THE STUDENT IN POOR CONTACT WITH REALITY

Description:

This student may appear withdrawn, frightened, disruptive, confused, illogical, unaware or unconcerned with classroom protocol or acceptable social behavior. These students have gross impairment in functioning and a poor sense of reality.

Written or verbal communication may be disjointed, with little or no connection between topics. Their speech may be rapid or slowed down. They may also pay a great deal of attention to some unimportant detail that is being discussed or may be generally scattered and incoherent.

The student may make inappropriate emotional responses. He/she may overreact to his/her feelings with excessive anger, sadness or exuberance. Others may demonstrate a complete lack of emotional expression and speak in monotone.

These students tend to distort their perceptions of the world in such a way that innocent occurrences have special meaning to them (e.g., interpreting an innocent facial expression or tone of voice as being hostile or persecutory). They may experience themselves as especially powerful or important or may believe that people are trying to control or harm them in some way.

The student may experience hallucinations, most commonly voices speaking to them. They may appear to be on drugs. However, that assumption should not be made. Since these students may elicit alarm or fear from others, it is important to get them assistance as soon as possible. If you cannot make sense of their conversation, immediately consult with or refer to Psychological Counseling Services in the Student Health & Wellness Office. If the student is belligerent or acting out, call Campus Safety at 242-7910 or dial 9-911 for immediate assistance.

Response:

The following actions may be helpful:

1. Respond to them with warmth and kindness, but with firmness.
2. If you are comfortable in doing so, see them in a quiet atmosphere to remove extra stimulation from the environment (rather than dealing with them in front of the class).
3. Acknowledge their position or feelings without supporting the mis-perceptions (e.g., I understand you think they are trying to hurt you and I know how real it seems to you, but I didn’t perceive them trying to humiliate you.).
4. Reveal when you have difficulty in understanding them and ask that they repeat or rephrase their communication.
5. Focus on the “here and now” (e.g., “you seem very tense, short of breath”).
6. Acknowledge your concerns and state that you can see they need help. Referral is very important for these students.
The following will not be helpful to this student:

1. Arguing or trying to convince them of the irrationality of their thoughts, as it may just make them defend their position (false perceptions) more.
2. Playing along with their beliefs to not upset them (e.g., maybe you are a prophet).
3. Encouraging further delusions. It is more helpful to switch topics and divert focus to reality issues.
4. Demand that they change their ideas or behavior. Limits on their behavior may need to be imposed but this is best done in consultation with others.
5. Expect customary emotional responses.