

# **Middle Georgia State University**

## **OTA Program**

### **Inservice:**

### **Dealing with the Difficult Student**

**Instructor: Jessica Pipkin, COTA/L**  
**Fieldwork Coordinator, Interim**

**Developed by: Betsy McDaniel, COTA/L**  
**Program Director, Interim**

# Handling the Difficult Student

## Agenda

I.	Introduction/Objectives	5 min.
II.	What is “the difficult student”? (definition)	10 min.
III.	What do you do? (strategies)	15 min.
IV.	What about failing? (strategies)	15 min.
V.	Question and Answer (wrap up)	
	Assessment	<u>15 min.</u>
	Total time:	1 hr.

## Objectives

At the complete of this 1 hr. inservice, the participant will be able to:

1. Identify and describe behaviors that may signal difficulties on fieldwork.
2. Problem solve effective strategies to deal with unacceptable behaviors and performance problems.
3. Describe a course of action when failing a student.

## Lecture Notes

### **I. Introduction**

- A. Fieldwork training is a vital first step in an OT/OTA's professional training.**
- B. Opportunity to demonstrate understanding of classroom material by applying knowledge in a controlled practice setting with supervision.**
- C. Seems logical that students who do well in their academic studies would do well in their clinical performance.**
  - 1. However, numerous studies found no correlation.
  - 2. Students who have difficulty engaging in the supervisory process encounter more problems than other students on fieldwork
    - a. Generally they didn't accept responsibility for their own behavior and respond well to feedback.
  - 3. Predictors of success seem more associated with emotional intelligence
    - a. e.i.- a set of skills that contribute to the ability to
      - 1. accurately appraise one's own and other's emotions
      - 2. perceive how one's behavior affects others
      - 3. appropriately regulate one's emotion in accordance with environmental demands
      - 4. assist others to regulate their emotions and behavior for effective life functioning
  - 4. Research suggests that students who have difficulty using supervisory feedback to modify inappropriate behavior and who experience conflict when required to assume greater flexibility, initiation and self-imposed structure in the clinical setting, appear to be most likely to perform poorly on fieldwork.
  - 5. Because these behaviors tend to appear in the academic environment as unprofessional behaviors/attitudes rather than academic failure, they usually do not interfere with students academic progress.
    - a. MGC uses professional behavior forms
      - 1. 10% of all grades
      - 2. must pass to pass class
    - b. Remember communication between fieldwork coordinator and student is confidential
      - 1. includes academic grades, disability information, personal problems, health information, performance on previous fieldwork, and letters of reference
      - 2. student must sign release form
- D. Common areas of communicative and behavioral difficulty**
  - 1. Rigidity of thinking- inability to demonstrate flexible cognitive adaptations to changes in the environment.
    - a. can't stop using strategies that don't work, to adopt new more functional strategies
    - b. heightened stress in response to schedule and supervisory changes
  - 2. Discomfort with ambiguity that accompanies clinical reasoning and decision making.

- a. can't accept that more than one clinical method was appropriate for same clinical problem
- 3. Lack of psychological insight- inability to identify and interpret one's emotions, motivations and personality traits.
  - a. commonly over/under estimates abilities
- 4. Difficulty interpreting feedback- inability to understand other's responses in relation to one's own behavior.
  - a. couldn't anticipate how their behaviors would be interpreted by others; therefore unable to draw connections between their actions and others response
  - b. couldn't modify inappropriate behavior on basis of feedback alone
  - c. instead complained of receiving unfair treatment; failed to understand how their own behavior elicited others reactions
- 5. Externalization of responsibility- displacement of accountability onto others in the environment because of an inability to assume one's own obligations and duties.
  - a. externalization to supervisor, patient, and academic institution
- 6. Difficulty learning from mistakes- lack of acceptance that one has erred and inability to rectify errors using different approaches.
- 7. Discomfort with the physical handling of patients (touching patients, unsafe transfers, mobility training, and ADL's).
- 8. Dependence on external measure for self-esteem.
  - a. equate internal worth with academic grades and clinical evaluations
  - b. could not distinguish between criticism of academic and clinical performance and criticism of themselves.

