

# Creating Harmony in the **Virtual** Classroom:

A Supplemental Guide for  
Addressing Student Behavior



FIT

Dean of Students Office  
Division of Enrollment Management & Student Success

# Creating Harmony in the Virtual Classroom: A Supplemental Guide for Addressing Student Behavior

The following guide serves as a supplement to the quick reference [Creating Harmony in the Classroom: Addressing Student Behavior](#).

Everyone across the world has been facing significant change in our daily lives. We are adjusting and trying to make sense of what is going on. Within the higher educational system, college students have been and will continue to transition to online education, socially distancing from peer groups and for many, hunkering down in their family homes trying to find a corner, a computer and a connection. Not easy for many. Faculty across disciplines have been scrambling to develop new means of course delivery and assessment as they convert in-person classes to remote learning. Everyone is worried about their health and safety and the health and safety of their loved ones.

We know that all this (and more) creates stress, but we also know that stress is a normal and even necessary part of life. As we all make this journey through life now impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, here are some ideas on how to help students, and yourself adjust and cope with everything that is going on.

Always keep in mind that as a professor, your calm and sure presence will set the course for students to also remain calm. Your calm will induce calmness in others across the virtual distance and help bring the class community together online.

## **The tone in your virtual classroom:**

Online classroom environments, like in-person ones, tend to be dynamic and the manner and amount in which individuals interact with each other and actively participate depends in part on the tone, the behavioral standards and the level of trust in the safety of the forum established by the person managing the class. (Are students using both audio and video to participate?) Setting the right tone is an essential element when it comes to creating and maintaining a harmonious remote classroom environment. Here are some ideas to consider:

- It is important to get to know your students and help them get to know each other. Students may need assistance connecting with each other as they will not have the in person interaction.
  - Ask them to introduce themselves, and share something that they love to do, like a hobby. Perhaps ask them what they are most looking forward to this semester.
  - Ask them for their preferred pronoun and name.
  - Arrange how class members will communicate online.
- Provide clear behavioral expectations to students through established remote classroom policies. Write down your expectations on an official course document such as your syllabus. Go over these with the students. You can go around and have students take turns reading these out loud so that everyone is a participant in understanding these standards or you could make a video and play it for them during class.
- Ask students if they wish to add something to the online standards.

- Talk about your expectations for classroom dialogue and what you envision in the remote classroom environment.

### **When things start to get stressful in your virtual classroom:**

- Consider addressing the normal stress right from the start.
  - “Doing some of this work remotely is trying for all of us but I want to reassure you that I am here to support you in getting through this course material and mastering it.”
- Remind students what is at stake.
  - “We are doing this to flatten the curve and to protect our most vulnerable people. Thank you for helping with this effort. I’m proud of all of you.”
- Be patient with students AND yourself.
  - “This may take a little time to get all the kinks worked out.”
  - “I don’t know the answer to that but I will email you all later.”
- Be reassuring and encourage positivity.
  - “I know this seems like a lot right now but I know that you can do it.”
  - “We will all get the hang of this very soon.”
  - “A vaccine is coming.”
- Explain any strategies for how to study remotely:
  - “Ensure that you have a private space to do your coursework, free from distraction.”
  - “Let others at home know that you will be busy when courses are taught.”
  - “Work to develop a schedule.”

If the entire class seems to be getting riled up, consider gathering the focus of the students:

- “Let’s all take a moment and take a few deep breaths.” Count it out: “inhale, 1, 2, 3, 4...exhale 1, 2, 3, 4”.
- “I want everyone to stand up, take a quick walk around the room and come back.”

If an individual student seems distressed:

- Schedule a private time to communicate.
- Ask how they are doing or describe what you are observing, e.g. “You have made quite a few comments about your mood being down. Are you struggling yourself?”
- The student may explain things in a way that leads you to feel no other action is needed. E.g., they may say they are already in treatment or that it just felt good to talk to their professor.
- If you remain concerned, have the student contact the [Counseling Center](#) to talk to a counselor – contact information is below.
- Follow up later and ask if the student received support and/or if they need anything else.
- *Any student who mentions suicidal thoughts should contact the Counseling Center ASAP or call 911 or 1-800-NYC-WELL if in immediate risk of harm.*
- Submit a [Care Report](#) as an additional measure so that follow up can take place through the Dean of Students.

- As courses progress, consider adding stress management tips (some can be found on the [Counseling Center's](#) website) during class time and place focus on building your classes' online community and increasing engagement.
- As needed refer to the quick reference guide [Creating Harmony in the Classroom: Addressing Student Behavior](#) which provides further information and discusses addressing negative and/or concerning behavior.

### Resources from FIT Counseling Center

FIT students are supported by the Counseling Center's team of knowledgeable and compassionate licensed professionals who understand the complexities of balancing work and life while learning online.

If your student needs help with a mental health issue, or is having thoughts about harming him or herself or others, please encourage them to call the Counseling Center at 212-217-4260 or chat with us through their student portal.

The Counseling Center is open from 9 am to 5 pm Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and later on Tuesday and Thursday from 9 am until 7 pm in the evening. A counselor will help determine what resources would best serve each student.

### Contact the FIT Counseling Center

Call 212-217-4260, or Live Chat to make an appointment: Log in to the [FIT Health Portal](#) using your FIT username and password. Click 'Chat' and then 'New Chat.' Live Chat hours: Monday through Friday 12pm - 2pm.

- For more information about services and resources visit the Counseling Center webpage <http://www.fitnyc.edu/counseling-services/index.php>

If a student is in crisis on campus, please call **FIT Public Safety** at 212-217-7777.

For **Mental Health Emergencies**, students should contact 1-800-NYC-WELL (press 2), or 911.

If your student is looking for **external mental health providers**, they can use the [Psychology Today Therapist Finder](#). (We recommend that they first contact their insurance company). Students can also call the Counseling Center for tele-therapy referrals nation-wide and for referrals in the New York City area.

- You may suggest that your student considers using mental health apps such as Headspace <https://www.headspace.com> for relaxation, mood tracking, sleep or other issues.
- The Steve Fund <https://www.stevelfund.org> is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting the mental health and emotional well-being of college/university students of color.
- Encourage your students to check out [FIT Health Service's Instagram](#) for tips from the Counseling Center in coping with social distancing among other great health and wellness related information.

## **The CARE Team**

If you are concerned about a student who is not responding to your efforts to help (i.e., has been referred to the Counseling Center but will not make contact, has been contacted but is continuing to decline) consider contacting the [CARE Team](#). Please fill out an [Incident Communication Form](#). A care team representative can strategize ways to ensure that the student gets the help they need.

We are all in this together. Thank you for your student support!