



SOS Digital - Providing Support to Students in Distress

Aggressive Behaviour

Self-Help Guide for Staff



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AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR: HOW TO RESPOND

What is aggressive behaviour?

Aggressive behaviour is behaviour that goes beyond the applicable social norms, such as: causing harm, pain, loss to people or objects. They are based on negative attitudes or emotions, for example: anger, rebellion, hostility, the desire to destroy, frustration. In this case, we can talk about the **affective dimension of aggression**. Aggressive student behaviour most often appears in response to failure and is a form of discharge of frustration and anger.

Aggressive behavior can also be **instrumental behaviour**, when the perpetrator of aggression is guided by the intention to achieve a specific goal in this way. An example of this type of situation may be, among other, an act of aggressive behavior of the student with the intention of making the teacher change the negative assessment. Instrumental aggression is most often revealed by people with a behaviour/conduct disorder, which main characteristics are: limited prosocial emotions, lack of remorse or guilt, insensitiveness, lacking in empathy, unconcerned about his/her performance, or superficial or poor affection.

Manifestations of physical aggression directed at the lecturer or other students are very rare. Manifestations of verbal aggression or aggression directed at objects are the most common, such as: raise the voice, use of vulgar/offensive words and inappropriate gestures, throwing a bag on the floor, hitting a fist on a table, kicking/knocking chairs or tearing up a failed written work.

How to deal with aggressive behaviour?

- ✓ **Stay calm and control your emotions.** In such situations, a calm, confident and decisive reaction facilitates a successful solution for the situation. Move slowly and steadily. Try to keep your physical movements calm.
- ✓ **Listen** to what the other person has to say and accept, recognize and emphasise positive aspects, without minimising the negatives.
- ✓ **Keep good eye contact** but ensure this does not appear confrontational.
- ✓ **Show understanding and empathy** with the person by reflecting, clarifying and summarising thoughts and feelings.
- ✓ **Avoid any expression of power**, for example "You must calm down".
- ✓ If needed, **find a safe physical distance**.
- ✓ If you feel that your or someone else's integrity or life is endangered, immediately move away and immediately **call for help**.

How to deal with aggressive behaviour inside the classroom?

- ✓ **Avoid underestimating student behavior.** It is worth to suggest talking, but postpone the conversation moment in time. It will be most effective if some time passes between the aggressive behaviour and the subsequent conversation. The spontaneous act of aggressive behavior lasts maximum several minutes, during which the over-aroused student is unable to listen and have a sober view of the whole situation. After half an hour or more, the student has a chance to look at the whole situation in a more rational and balanced way. So if possible, invite the student for a talk after the class.
- ✓ If that doesn't work and the student is still aggressive, you can be more principled. Then, it is worth saying in a firm but calm tone that you do not accept the raised voice and vulgar words inside the classroom, and that the condition for further conversation is the student's calm behavior.
- ✓ If the verbal aggression of the student persists or escalates, for the sake of other students' safety, a fifteen-minute break should be ordered, all students including the aggressive student, should be asked to leave the room. After break, you can offer the student to move to a remote place together to talk, but not in front of the rest of the group.
- ✓ Choose a space that is conducive to constructive conversation. It is important that this place allows you to turn to third parties for help or to increase the distance from an aggressive student, if necessary. Staying alone with the student in a closed room should be avoided.
- ✓ It is worth showing understanding for the emotions experienced by the student, which doesn't mean an excuse for the student's behavior.
- ✓ You cannot leave the student convinced that you succumbed to his persuasion and bent under the influence of his aggressive behavior. Show that you are available to look for a solution to the situation in a conversation with the student.

USEFUL CONTACTS

- ✓ If you are a staff from UMinho please click [here](#)
- ✓ If you are a staff from UniTrento please click [here](#)
- ✓ If you are a staff from USC please click [here](#)
- ✓ If you are a staff from AMU please click [here](#)

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