## **II. Who are the difficult students?**

### **A. Common Characteristics**

- 1. Unreliability
- 2. Poor attitude
- 3. Non-supportive behavior
- 4. Failure to meet deadlines
- 5. Failure to meet job responsibilities
- 6. Irresponsibility
- 7. Need for frequent retraining

### **B. Who are they?**

- 1. Amy Attitude
- 2. Blameless Bob
- 3. Louis Loner
- 4. Anthony Antagonist
- 5. Twila Thumb-twiddler
- 6. Wendell Whiner
- 7. Iris Insubordinate
- 8. Timmy Tortoise
- 9. Harriet Hand-holder
- 10. Cindy Clock-watcher
- 11. Wendy Worry Wart

**C. 9 major reasons students don't meet performance standards**

1. Don't know how to do the work
2. Experience obstacles that keep them from doing their work
3. Don't know what job responsibilities are  
i.e.- unspoken rule that no one leaves before 5:00, even if hours are 8-4:30
4. Don't understand the importance of doing their work properly
5. Don't want to do it the way the supervisor wants them to
6. Aren't reinforced for doing their work well
7. Receive no negative consequences for non-performance
8. Have wrong priorities
9. Have personal limits

**D. Signs that performance problem is brewing**

1. Turns in work late
2. Has petty conflicts with others
3. Is frequently late
4. Spends too much time on the phone
5. Takes long breaks
6. Is reluctant to change
7. Seems isolated/unhappy
8. Gets upset without provocation
9. Doesn't volunteer for assignments
10. Won't make contributions in meetings
11. Won't take responsibility
12. Shows little or no initiative

**III. Just what can I do?**

**A. First determine that there is a performance problem**

1. Make a list of performance issues
  - a. must deal with performance, not attitude (performance is manifested as a result of attitude)

b. Examples: Attitude

1. disinterested
2. uncooperative
3. lazy/slow
4. careless
5. doesn't care about job
6. work not priority
7. lack enthusiasm
8. set in ways; inflexible
9. loner, withdrawn
10. irritable
11. no initiative

Documentation of Performance

- work turned in late
- petty conflicts
- productive ratings
- quality of work
- late to work
- too much time on personal phone calls
- too many, too long breaks
- quality, service, productivity
- not team player
- patient complaints
- less work than others

2. Review the list (if you can't tie the problem to specific performance, then there may be a personality clash)

3. Separate issues relating to students performance from issues relating to students personality/background
    - a. be careful of “halo”/ ”pitchfork” effect
    - b. discard preconceived suspicions, avoid judging/making decisions based on your values
    - c. assess the relationship
      - C- confidence
      - A- affection
      - R- respect
      - T- trust
1. think how the student would rate you on a scale of 1-10
  2. subtract 2 from each (probably over assessed yourself)
  3. 30+ - excellent relationship
    - 29-20 - good/positive
    - 19-10 - fair; needs improvement (try more coaching)
    - less than 10 - definite stumbling block (relationship is so poor that everything you do is perceived as negative)

**B. If it's a relationship issue**

1. To increase trust/affection, give full doses of praise and constructive criticism
2. Remember that this is a relationship
3. Ask yourself, How relationship oriented am I?
4. Make relationship management and priority
5. Look at your managerial style
  - (1) circumventive- don't bother me
  - (2) congenial- I want everyone to get along
  - (3) combative- do it now; aggressive
  - (4) collaborative- best type: push to get task done, but use people skills

high

Combative	Collaborative
Circumventive	Congenial

low

high

**PEOPLE**

6. Supervisors DO NOT:
  - a. give advice
  - b. diagnose
  - c. guess what caused the problem
7. If a student has a personal problem, it is your ethical responsibility to keep him/her as active/productive as possible and refer to someone who can help

