

GUIDELINES FOR TEACHERS

*Psychological/Psychiatric
Conditions*

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2024

Psychological/Psychiatric Conditions

Manifestations we might observe in these students:

Students with psychological or psychiatric issues may face several challenges in the academic setting:

- Relational/interpersonal issues
- Behavioral regulation issues
- Limitations in attention capacity
- Constraints on memory, reasoning and processing speed (more pronounced in specific cases or due to certain medications)
- Challenges in maintaining a routine
- Emotional restraint and feelings of shame and insecurities

Challenges in supporting these students

One of the main obstacles to effectively supporting these students is the prevalence of prejudice toward them.

Typically, physical limitations are more readily accepted as conditions that naturally deserve attention.

However, with psychological and psychiatric conditions, not only are their limitations not visible, but also easily misunderstood. Since many symptoms manifest themselves in one's behavior, there is risk in assuming that these can be easily changed, as if they were just a matter of "willpower".

A good starting point is assuming that the person is already doing their best with their condition limiting them. It is not a matter of willpower. Generally, these students experience considerable distress, feel some level of shame associated to their condition and would give anything not to feel as limited as they do.

The clinical issues in this area are varied, with multiple implications. However, there are situations that occur more frequently than others, or carry greater impact in the academic setting. The following are recommendations for two issues of dysregulation that can occur in the academic setting.

What to do in situations of high anxiety or panic attacks:

- Extreme anxiety or panic attacks are the most common situations of dysregulation

- In the classroom setting, escort the student outside of the class to a calm area. If someone calming is present (e.g. a friend or partner), they should be allowed to accompany them.
- Adopt a calm and supportive posture: show patience, be empathetic and willing to help.
- Avoid telling the person to “calm down” or “just relax”. This often only increases anxiety. Things are not as simple as that. By doing so you risk adding stress on the person.
- It may be important to ask for help (GAPsi and FCUL emergency contacts are found at the end of this document), explaining the situation and location. Since the person should not be left alone, ask someone else to make the call if it is possible. Depending on the situation it may be necessary to contact a family member or even 112.
- Avoid surrounding the person. Multiple people surrounding them and providing input can be overwhelming. A close friend can provide comfort, others should step back.
- Rapid breathing may be a sign that the person is hyperventilating, leading to physiological overstimulation. Gently encourage to person to breathe slower or provide a paper bag to breathe into.
- Those having a panic attack are hyper focused on their sensations and scared of losing control. Shifting the conversations to a neutral topic, like their hobbies, or their favorite foods, can help them to step out of this self-monitoring mode. Every time the person focuses on their fears their anxiety will once again increase. Distractions can help manage this anxiety and may need to be repeated multiple times.
- While communicating it can be beneficial to say something like: “I’m here with you and want to help” or “I want to stay with you because I care” instead of saying things like “This will go away”, “Can’t you see that this is not important? You just need to let this go” or “I know what you are feeling, you just need to be strong”.
- Make sure that the student does not leave alone. If 112 was not called, the student should go with a friend or a family member instead of leaving by themselves.

What to do in situations of decompensation or a psychosis crisis?

- Students with schizophrenia that request special accommodations are generally well-medicated, so decompensation events are rare.
- If something happens in the classroom, escort the student outside the class, or give permission to step out (depending on what seems appropriate within the situation). The goal is to create a clam environment for the student.

- Sometimes these situations are preceded by visible agitation. If the teacher or a third party knows the student's condition, they can utilize a calm and gentle approach to help them.
- It may be important to ask for help (GAPsi and FCUL emergency contacts are found at the end of this document), explaining the situation and location. Since the person should not be left alone, ask someone else to make the call if it is possible. Depending on the situation it may be necessary to contact a family member or even 112.
- Stay with the student until specialized help arrives. Even though interacting with the person may be a challenge, remain present. If a close friend offers security they can remain, but others should distance themselves.
- While with the student, logical or rational conversation may not be effective and could increase distress, as their perspective may differ from their current reality. Instead, engage with the central topics the student brings up, allowing a respectful and empathetic interaction.

General safety instructions

Despite the earlier recommendations, prioritize safety and follow these additional guidelines:

- Ensure personal safety. Do not take unnecessary risks.
- If the situation feels unsafe or if you lack the appropriate training, leave and call the FCUL emergency number
- Report the nature of the incident
- Provide the exact location (building, floor, room or campus reference points)
- Wait and follow the emergency teams instructions

Additional guidance on students with special status

In case of doubt about the compensatory measures that the student has taken, contact the colleagues in the department who are responsible for matters regarding the students with Special Education Needs (Necessidades Educativas Especiais – NEE).

For other existing concerns related to psychological or psychiatric conditions, contact GAPsi.

Most students with critical needs are identified and have the status of a student with NEE. However, there may be students who are not flagged. In this case, if any students display particular difficulties and have no NEE status, GAPsi should be contacted so that the best way to respond to the situation can be considered.

GAPsi Contacts:

Internal phone number: 524125

External phone number: 217500435

Email: gapsi@ciencias.ulisboa.pt

Emergency contact in FCUL:

Internal telephone: 20000

External telephone: + 351 217 500 600