

## Sample Text from Academy Instructor's Guide Dealing with Difficult Students

<b>Purpose</b>	This session provides information on how to deal with challenging or difficult students in the clinical setting. Today's college students are becoming more and more challenging to work with as they have more life pressures. This presentation will help new clinical faculty to identify problem issues and provide some possible methods to deal with these issues.
<b>Time</b>	90 Minutes
<b>Outline</b>	<p><b>Objectives</b></p> <p><b>Characteristics of Students Today</b></p> <p><b>Exploration of Incivility – Classroom/Clinical Issues</b></p> <p>Student Incivility</p> <p>Faculty Incivility</p> <p>Faculty Concerns Regarding Incivility</p> <p><b>Expectations of Students — What Is Reasonable?</b></p> <p><b>Guidelines for Safe Student Performance</b></p> <p><b>Identification of Possible Student Issues</b></p> <p>Case Studies</p> <p>Identify What the Issues Are</p> <p>Discuss Methods to Deal with the Issues</p> <p><b>Role of the Clinical Faculty</b></p> <p>Methods to Deal with the Difficult Issues</p> <p>Methods to Assist the Difficult Student</p> <p>Dismissal or Failure of the Difficult Student</p> <p><b>Summary</b></p>
<b>Materials Needed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> PowerPoint Slides 9-1 through 9-24</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Case Studies: Use those in the participant notebook or substitute your own.</li> </ul>

**Dealing with Difficult Students**

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**Opening**  
PPT 9-1

Introduce yourself, your role at your institution, and your session. Share with your audience the positive aspects of working with students and then inform them that the following session will seem negative as you discuss the difficult student. Emphasize that the majority of students are rewarding to work with and that the problem or difficult student is not the norm.

**Objectives**

- ▢ Discuss student incivility – what is it?
- ▢ Identify methods to maximize student learning
- ▢ Identify ways to handle difficult issues
- ▢ Discuss ways to assist difficult students

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**Objectives**  
PPT 9-2

Highlight the four main topics that will be covered in your session.

**Characteristics of Students Today**

- ▢ Able to multi-task
- ▢ Technologically skilled
- ▢ Open / Transparent

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**Characteristics of Students Today**  
PPT 9-3 through 9-5

Ask participants to recall what they remember about being a student and then compare those characteristics with the “students of today.” The characteristics on the slide are examples of some of the common characteristics that are seen in many students. Add any other characteristics that you have identified and/or give examples of some of these characteristics that you have witnessed in the classroom or clinical setting. You may want to emphasize the consumer mentality and the number of societal pressures that students have today.

**Characteristics of Students Today**

- ▢ Respect for authority
- ▢ Consumer mentality
- ▢ Meaning of time
- ▢ Expect immediate responses
- ▢ Materialistic

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Some topics on this slide are also discussed in previous presentations. The session on the technologically competent student is part of a previous discussion of online education in the session entitled *Why We Are Here* in Tab 2. You may want to draw this to the attention of the participants.

### Characteristics of Students Today



- Jump from job to job
- Civically & politically disengaged
- Risk takers
- Many societal pressures

95



### Student Civility in Nursing – Classroom/Clinical Issues

- Common themes in recent literature
  - Sarcastic remarks
  - Inattentiveness/sleeping in class
  - Dominating discussions
  - Cell phone/computer use
  - Attendance/tardiness

96



### Student Civility in Nursing – Classroom/Clinical Issues

- Common themes in recent literature
  - Not prepared
  - Cheating
  - Verbal / physical abuse
  - Violence: 2002 - University of Arizona

97



### Student Civility in Nursing – Classroom/Clinical Issues

PPT 9-6 and 9-7

You will want to read some of the recent work done by Cynthia Clark. She has done a lot of work on incivility in nursing. There are also older studies done by Lashley and De Meneses that also provide interesting information that still pertains to students of today. You will want to mention that student incivility is an issue in nursing education today. You may want to stress to participants that extreme physical or verbal abuse is not common. (The 2002 University of Arizona school of nursing student that shot 3 professors and himself is a rare example of extreme violence.) Share with participants any examples of student issues that you have been involved in. Discuss with them how you see students changing over time.

Note how emotionally and physically exhausting it is to deal with difficult student issues and emphasize how time-consuming these issues can become. Mention how this can affect the instructor--such as difficulty sleeping and questioning one's ability to evaluate students.

### Faculty Incivility

- ❑ Cancelling class without warning
- ❑ Unprepared / Ineffective teaching style
- ❑ Not allowing open discussion
- ❑ Belittling
- ❑ Not available
- ❑ Subjective grading
- ❑ Rigid

98



### Faculty Incivility

PPT 9-8

State that faculty incivility is becoming a growing topic of concern. However, tell the participants that faculty incivility is not the focus of this presentation. Briefly mention the items listed on the slide and tell participants that there may be a faculty side to this issue of incivility as well.

