on ideas rather than individuals and return the meeting to order.

The Backseat Driver

This person keeps telling you what you should be doing. As a leader/facilitator, you should request suggestions from the group and generally follow them. If the suggestions get out of hand, point out that there are many different styles of facilitation and many ways of approaching a problem.

The Busybody

He/she/ze is always ducking in and out of the meeting. In chronic situations, confront this person ahead of time explaining how the interruptions disturb the flow of the meeting. Get the busybody to make a commitment to the meeting time, then you will have some leverage if the individual resumes the behavior.

The Broken Record

He/she/ze keeps bringing up the same point over and over. Say, “Yes, I know that point is important to you. We have recorded it in the minutes.” If the individual is really worked up over the issue you could suggest, “Why don’t we take three minutes now to hear what you have to say, so you can let go of it. We want you to be able to free your mind so you can move along with us through the rest of the meeting.”

The Dropout

This person sits at the back of the room, doesn’t say anything, doodles and/or reads other things. This person is more disrupting to the leader than the rest of the group. During a break, ask him/her/hir why he/she/ze is not participating.

The Early Leaver

Don't confront this person in front of the group. Find out later why this disruptive behavior continues. At the beginning of the meeting check to see if everyone can stay until the end.

The Gossiper

This person introduces hearsay and gossip into the meeting. Check out the information immediately, saying "Do you know that for a fact?" or "Can anyone else verify that?" Defer the issue until after the information can be obtained, or take a short break to make a phone call.

The Headshaker

This person displays nonverbal behavior that disagrees in a dramatic and disruptive manner. Eye rolling, crossing and uncrossing legs, slamming books shut, pushing chairs back, madly scribbling notes, etc. Sometimes the person is unaware of his/her/hir behavior. Address the behavior by confronting the person. For example, you could say, "Steve, I see you're shaking your head. Looks like you disagree. Do you want to share your reactions with the rest of the group?"

The Interpreter

This person is always speaking for other people. "What Bob is trying to say is..." If Bob is in the middle of talking, jump in quickly and say, "Hold on a minute Adam, let Bob speak for himself. Go on Bob; finish with what you were saying."

The Interrupter

Deal with this one immediately. People will be watching to see if you are really going to be neutral, assertive, and protective of the group. "Hold on Joan, let Donna finish what she was saying." You must be impartial and fair in your interventions. Try making an interrupter be a secretary or recorder – taking notes is a good exercise in listening.

The Know-It-All

This person uses credentials, age, length of membership, or past positions to argue a point. Acknowledge this member's expertise once, but emphasize why the issue is being considered by the group.

The Latecomer

After the meeting ask why he/she/ze is late so frequently. Don't lecture. Make sure your meetings begin on time. (If at the appointed hour only a few people have arrived, let *them* decide when to begin.) Do not stop the meeting to review for latecomers; acknowledge his/her/hir presence and tell him/her/hir to catch up by reviewing the minutes of the meeting.

The Loudmouth

This type of person dominates the meeting. He/she/ze is often a senior member or past-leader of the group, which makes dealing with him/her/hir even more difficult for the current leaders of the group. Try moving closer and closer and maintain eye contact, then immediately shift your focus and call on someone else. Cut in, "How do the rest of you feel about that?" Deal with this person outside of the meeting. Often this type of person needs to blurt out ideas as soon as they come into their heads. Suggest that they take notes or serve as a recorder for the group.

The Whisperer

This person is constantly whispering to a neighbor and is one of the most irritating of the problem people. Try walking up close. If a lot of whispering is going on, try saying "Hey, let's keep a single focus here! We won't be very productive if people are going off in different directions." Ask a couple of whisperers "Do you want to share what you're talking about with the rest of the group? If not, why don't you go outside the room and talk? We still have a lot of things to accomplish here." Try to separate the chronic whisperers from each other ahead of time.

