

---

---

**“To be heard I must yell:”**  
**Complex Trauma, Misconduct,-De**  
**escalation and Discipline in the John Jay**  
**context**

---

---

Serena Thomas, LMHC, MA

---

---

I want to be seen. See me! I exist!

# Complex Trauma

- Trauma is experiencing an extreme stressor that surpasses one's ability to cope. It is not the event itself but rather that the experience overwhelms your ability to cope.
- Complex trauma involves multiple, ongoing trauma experiences
- No post
- Most of our John Jay students have previously experienced multiple traumas in their lives. Many of them would meet a diagnosis of Complex -PTSD.
- Complex Trauma:
  - involves repeated or prolonged exposure to trauma
  - involves direct harm, abandonment, or neglect from caregivers or parents
  - begins during childhood development
  - creates a severe threat that impacts development in multiple ways – emotionally, cognitively, behaviorally

# Complex Trauma

- Impact of complex trauma:
  - Misinterpretation and overinterpretation
  - Challenges with emotional and behavioral regulation
  - Hypersensitivity to stimuli and traumatic triggers
  - Cognitive Delays
  - Challenges with calming and self soothing

# What we see in the classroom

- **Rapid mood swings:** Increased energy, pacing, suddenly depressed or happy.
- **Psychotic symptoms:** perceiving and interpreting things differently than those around them (Suspiciousness, paranoid ideas, or uneasiness with others, unclear thinking, social withdrawal, unusual or overly intense ideas, strange feelings, decline in personal hygiene)
- **Dissociation:** a sense of detachment or disconnection from the world around them (daydreaming, spacing out, or eyes glazed over, acting different, or using a different tone of voice or different gestures, switching between emotions or reactions to an event, such as appearing frightened and timid, then becoming violent)
- **Unexplained physical symptoms:** Facial expressions look different, headaches, stomach aches
- **Agitation and anger that spirals**
- **Disconnect/Isolation:** from family and friends: Less interest in usual activities.,

# Disruptive Behavior

All Behavior has meaning

# What to do if a student is in distress

- When students are behaviorally dysregulated (e.g., “acting up”), start by **adopting a new mindset.** This will help you to be calmer and more focused when interacting with the student.
- Instead of wondering, “What is wrong with them?” wonder what has happened to them which has made them engage in that behavior (trauma-informed approach)
- There are many different reasons why students may “act up.” What could be some of these reasons?

# What to do if a student is in acute distress

- If the student is in acute distress, here are some things to keep in mind:
  - Stay calm – the situation may provoke anxiety in you, but it's important to stay calm so you can think clearly and help keep the student safe. Speak in a calm, soothing tone (raising your voice may increase distress).
- Listen to the student – what they're saying may not make sense but try not to argue or talk over them, let them talk and make sure they know that you're listening and that you care.
- Ask them what support they would like – some people will know they're unwell and may want you to contact their spouse or mental health professional, or they may know that going somewhere or doing something may help the crisis pass. Help with practical concerns – in the moment it's amazing what feels impossible. The student may need support with getting home, preparing a meal, finishing school work
  - try to think about what stresses you would want taken away if you were in crisis yourself



# Deescalation skills

1. Remember that there is no content except trying to calmly bring the level of arousal down to a safer place.
2. Do not get loud or try to yell over a screaming person. Wait until they take a breath; then talk. Speak calmly at an average volume.
3. Announce any actions beforehand and Do not restrict the person's movement
4. Respond to disorganised speech with short, simple sentences. Repeat things if needed. Allow plenty of time for responses
5. Listen to them. Ask what might help. If a student is in distress, they need something. (They may not know what they need, but something is not ok.

# Deescalation skills

6. Ask them what support they would like – some people will know they're unwell and may want you to contact their spouse or mental health professional, or they may know that going somewhere or doing something may help the crisis p
7. Empathise with feelings but not with the behaviour (e.g., "I understand that you have every right to feel angry, but it is not okay for you to threaten me or others. I am here to support you.")
8. Do not ask how a person is feeling or interpret feelings in an analytic way. Try to be aware of what may worsen the person's fear and aggression. Avoid those things.
9. Do not argue or try to convince. Do not challenge or try to change manic thinking/delusions
10. Wherever possible, tap into the person's cognitive mode: Do not ask "Tell me how you feel." But instead: "Help me to understand what you are saying to me." People are not attacking you while they are explaining to you what they want you to know. Attempt to get a quick sense of their reality. Focus on practical, concrete needs.
11. Suggest alternative behaviours where appropriate (e.g., "Would you like to take a break from this part of the conversation? Shall we sit down here? I just need a big breath. Do you need one too?").

