STUDENTS WHO APPEAR IN POOR CONTACT WITH REALITY

Student who are in poor contact with reality may appear withdrawn, frightened, disruptive, confused, illogical, unaware, or unconcerned with classroom protocol or acceptable social behavior. These students may have gross impairment in functioning and a poor sense of reality. Written or verbal communication may be disjointed. Their speech may be rapid or slowed down. The student may have inappropriate emotional responses to the situation or have a complete lack of emotional expression and speak in monotone.

These students tend to distort their perceptions of the world in such a way that innocent occurrences have special meaning to them (e.g., interpreting an innocent facial expression or tone of voice as being hostile or persecutory). They may experience themselves as especially powerful or important or may believe that people are trying to control or harm them in some way.

The student may experience hallucinations which may look like the student is under the influence, however, that assumption should not be made. Since these students may elicit alarm or fear from others, it is important to get them assistance as soon as possible. If you cannot make sense of their conversation, immediately consult with, or refer to the student to see a mental health specialist on campus. If the student is belligerent or acting out, call Campus Police at 895-2351 or 2677 (COPS) from campus phones or dial 911 for immediate assistance.

Suggested strategies for supporting a student in poor contact with reality:

1. Respond to the student with warmth and kindness, but with firmness.
2. If you are comfortable in doing so, see the student in a quiet atmosphere to remove extra stimulation from the environment
3. Acknowledge the student's position or feelings without supporting the misperceptions (e.g., I understand you think they are trying to hurt you and I know how real it seems to you, but I didn't perceive them trying to humiliate you.).
4. Reveal when you have difficulty in understanding them and ask that they repeat or rephrase their communication.
5. Focus on the "here and now" (e.g., "you appear very tense, short of breath").
6. Acknowledge your concerns and state that you can see they need help. A referral is very important for these students.

Suggested things to avoid:

1. Arguing or trying to convince the student of the irrationality of their thoughts.
2. Playing along with the student's beliefs to not upset them.
3. Encouraging further delusions. It is more helpful to switch topics and divert focus to reality issues.
4. Demand the student change their ideas or behavior.
5. Expect customary emotional responses.