Principles of Verbal Judo

- 1.) Say what you want, **do** what I say
– *Don't take their words personally; their actions are what is most important.*
 - 2.) You've got the last **word**; I've got the last **act**.
– *You have a lot more options than they do and you don't have anything to prove.*
 - 3.) As ego goes up, power and safety goes down!
– *Remember that you have nothing to prove because as soon as your ego becomes involved you lose your credibility as well as your safety.*
 - 4.) **Redirection** rather than **resistance**.
– *Don't fight force with force and get into a battle of the wills. Instead, use your creativity to redirect the person's energy or attention to something more constructive or appropriate.*
 - 5.) A professional **uses** adrenalin, an amateur is **ruled** by it.
– *Adrenalin can help you endure a difficult situation, but remember that it can also be the very thing that puts you in a difficult situation. Do NOT allow adrenalin to make your decisions for you.*
 - 6.) **Respond** to people, don't **react**.
– *The difference between a response and a reaction is that if you respond you remain in control and if you react, you have put them in control.*
 - 7.) People are like steel, when they lose their temper they are useless.
– *Remain calm in confrontations as a loss of temper may result in you becoming and/or perceived to be useless, unprofessional and dangerous.*
 - 8.) Don't just tell someone to "calm down." Calm them down with your performance.
– *People will often follow your lead. If you act calm, your actions will de-escalate the situation.*
 - 9.) When your mouth is open your ears are closed.
– *You can't talk and listen at the same time.*
- Remember . . . To generate voluntary compliance is the essence of professionalism.***

Confrontation Role Play

One person in the role-play is a student carrying an open container of alcohol in hallway. The other is the RA/ALA.

An ineffective confrontation:

RA/ALA: (when seeing the student down the hall) Hey, you. What are you, Stupid? You should know that you can't have alcohol. The least you could do is keep it in your room so that I don't have to deal with you.

Student: Who are you? What's your problem?

RA/ALA: (loudly) It doesn't matter who I am, You need to dump out that beer in the water fountain and then give me your ID.

Student: I don't have to do what you tell me to do. Last week you walked right by me when I was drinking in the hallway.

RA/ALA: Fine. I'll just call the cops and have them deal with you. Then you'll have to see the RD/ACC and he/she/ze will kick you out of housing for not cooperating with me.

Other issues in this confrontation:

*The RA/ALA hasn't helped the other staff when they have to interact with this same student

*Students observing the situation, of whom there may be several due to tone and level of the voices, may have been influenced by this RA/ALA's interaction and expect similar behaviors/disrespect from other staff.

Problems with the RA/ALA's behavior:

*Confronting the person, not the behavior

*Insulting the student

*Telling the student what they should know rather than explain what the problem is

*Making it clear that the s/he/ze doesn't want to deal with the student and would avoid the policy violation if the student hadn't put it right in front of them.

*Not identifying self to student

*Demanding certain behaviors on the part of the student

*escalating the confrontation by yelling and having an attitude

*RA/ALA is being inconsistent in enforcing policy

*threatening the student rather than trying to resolve the situation

*telling the student what the sanction will be and further escalating the situation

A More Effective Confrontation:

RA/ALA: (when seeing the student down the hall, politely and assertively) Excuse, me. I'm Susan, the RA on duty. You have an open container of beer in the hallway.

Student: Listen, it's almost empty, I was just heading down to the bathroom.

RA/ALA: I still need for you to dump out the can in the water fountain and then show me your ID.

Student: OK. I'll dump it out and then we'll forget this ever happened, right?

RA/ALA: No, this incident will be documented and given to the Residence Director.

Student: Oh, come on. I just had a beer in the hallway. Give me a break - I can't get into trouble again.

RA/ALA: I'm doing my job. You made the choice to violate policy. I'm going to document the incident and then you can talk with the RD or ARD.

Positive RA/ALA behaviors

- *Confronting the behavior, not the person,
- *identifying self to student
- *Clearly identifies the behavior
- *RA/ALA is clear about what needs to happen next
- *RA/ALA doesn't get distracted by the student's excuses or engage in a conversation about the excuses
- *RA/ALA remains low key and stays on the offensive.
- *RA/ALA lets the student know what will happen next.
- *RA/ALA remains neutral. Explains that student is responsible for his/her choices.
- *RA/ALA doesn't try to explain what will happen or tell the student not to worry about it.

Other Positive behaviors:

- *RA/ALA does not raise voice and therefore does not attract the attention of other residents.
- *RA/ALA did not try to embarrass the student
- *RA/ALA didn't argue with the student, but rather kept on course with what needed to happen
- *RA/ALA is decisive and firm