8. Ask – Is there anything I may not know that is affecting your work?
  - a. if “yes”, and they give details-
    1. give reassurance- “Many people face similar problems.”
    2. say- “ I can’t give advice”, but suggest professional help
  - b. if ambiguously admits problem, but doesn’t share
    1. don’t probe further
    2. reinforce- not alone
    3. encourage to seek help
  - c. if “no”
    1. reinforce concern with student as a person and with their work
    2. “Not my job to pry and will respect privacy.”
    3. “But will need to continue to monitor work aspect.”
  
9. Things that can cloud supervisors judgement
  - a. appearance
  - b. lack of participation in activities
  - c. values, styles
  - d. race, gender, culture, religion

**C. Consider the consequences of behavior**

1. Behavior that is followed by a negative consequence is less likely to occur than behavior that is followed by a positive consequence
  - a. intentional positive consequences
    1. positive feedback
    2. praise
    3. public and private recognition
  - b. unintentional positive consequences of poor performance
    1. supervisor’s attention
    2. less work assigned
    3. longer hours
  - c. intentional negative consequences
    1. criticism
    2. disciplinary action
    3. lack of attention
  - d. unintended negative consequences of superior performance
    1. more responsibility
    2. increase work load
    3. jealousy from others

**D. Reasons why supervisors fail to recognize performance problems**

1. Want to avoid conflict
2. Student’s strength in one area masks weakness in another
3. Personal friendship exists
4. Student “snows” supervisor
5. Supervisor is overloaded
6. Discomfort with disciplinarian role
7. Hope problem will go away
8. Addressing one problem might cause more
9. Lack of confidence in your performance
10. Fear situation will get out of hand
11. Fear of failure as supervisor

12. Fear of student resentment

**E. Interesting facts**

1. Simmons/Bright research
  - a. women found more difficult to give constructive criticism
  - b. beginning is the hardest part
  - c. non-supervisors found most difficult
  - d. 50% difficult to criticize boss

**F. Addressing performance problems**

1. Think of the most challenging performance issue facing right now
  - a. identify 3 most likely to occur consequences if you
    1. address it
    2. don't address it
  - b. assign point value
    - 4=very serious impact
    - 3=somewhat serious
    - 2=marginal
    - 1=not very important
  - c. then add up columns – Will there be a more serious problem if you do/don't address it?
2. 5 steps to identify the problem, confront the student, and get help
  - a. document events and poor work quality in an accurate, timely, and appropriate manner
    1. what, who, when, follow-up
    2. don't refer to subjective factors like attitude or emotions
  - b. do your homework
    1. review performance standards
    2. observe student behavior
    3. listen to others complaints/ comments
    4. look below the "surface"
  - c. eliminate enabling behavior
  - d. know what support is available for you and the student
  - e. confront and take action
3. How to ask student to meet with you
  - a. confidentially
  - b. let them know what the meeting is about
    1. not too specific; not too general
    2. "I have concerns about your productivity."
  - c. tell student how you will prepare for meeting
  - d. if applicable, tell student to prepare by:
    1. making a list of strengths and weaknesses
    2. complete performance self-assessment
  - e. reaffirm date, time, place and end on a positive note
  - f. don't
    1. have secretary set up a meeting
    2. write a note requesting meeting
    3. say too little; say too much
    4. set up meeting on the spur of the moment
4. Characteristics of constructive feedback
  - a. encourage as much student involvement as possible
  - b. acknowledge a positive
    1. must be specific, sincere, and related to the topic
    2. "I really appreciate the way you explained what OT is to that family."

