

Taming the Elephant in the Room: Tools for Behavior Management in the College Classroom

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ABSTRACT: University faculty often lack training or confidence to manage incidents of minor and major classroom incivility, occurring with increasing frequency and intensity. Concern about this increasingly flavors their teaching preparation and syllabi and finds its way into faculty conversations. The session offers five central experience-based principles which can help accomplish the respectful prevention and management of most incivility without a long list of rules. Stories give life to each principle. The author has 35 years of experience teaching and consulting at the secondary and university levels, and coaching secondary and university faculty.

The single goal of this session is that participants leave empowered with ideas and resources they can apply immediately to their own classroom challenges, and confidence to risk trying ideas that comfortably fit their practice.

The wisest approach to a mutually respectful classroom is proactive prevention, using strategies for trust- and relationship-building. When problems happen,

Principle 1 REACT to a challenge only if you have a real emergency: otherwise, don't react. Think, plan and respond instead.

Principle 2 PREVENT PROBLEMS by proactively building relationships and trust. Specific strategies are offered.

Principle 3 DON'T IGNORE, do respectfully respond to boundary violations. Ignoring inappropriate behavior (in the hope it will go away) is a sign of explicit permission for that same behavior to continue or escalate. Action steps are described.

Principle 4 PREVENT PROBLEMS by regularly seeking feedback about your teaching and the learning environment. Strategies are offered.

Principle 5 SET UP AN EMERGENCY TOOLBOX, with the peer and supervisor support you need. Specific kinds of support are described.

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