

# Managing Potentially Violent Students

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# Objectives:

- To recognize signs of emotional distress in students
- To list three or more ways to help students in emotional distress
- To recognize high risk factors corresponding to potentially violent students
- To verbalize appropriate action when confronted with a violent student

# Role of Faculty or Staff:



- Recognize behavior changes
  - Inconsistency may be a “cry for help”
- Express your concern to student (first step in successful problem resolution)
- Help them explore alternatives
- Respect cultural differences
- Refer them to counseling and psychological services, if needed



*What  
counseling  
services are  
available in  
your school?*

# Signs of Emotional Distress:

- Inability to concentrate
- Confusion
- Persistent worrying
- Social isolation
- Increased irritability
- Bizarre behavior
- Missed class/assignments
- Procrastination
- Dangerous behavior
- Restlessness
- Disheveled appearance
- Mood swings
- Indecisiveness
- Depression/Anxiety

# Guidelines for Interaction:

- See the student in private to minimize embarrassment/defensiveness
- Acknowledge your observations/perceptions
  - Comment on strange or inappropriate behavior
- Listen carefully to student's perspective
- Identify your concerns and student's concerns
- Explore alternatives
- Be as flexible with the student as possible
- Keep your involvement within realistic limits of your time and skill

# Goals:

- To maximize communication
- To mobilize resources
- To optimize learning
- To prevent escalation to violence



# High Risk Factors for Violence:

- Violent drawings or writings
- Threats of violence toward others
- Past violence or aggressive history
- Animal torturing
- Recent relationship break
- Isolation
- Perceptions of being teased
- Inappropriate use or access to firearms





# Risk Factors for Violence (continued):

- Social withdrawal
- Substance abuse
- Family stressors
- Being noted by peers as being "different"
- Low school interest




# Understanding Verbally Aggressive Students:

- Anger and frustration with situation becomes displaced to faculty
- Verbal abuse may follow when frustrating situation seems beyond the student's control
- Students may feel they will be rejected, and want to reject you first
- They often realize the impact of the drama and intimidation behind their anger

# Managing a Verbally Aggressive Student:

- Acknowledge their anger and frustration
- Allow them to vent and identify what is upsetting them
- Reduce stimulation by going to a quiet place to talk
- Consider keeping your office door open or invite another faculty or staff member to join the conversation
- Tell them “When you yell and scream at me that way, I find it hard (impossible) to listen”

# Managing a Verbally Aggressive Student (Continued):

- If the student is in your personal space, tell them, "Please stand back; you are too close"
  - Keep your voice calm and refrain from shouting or becoming punitive
  - Deal with the situation (rather than looking away or ignoring it)
  - Help the person problem solve and deal with the real issues when they become calmer
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# Violent or Physically Destructive Students:



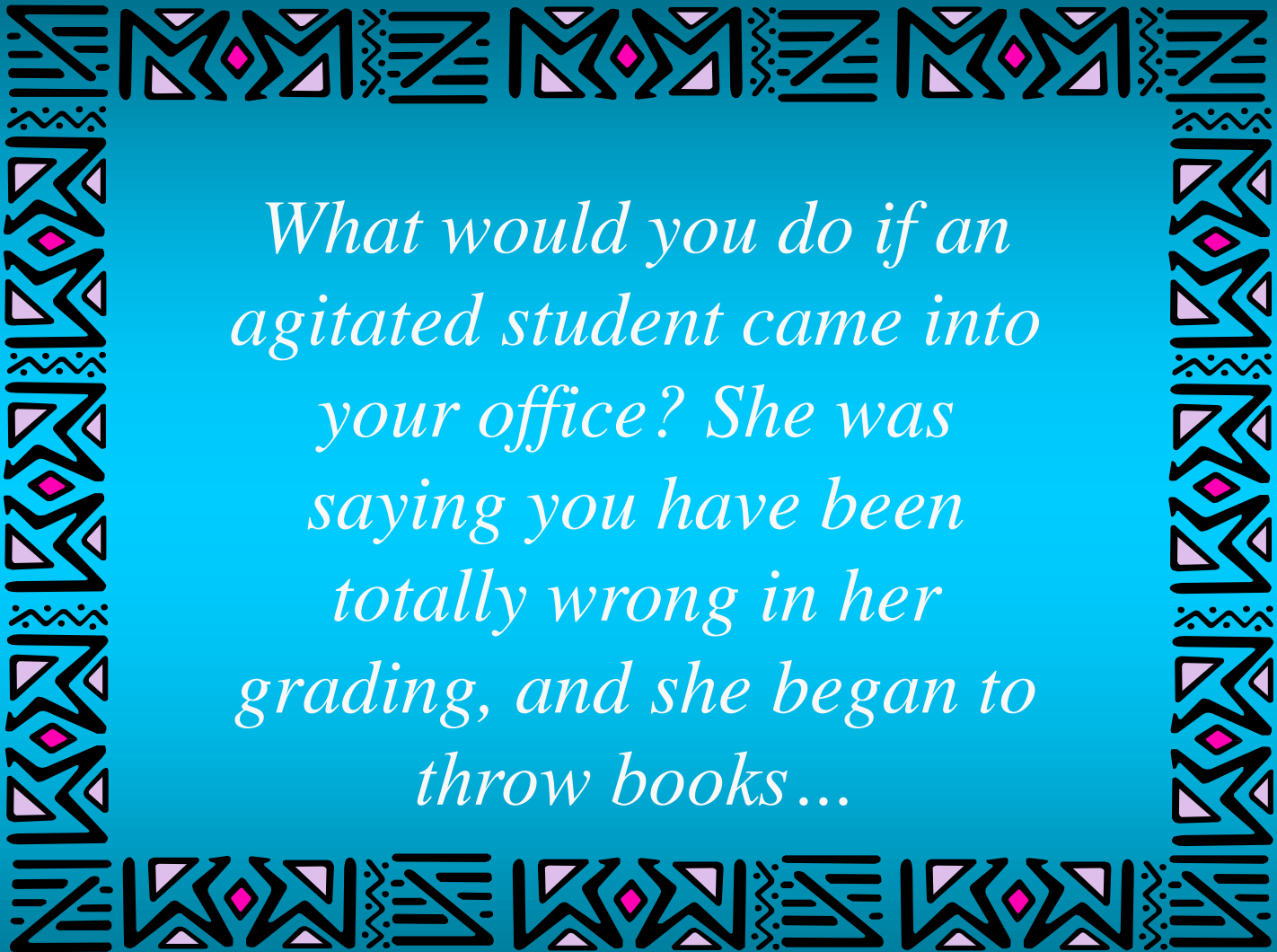
- Violence may result from emotional distress
- Violent behavior is rare
- May occur when the student is totally frustrated and feels there are no other options

# Managing Violent Students:

- Prevent total frustration and helplessness by quickly and calmly acknowledging intensity
  - “I can see you are really upset and mean business. You must have some serious concerns on your mind”
- Explain clearly and directly what behaviors are acceptable
  - “You certainly have the right to be angry, but screaming, hitting (breaking things) is not O.K.”
- Stay in an open area

# Managing Violent Students (Continued):

- Take warning signs seriously
  - Yelling, screaming, clenched fists
  - Statements like “You leave me no choice”
- Divert attention
- Consider saying “If you hit me, I can’t be of help”
- Refrain from touching, threatening, daring, taunting, or cornering student
- Get help of other staff, University Police, or counseling services



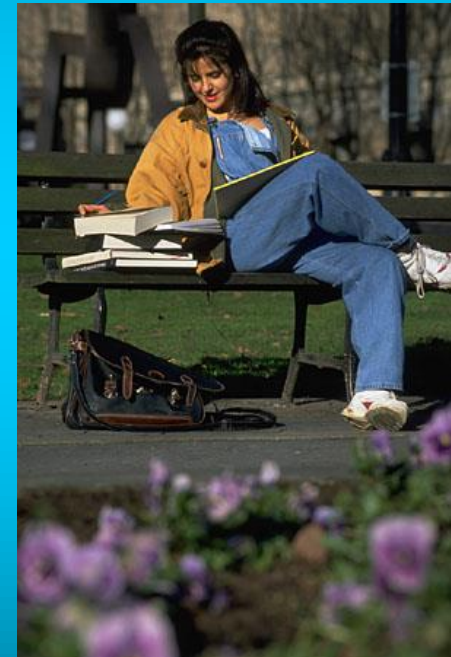
*What would you do if an agitated student came into your office? She was saying you have been totally wrong in her grading, and she began to throw books...*



## Conclusion:

- Student violence is a very real danger
- Knowledge of risk factors and development of policies provide reasonable safety
- Assessment and early intervention are needed
- Help students in emotional distress
- Prevent violent behavior

**Enhancing  
Communication  
is the Key!**



# References:

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- SDSU Counseling and Psychological Services. *Working with the emotionally distressed student.* <http://www.sa.sdsu.edu/cps/faculty-staff.html>.

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