- c. state your concern
  - 1. keep focused on performance, not “you” focused
  - 2. state what impact is on the student, supervisor, and organization
  - 3. “My concern is that your productivity is down due to.....”
  - 4. deliver negative feedback objectively and unemotionally
  - 5. describe behavior that you want changed – offer examples
  - 6. use “I” messages not “you”
- d. seek a reaction
  - 1. What do you think?
- e. explore background
  - 1. “Tell me how you go about.....”
- f. jointly develop solutions
  - 1. people have the tendency to “own” what they create
- g. close
  - 1. confirm expectations/ follow-up dates
  - 2. express confidence and thank student
- 5. Examples to Improve
  - a. you are not even trying to do better: my concern is that you are 20% below productivity
  - b. you are always late for work
  - c. I don’t like your attitude
  - d. last month you....
  - e. I am sure you know what I am talking about
  - f. the staff is very disappointed in you
- 6. Goal setting with student
  - a. like with a patient
  - b. S M A R T  
Specific, M measurable, Actionable, Realistic, Timeframe
  - c. example: to complete treatment plan on new evaluation within 2 days of initial assessment
  - d. practice writing goals

**G. How to Praise with More Impact (need to do more than “atta boy”)**

- 1. 5 step model
  - a. tell what they did right; be specific , emphasis on impact
  - b. tell how you feel about it
  - c. pause (let it sink in); ask student, How do you feel?
  - d. encourage more of same
  - e. reaffirm value of student and their performance

**H. Positive Intervention Techniques**

- 1. Corrective- focus on training issues
  - helps student to improve
  - supervisor gains respect
- 2. Punitive- focus on punishing wrong behavior
  - won’t help student improve through training
  - supervisor gains resentment and resistance
- 3. Corrective
  - a. continuum

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counsel      coach      discipline

- b. counsel- supportive
    - helps define and work through problem
  - c. coach- more directive
    - helps encourage to increase skill through training/guidance
  - d. discipline- corrective process
    - hold accountable for non-performance
4. When to use
- a. student frustrated/unhappy counsel
  - b. nervous about responsibility coach
  - c. orientation coach
  - d. follow-up previous training coach
  - e. performance evaluation coach
  - f. during periods of change counsel
  - g. late discipline
  - h. didn't follow policy after coaching discipline
  - i. train new job duties coach
  - j. continue to make same mistakes discipline

**I. Verbal Reprimands**

1. Use to correct mistakes, to improve performance
2. If more serious, possible failure; also DOCUMENT/SIGNATURES, ETC. (written reprimand)
3. Includes:
  - a. expectations that have not been met
  - b. effect had on department
  - c. clear statement of what to see in future
  - d. delivery in objective manner
  - e. statement of belief in student

**J. Case Study:**

Sara is in an OTAS at your facility. She has completed 3 weeks of an 8 week fieldwork. The supervisor, Alice, told Sara during the departmental lunch that she wanted to meet with her. Sara has had an uneasy feeling that Alice isn't happy with her performance. Alice has given her no praise, but hasn't really told her clearly what she isn't doing correctly. She seems distant, and Sara has noticed that Alice "sighs" a lot and sometimes "rolls her eyes" at her. Sara hasn't really enjoyed this fieldwork. She is homesick. She feels frustrated because she feels there wasn't enough training on department policies and responsibilities in the beginning. Alice met with her at 9 a.m. the next day. Alice begins the meeting with "I have been unhappy with your performance and your attitude is bad". She continued telling Sara that she was late twice the first week. She doesn't write legible notes and she can't spell, her treatments aren't creative and she never cleans up the gym area. Alice then added "I've had staff and other students double check your work and they are reporting problems. I don't think you will ever learn." Sara was then told that she had 1 week to improve or that she would be failing at midterm and Dee, the fieldwork coordinator would be called. Sara left the meeting bewildered. She had no idea others were checking up on her or had complained. As the day continued, Sara became angry and decided that she would call Dee and withdraw from the fieldwork.

List the positives/negatives in the way Alice and Sara handled the situation.