### Faculty Concerns Regarding Incivility

- ❑ Student response
- ❑ Sense of threat to well-being
- ❑ Physical and psychological ramifications
- ❑ Confidence in teaching ability

99



### Faculty Concerns Regarding Incivility

PPT 9-9

Faculty are concerned about students today and how they will react to constructive criticism and how they may react when confronted with professional issues. Some faculty have felt threatened by students and do fear for their well-being.

### Expectations of Students: What Is Reasonable?



9-10



### Expectations of Students: What is Reasonable?

PPT 9-10

Ask participants what they think is reasonable to expect from students in the clinical setting. See what types of expectations they identify before you share the next two slides.

### Guidelines for Appropriate Classroom Behavior

- Timeliness
- Engagement / Participation
- Respect for others
- Prepared
- Responsible for own work

9-11



### Guidelines for Appropriate Classroom Behavior

PPT 9-11

You may mention some of the classroom expectations, however; the Academy participants are probably going to do more clinical supervision of students rather than classroom instruction. (Adjust your focus based on the participants.)

### Guidelines for Safe Clinical Performance

- Adequate clinical preparation
- Ability to administer medications safely
- Ability to perform skills safely
- Ability to care for patients safely
- Application of theory to clinical setting

9-12



### Guidelines for Safe Clinical Performance

PPT 9-12 and 9-13

Remind the participants of the presentation on clinical evaluation tools presented in an earlier session. The guidelines on this slide are based on the clinical evaluation tool that this session's authors use with their students. You may have other guidelines that you will want to mention. Stress safety related to patient care, medication administration, and skill performance as well as professional behavior. During this discussion, share particular student examples that you have encountered. For instance, students who do not come prepared for clinical, students who do not know their medications, and examples of unprofessional behavior.

### Guidelines for Safe Clinical Performance (continued)

- Ability to communicate
- Professional behavior at all times
- Compliance with policies and procedures
  - Academic
  - Institutional

9-13



### Other Potential Student Issues

- ❑ Lack of motivation
- ❑ Disruptive behavior
- ❑ Substance abuse
- ❑ Mental illness
- ❑ Falsifying records
- ❑ Breach in confidentiality
- ❑ Failing student



clinical  
faculty  
academy

9-14

### Other Potential Student Issues

PPT 9-14

This slide includes a few of the issues that one may encounter with students. Add any others that you may have experienced. At this point, do not mention ways to deal with these issues. That will be discussed through the case studies.

### Case Studies



clinical  
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9-15

### Case Studies

PPT 9-15

Divide participants into small groups to work on the case studies. Groups should be no larger than three or four to ensure that all have an opportunity to participate. To mix the groups up a bit, you can have them number off to form groups.

Each small group will only work on one case study. Three to six different case studies are adequate as there is not enough time to discuss any more than that when the large group reconvenes. If there are more than three to six small groups, it works well for more than one group to have the same case study. Groups should have approximately 20 minutes to work before calling the group back together for discussion.

Groups are instructed to read the case study, identify problems, and discuss possible actions they might take.

The participant notebook includes four sample case studies. Each case illustrates one or more issues that nurses may encounter in a clinical teaching situation. These have been drawn from actual experiences of clinical faculty. Use these or develop some of your own case studies based on personal experiences as this adds interest and credibility to the discussion.

Case 1: This case presents a very disorganized student who also demonstrates poor decision-making resulting in unsafe care.

Case 2: This case involves a student with tardiness issues and possibly lying to the instructor.

	<p>Case 3: In this case, the student is over-reliant on the instructor and staff nurses with even the most basic tasks.</p> <p>Case 4: This case involves a student with a possible substance abuse problem.</p> <p>When the participants reconvene, ask each small group to report on their case study and how they approached the problems. The larger group can then give feedback and any additional suggestions.</p> <p>Encourage small groups to identify all the issues, not just the most obvious. Also help participants state specific interventions rather than general approaches. Discussion should include how student progress will be evaluated.</p> <p>Other questions and issues that often arise during the discussion (or should be introduced by the facilitator) are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When should someone else be notified of the student’s behavior; i.e., the course or clinical coordinator?</li> <li>• Are there course, program, or institutional policies that impact the instructor’s intervention with this student?</li> <li>• Does the instructor have a clear understanding of what is acceptable performance or remediation by this student?</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Role of Faculty</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Create a positive environment</li> <li>❑ Be aware of own values, biases</li> <li>❑ Do not rely on first impressions</li> <li>❑ Make a series of observations</li> </ul> <p>clinical faculty academy</p>	<p><b>Role of Faculty</b> PPT 9-16 through 9-18</p> <p>The next few slides discuss the role of the clinical instructor in dealing with the difficult student. Discuss how important it is for the faculty to be aware of their own values and biases and to be sure that these biases do not get in the way of fair evaluation. Note how first impressions of students can really change over time.</p> <p>The emphasis in this section is related to careful observation and documentation. The evaluation of the student needs to occur over time and be based on the clinical evaluation tool that is being used. All documentation needs to be done very carefully and</p>