We never know the story people walk with

# Contact Information

---

- Cory Head, Ph.D. Associate Director of Counseling Center (manages clinical operations). Email is preferred: [chead@jjay.cuny.edu](mailto:chead@jjay.cuny.edu) or you may call 212 -887-6239.
- Gerard Bryant, Ph.D. Director of Counseling Center: [gwbryant@jjay.cuny.edu](mailto:gwbryant@jjay.cuny.edu) or call (646) 557-4552.
- You may also submit a report to the Behavioral Intervention Team if you are concerned about a student's behavior. You can access the link to submit a report on this page: <https://www.jjay.cuny.edu/behavioral-intervention-team> or email [BIT@jjay.cuny.edu](mailto:BIT@jjay.cuny.edu).
- If it appears to be mainly a mental health issue, please email Cory Head [chead@jjay.cuny.edu](mailto:chead@jjay.cuny.edu) (to keep confidentiality for the student).
- Crisis options for off hours or when a counselor is not immediately available:
  - 1-888-NYC-WELL (1-888-692-9355) or text "WELL" to 65173
  - National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 1 -800-273-8255
  - NYC Samaritans: 212-673-3000

# **To be heard, I must Yell, Part II: Student Conduct and Discipline**

**Faculty Development Day Fall 2023**

# True/False

- **John Jay has a food pantry with free food for any student who needs it.**

**True**

- **John Jay has resources to put a homeless student into housing.**

**False**

- **John Jay has free mental health care for students.**

**True**

- **John Jay can pay a student's rent or utilities if they're about to get evicted or cut off.**

**True**

# True/False

- **I know what to do if a student tells me they've been sexually assaulted or are experiencing domestic violence**
- **I know what to do if a student tells me a classmate is harassing them**
- **I know what to do if a student tells me someone is stealing/plagiarizing their research**
- **I know what to do if I suspect a student cheated on an exam**
- **I know what to do if a student says the FBI has bugged their phone & email**

# Definitions

- **Disruption:**
  - Behavior that affects your students' ability to learn OR
  - affects your ability to teach
- **Crisis:**
  - Any situation that affects a student's wellbeing OR
  - Any situation in which a student may be a danger to themselves or others





**In Crisis**

**Disruptive**

# **Address crises and disruptions**

- **Practice good classroom management, including de-escalation**
- **Offer appropriate resources**
- **Notify appropriate offices/departments that there is a problem**

# It is not misconduct to...

- **Cry**
- **Get upset about an upsetting topic**
- **Disagree with classmates or faculty**
- **Have a disability or a mental illness**

# Useful phrases

- **We need to move on now.**
- **It's time to give other students the chance to talk.**
- **Let's discuss this later.**
- **I'll follow up with an email.**
- **Would you like to take a moment to go compose yourself?**
- **We don't do that here.**
- **You need to leave the classroom.**

# **It IS misconduct to...**

- **Disobey direct instructions from a faculty member in the classroom**
- **Threaten classmates or instructor(s) with physical harm**
- **Retaliate against a classmate or instructor for complaining about their behavior**

# Student Conduct Process

## Report

- Faculty report incident of student misconduct to the Office of the Dean of Students (deanofstudents@jjay.cuny.edu, 212-237-8211)
- Reports cannot be made anonymously

## Investigation

- Conduct Officer will open investigation
- Faculty and witnesses will be contacted for interviews
- Conduct Officer will contact student respondent for an interview
- Interim measures may be taken (no contact orders, class section switch, emergency suspension)

## Resolution

- Informal resolutions are preferred whenever possible
- Educational modules, reflection paper, apologies, mediation conference
- Voluntary Withdrawal
- Formal Faculty-Student Disciplinary Committee hearing (FSDC)

# **Student Conduct FAQs**

- **Can I tell a student to drop my class and not come back?**
- **Can I require that a student receive services from Counseling or Accessibility Services?**
- **Can I have Public Safety remove a student from my classroom?**

# Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT)

- BIT provides threat assessments and early intervention of reported students before a crisis arises on the campus.
- What should a faculty member report?
  - Elevated & severe behavioral concerns
  - Suicidal thoughts or impulses
  - Violent and aggressive impulses
  - Depression
  - Disruptive behavior
  - Emotional/behavioral dysregulation
  - Clear indication of physical and sexual abuse
- Email [BIT@jjay.cuny.edu](mailto:BIT@jjay.cuny.edu) or reach out to any member of the team. Chaired by Dean of Students





# BIT Process

## Report

- Faculty and staff report a student of concern to BIT.
- Reports can be made through e-mail to BIT or phone calls to Dean of Students, Director of Counseling or Director of Public Safety
- Reports can be made anonymously.

## Evaluation

- Student is discussed in BIT meeting.
- Information gathering through contact with professors, background check, etc.
- Use of threat assessment tools to determine risk.

## Recommendations

- Student may be invited to meet with Dean of Students to discuss concerns.
- Behavioral contracts and/or referral to mental health treatment
- Involuntary Medical Withdrawal Process
- Disciplinary Process

# Contact Us

- **Rachel Brown, [rabrown@jjay.cuny.edu](mailto:rabrown@jjay.cuny.edu); 212-621-4143;  
L.65.06NB**
- **Serena Thomas, MA, LMHC, Adjunct Lecturer, Sociology  
Department & Adjunct Counselor, Wellness Center;  
[sethomas@jjay.cuny.edu](mailto:sethomas@jjay.cuny.edu)**

# #APeoplesCUNY



**[PSC-CUNY.org/UnionYes](https://PSC-CUNY.org/UnionYes)**