**K. Ways to train/orient student on limited budget and time**

1. Develop staff to student or student to student training program – provide rewards
2. Develop special news letter/bulletin board
3. Develop library of materials
4. Develop schedule of lunchtime lectures with presentations
5. Make a video showing skills

**L. Performance Review/Improvement Materials**

1. Checklist for preparing effective meeting
  - a. review reasons for meeting
  - b. review your goals and priorities, meeting notes, etc.
  - c. make appointment with student
  - d. allow at least 15min; better 30min
  - e. ensure no distractions (phones, visitors)
  - f. sit with student, not at your desk
  - g. write script and rehearse
  - h. have items to take notes
  
2. Checklist for conducting an effective meeting
  - a. use positive body language
  - b. make eye contact
  - c. explain purpose; be objective
  - d. ask open ended questions
  - e. paraphrase what student says
  - f. give specific examples
  - g. don't repeat rumors
  - h. obtain student input for solutions
  - i. develop written agreement
  - j. show confidence in student
  - k. provide support resources
  - l. schedule follow-up
  - m. evaluate what excites student about this fieldwork and use it to motivate
3. Elements of Successful Performance Improvement Plan
  - a. pick realistic most critical areas
  - b. have action plan; who, what, when
  - c. pick top 2-3 objectives student will work on in given time period
  - d. list what you, as supervisor, will do during same time period to assess student
  - e. document
  - f. list consequences of success/failure
    1. use "within" not "in" - legal reason
    2. failure to meet goals "may" result in additional disciplinary action up to and including termination/failure - legal reason
4. Reactions and how to deal with them
  - a. silence, shock, disbelief  
response: silence, acknowledge student reaction, ask for input
  - b. crying, fear, sadness  
response: statement of empathy, arrange time for calm down, acknowledge student reaction, be caring

- c. rage, anger, hurt  
response: allow vent, but keep situation under control, avoid feeling defensive, allow student input
  - d. tenseness, indignation  
response: same as above; answer questions one at a time, use silence to give student time to reflect
  - e. regret/guilt  
response: acknowledge reaction, be clear and direct about expectations, encourage steps toward improvement
5. Follow-up Meeting
- a. important- because lack of follow-up is most common reason performance agreement fails
  - b. steps
    - 1. review performance
      - recognize effort to change or
      - recognize if student has failed to make effort or
      - recognize if student tried to change, but failed anyway
    - 2. review your own performance
    - 3. make plans for where to go from there

#### **IV. What about failing a student?**

##### **A. Disciplinary Conference**

1. Informs student that disciplinary action is being taken
2. Defines problem and seeks solutions
3. Protects supervisor and faculty and academic institution from litigation
4. Follows guidelines of performance meeting
5. Reviews consequences

##### **B. Difference between disciplinary conference and performance meeting**

1. Disciplinary conference- conference report prepared before meeting
  - support from academic institution needed
  - consequences are serious
2. Performance meeting- conference report completed during meeting
  - support from academic institution is always necessary (judgement of supervisor)
  - consequences less serious

##### **C. How to be Legally Sound**

1. Document efforts to help
2. Document meetings and verbal reprimands
3. Document performance improvement plan
4. Don't say "I am sorry." - implies blame (say "I understand this is hard.")
5. Use e-mail to self document ( give time and date)
6. In telling others – don't say "The student failed.", say "The student is no longer with us."

##### **D. Actions that may warrant fieldwork failure**

1. Poor performance ( have you tried all other measures)
  - failure to follow policies, safety
  - consistent time management issues
  - failure to complete job responsibilities satisfactory

2. Gross Misconduct (may warrant direct termination)
  - theft
  - emotional, physical abuse
  - abusive language
  - influence of alcohol or drugs
  - sexual harassment
  - failure to implement safety rules
  - dishonesty/falsification of documents
  - possession of weapons
  - insubordination
  - confidentiality problems
  - unauthorized expenditures
  - willful destruction of facility/staff/patient property
3. How to handle gross misconduct
  - a. remove from area ASAP
  - b. involve support persons- dept. head, fieldwork coordinator, legal counsel, witness
  - c. remain calm and objective
  - d. document what took place, steps taken, and outcome
  - e. terminate if warranted and escort off property