### Role of Faculty (continued)



- Evaluate based on course / clinical objectives
- Discuss evaluation with students
- Be fair

9-17



### Role of Faculty (continued)



- Role model professional behavior
- Discuss unprofessional behavior with students in a timely fashion

9-18



### Dealing with the Difficult Issues

- Formative and summative evaluation
- Carefully written documentation
- Ongoing verbal feedback
- Mid-rotation conferences
- Conference with third party

9-19



### Dealing with the Difficult Issues

- Prevent monopolization of your time
  - Set time limits
  - Make assignments carefully
  - Pair weaker student with a stronger student

9-20



thoroughly. Also stress the solicitation of student self-evaluation. Maybe the student is making mistakes or acting in a certain way because the faculty makes them very nervous. Are there ways to deal with this?

In this section discuss mistakes and how they need to be dealt with. Stress to the participants that students will make mistakes and that it is OK for them to make mistakes as long as it does not harm the patient. You may want to stress that unprofessional behavior such as poor attendance, tardiness, alcohol abuse, and other inappropriate actions will not be tolerated.

### Dealing with the Difficult Issues

PPT 9-19 and 9-20

This is a continuation of the above content. In this section stress documentation and keeping students informed on their progress towards meeting clinical objectives. If students are not meeting the objectives, they need to be aware of this early on. Frequent conferences may be necessary as well as a third party participant to witness what is discussed with the student. The course coordinator or school of nursing dean may be possible third party witnesses.

Also stress that the faculty cannot allow the difficult student to monopolize their time — all students need their attention. Use the suggestions on the slides for how they can prevent this monopolization. You may share other ideas. Stress that careful assignment of patients is important when dealing with the difficult student. Suggest pairing the difficult student with a strong student. Be aware, however, of how this impacts the other students.

### Methods to Assist Students

- Early identification of at-risk students
- Early referral to student services
- Provide simulations in the lab
- Practice case studies
- Design daily or weekly goals
- Design contracts

9-21



### Methods to Assist Students

PPT 9-21

This slide is a list of possible methods to assist the struggling student. The participants may not be familiar with clinical simulations. You may need to explain that these are patient care scenarios that are created in the laboratory setting which allows the faculty to evaluate student performance without putting patients in jeopardy. You may also want to give examples of goals that could be set for students to help them to progress towards meeting the clinical outcomes. We have designed student contracts for some of our more difficult student issues. If students are not able to meet the objectives of the contract, they do not progress in the course. If you have not designed contracts, you may want to mention them just as a possibility. Many times the contract may involve the student seeking assistance outside the school of nursing (i.e., student resource center, mental health counseling).

### Dismissal of Student

- Verbal notification
- Written notification
- Clinical appeal process
- Grade appeal process

9-22



### Dismissal of Student

PPT 9-22

We have stressed to participants that clinical failure and dismissal of students is not common but does happen occasionally. This discussion emphasizes the importance of notifying the student of the failure. Institutions may have a clinical failure appeal process available for students who feel that they are not being evaluated fairly. Note that this process may not be available in all institutions but that it should be considered in order to prevent legal problems. Many legal issues related to discipline and/or dismissal were discussed in the *Legal Issues* session, Tab 3.

### Student Failure – Very Difficult!

- ❑ Fear of poor student evaluations
- ❑ Fear of not being supported by administration or by colleagues
- ❑ Be sure to meet with other faculty to discuss situation and feelings

9-23



### Student Failure – Very Difficult!

PPT 9-23

Discuss the faculty fears related to student discipline as identified in the Lashley & De Meneses Study (2001). Many faculty do not share these same fears. Emphasize that most deans, course coordinators, and school administrators are usually supportive of faculty who must fail a weak or unprofessional clinical student. Emphasize to these new faculty that they must not do this alone. They need to get the other course faculty or dean involved as they face these challenging students.

### Summary – Most Important to Remember

- ❑ Student is a novice so must consider when evaluating
- ❑ Careful documentation necessary with difficult issues
- ❑ These are the nurses of the future!



9-24



In summarizing, stress that students are just learning the nursing process and will make mistakes. If, however, they do not begin to progress towards meeting the clinical objectives or have issues related to professional behavior, that progression in the nursing major may not be possible. Again, emphasize careful documentation! Tell participants that their students are going to be nurses of the future and that one has to feel confident that these students can practice safely.

In closing, emphasize again how rewarding it is to work with student nurses. Stress that the difficult student will be the exception and not the majority of students. Close the session by stating that most students are very hard-working and provide a positive and fun challenge to faculty. Allow a few minutes at the end of the presentation for any final questions.