

Emotional First Response Guidelines

Helping teammates in distress:

Low Level Distress

Person may be crying, or visibly upset but as long as they are engaging with you - talking coherently, answering questions, and responding to you in a productive manner - they're 'online'.

It's ok to acknowledge that this person is showing emotion, but their state isn't inhibiting their ability to move forward. Be supportive, and directive with your statements.

Fight/ Flight

This person is showing distinct changes in behavior. This may include becoming combative, becoming withdrawn (they were previously engaged, and now they're not), *and is having a hard time communicating with you*. They may not be responding to the questions you ask, but rather focusing on a different "problem", or are not verbalizing, and/ or are becoming agitated.

Giving this person information, or trying to move them forward through logic and direct communication may not be effective. Try these things:

- Get them calm by co-regulation. Stand in close proximity to them (as close as is possible without being physically imposing) - and breath audibly in a slow, calm manner.
- Instruct the student to clench and open their fists, and flex and relax other major muscles (thigh muscles, arms).
- Have them drink water, and turn their head from side to side, gazing over each shoulder alternately.
- If it is acceptable for you to touch them (ask them and receive a clear "yes" answer) - apply close pressure to them (by hugging, or applying firm, direct pressure with an open hand to a shoulder or arm).
- Use clear, directive sentences, repeat yourself if needed calmly, and soothingly. Becoming agitated or impatient yourself is counterproductive. Being directive and clear while remaining calm is very helpful.

Freeze

This person has gone through a fight/ flight response, surmised that they can do neither, and as a result is "frozen". They are "offline", not communicating effectively, and not responding to communication from you.

This person is not in a good state to communicate with you, or to make well thought out choices.

- Lower yourself to just below this person's eye gaze and make non-threatening eye contact.
- Co-regulate your breath with them, audibly breathing in a calm manner (this will automatically induce them to calm and regulate their own breathing).
- -They may appear to be cold as blood leaves extremities - warm them up.
- Follow instructions for fight or flight.
- Use clear, directive sentences. ask clear concise questions until the person is responding productively.

Note that they may still be exhibiting emotions, but they are online and ok at the point that they are answering you verbally and communicating in spite of their emotions.

Guiding Principles of good communication/ teams/ learning environments:

- *Listen to understand* - it's important that you be ready to meet your teammate where they are. Do not assume that you know their individual experience, or that you know already what the best course of action is for them. Listen without planning how you want to respond, and treat them as a collaborator instead of a subject.
- *Physical orientation* - set up a sense of a safe, comfortable environment by physically locating yourselves in space before starting work. Get a sense for where you are, and what you will be doing.
- *Use language that respects the individual.* - Teammates are people and they change over time. Rather than saying "Jane is always late" we might say that "Jane's circumstances caused her to be late today." If Jane frequently exhibits lateness, ask if there is a circumstance that you can help address; try to discover the circumstance causing the behavior, rather than attributing a trait to an individual. This is also true of positive attributions- be sensitive that for some individuals being labeled as "great at X" can induce them to feel pressure to always be good at X, or can cause you to ignore "off days."
- *Safety first.* If you find yourself in a situation where the teammate is unable to respond, take action or communicate and they are putting themselves or others in danger as a result, take all safe, necessary action to solve that immediate problem first.