

Classroom Problems: *What Can I Do Right Away?*
A Learning Supports Practice Series for Teachers*

Disengaged Students

I am a high school teacher who is extremely concerned about several of students. They are bright, but seem to have encouraged each other to tune out. I think they have started smoking marijuana. Their parents are also concerned.

First considerations involve connecting the students to someone the teens are willing to work with (value, respect, trust) and who has the ability to engage the teens in the process. This usually means someone who has solid counseling skills, including knowing not to push too soon and too much with respect to limits, advice, and consequences. At first, this means looking at the problem from the teens' perspective and explore solutions through a mutual problem solving process.

It is important to provide some positive and valued alternative activities as a way to engage them and to shifts the focus from the behavior of concern. *It is essential to engage the teens in making their own decisions from among options they value.*

Discuss with them both supportive interventions and activities that can effect major changes in current habit patterns (e.g., changes related to activities and school routines, peer associations, relationships with staff). Offer enrichment opportunities related to their special interests (computers, art, photography). If feasible, enable enrollment in an enrichment course elsewhere (e.g., at a local community college).

Plans also need to made for out of school time. Again, the emphasis is on engaging them in valued prosocial activities (sports, a part-time job, etc.). And, as feasible, engage the parents in all this (and especially in addressing problems at home).

Note: The Center has a range of resources related to this topic. For example, see the following:

> *Motivation* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/motiv.htm>

> *Working with Disengaged Students* –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/disengagedstudents.pdf>

> *Engaging and Re-engaging Students in Learning at School* –
<http://www.smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/engagingandre-engagingstudents.pdf>

> *Substance Abuse* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p3001_03.htm

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Often the best way to learn is by addressing a specific concern that needs an immediate response.

With this in mind, the Center is producing a series of resources focused on daily classroom dilemmas teachers experience and some initial ways to deal with such concerns. The emphasis is on engaging and re-engaging students in classroom learning.

As a school moves to develop a unified and comprehensive system of learning supports, this series can help augment professional development by providing a stimulus for discussion by teachers and other staff.

What can I do right away?

To date, this learning supports practice series for teachers includes the following topics:

- > *Bullying* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/bullypn.pdf>
- > *Disengaged Students* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/disengpn.pdf>
- > *Fidgety Students* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/fidgetypn.pdf>
- > *Homework Avoidance* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/homeworkpn.pdf>
- > *Students in Distress* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/distresspn.pdf>
- > *Minimizing Referrals out of the Classroom* –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/referralspn.pdf>
- > *Addressing Neighborhood Problems that Affect the School* –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/neighborpn.pdf>

See the complete series and other resources for professional development at
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>
(Click on Resources/Publications)

**Feel free to email similar concerns to the Center for discussion as part of
our weekly community of practice listserv. See**
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/mhpractitioner/practitioner.pdf>

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