#### **E. Failure/Termination**

1. 3 legged stool to fail with confidence (for performance issues)
  - a. did you give reasonable time frame to turn it around?
  - b. did student and academic institution understand jeopardy of failure (documentation)?
  - c. did you give student reasonable chance to salvage fieldwork?
  - d. if “yes” to all 3 and have document, then go ahead
2. To do before failing student
  - a. check with appropriate support person (dept. head, fieldwork coordinator)
  - b. ensure all documentation is in place (fieldwork evaluation form, record of performance, improvement meetings.
  - c. conduct meeting when you are calm
    1. best to do before or after regular work hours
    2. at end of week (social support needed to prevent violence)
    3. fieldwork coordinator will be present if you desire
3. To build sound case- student log:
  - a. date each entry
  - b. remarks concerning behavior, work
  - c. list contacts
  - d. additional training
  - e. follow-ups to meetings
  - f. initials after each meeting
4. Guidelines
  - a. schedule short meeting -15 min
  - b. plan what you will say
  - c. discuss what will happen next (turn in keep, paperwork completed, appointment with academic institution, etc.)

- d. escort off premises (if needed)
  - e. document
  - f. have student sign and date (they may refuse)
  - g. don't argue with student / lose temper
  - h. have witness (fieldwork coordinator, another student, another staff)
  - i. have policy/procedure in student handbook- What student will fail for and what happens when student fails
  - j. in addition to completing fieldwork evaluation form and student evaluation form, prepare detailed letter to go with evaluations, to include recommendations which would assist student
5. Other Information/Thoughts
- a. MGC doesn't usually recommend extension of fieldwork
  - b. fieldwork educators are gate keepers/point of entry into profession
    - 1. sometimes it's what you have to do
    - 2. it's always uncomfortable
    - 3. try not to feel guilty
    - 4. get support for yourself

## **V. Suggestions for Specific Problems**

### **A. The Know It All**

- 1. Usually results from personal self-esteem issue
- 2. Look at reasons
  - a. need for personal validation
  - b. inappropriate communication skills
  - c. need for power and control
  - d. insecurity
  - e. lack of appropriate behavior
- 3. Action plan (feedback)
  - a. describe problem in behavioral terms (specific)
  - b. relate the impact and your feelings
  - c. ask- then listen- for the real problem
  - d. work out win/win change
  - e. focus on positive
  - f. set ground rules- possible speaking time limit

### **B. Supervising someone older than you**

- 1. Describe problem/look for reasons
  - a. feeling public humiliation/competency challenge
  - b. need to prove their worth
  - c. need for authority and independence
- 2. Recognize and deal with your contributions
- 3. Action plan (communicate) GREAT
  - a. Goals- set goals for the relationship
    - How would things be different if you got the change you wanted?
    - What are the reasons you want/need to achieve goals?
  - b. Roles- What are the roles you want to play and have the other person play?
    - write in reasonable, behavioral terms
    - mutually accept outcome
  - c. Expectations: What are expectations for satisfactory performance?  
For outstanding performance, how to you each expect to be treated?

- d. Abilities- Is the problem with abilities?
  - 1. 3 varieties of students/people
    - a. don't know what you want  
solution- tell clearly; get feedback
    - b. can't do what you want  
solution- training, change in structure, tools, resources
    - c. won't do  
solution- try to list reasons  
Is there secondary gain?  
Look to see if you can change rewards/punishment
- e. Time:
  - 1. What is your time table?
  - 2. What support will you provide?
  - 3. How will you measure progress?

### **C. Poor Hygiene**

- 1. Begin with assumption, they are unaware
- 2. Start with subtle suggestions of tools you used with similar problems
- 3. Attitude: try not to be embarrassed  
Timing: after lunch/privately  
Behavior: start subtle, shift to sincere concern

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