

Guidance for dealing with classroom disruptions



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While most classes at Queen’s University proceed smoothly, there are occasions when disruptions may occur.

In most of these instances, instructors can effectively draw on their classroom management skills to address these disturbances and maintain a productive learning environment. When significant disruptions occur, they can impact the educational experience and the well-being of those involved. As instructors, when we are faced with a significant disruption our primary goal is to minimize its impact and, if possible, resume planned classroom activities.



While difficult conversations are not considered significant classroom disruptions, they can present challenges in maintaining a respectful and productive learning environment. For guidance on navigating sensitive topics or managing complex classroom dynamics, Queen’s **Centre for Teaching and Learning** offers valuable resources on [Managing Difficult Conversations](#). These resources provide practical strategies for instructors to support constructive dialogue and foster inclusivity during moments of tension.

This document is intended to provide instructors practical advice on responding to various scenarios and supporting students who may be affected by disruptions. Refer to the [Supporting Students in Distress](#) resource for guidance on recognizing signs of student distress, responding with compassion, and connecting students to appropriate support services such as [Care Support Services](#). Instructors are encouraged to use their judgment and choose strategies that are most appropriate for the circumstances they encounter. Although instructors are primarily responsible for managing classroom disruptions, support is available, and this document provides details on where and how to seek it.

General guidance for all incidents:



Plan ahead: Reflect on the scenarios below and consider how you would respond. Consider adding the Queen’s **Emergency Report Centre** number (613-533-6111) to a cell phone. Having the [SeQure App installed](#) on a mobile device allows you to receive important information about campus emergencies, and report incidents.



Room location: All centrally managed classrooms have emergency contact posters with the name and location of the room. This is information you will need to share if calling Queen’s **Emergency Report Centre**.



Ending class early: Depending on the severity of the incident, it is appropriate to end the class early. If your instruction is disrupted, communicate your contingency plans to your students. These options might include posting asynchronous lecture notes later in the day or shifting to remote instruction.



Acknowledge and support: After any disruption, immediately acknowledge the incident's impact. Offer support and resources such as those found on the [Care Support Services website](#).

Class disrupted by outside group

External groups may sometimes enter a classroom unannounced to protest or raise awareness of a cause. These disruptions can involve demonstrations, distributing flyers, or making announcements, potentially creating confusion, unease and interrupting the flow of the class.



- **Step in:** If you judge it safe to do so, assert your leadership over the classroom. A calm but direct response can assist in establishing control and help deescalate the situation.
- **Options for response:** You may choose to:
 - Engage with the group briefly, offering them an opportunity to speak for a set period of your choosing; or
 - Ask them to leave; *“You are interrupting this class. I would like you to stop and to please leave now.”* or
 - If the disruption continues, call Queen’s **Emergency Report Centre** (613-533-6111 for on campus emergency responses).
- **Acknowledge and support:** After the incident, acknowledge to students that a disruption occurred, and that such disruptions can be unsettling. Offer time to discuss the event and offer information for ongoing supports.
- **Non-emergency reporting:** After the incident, report the incident to **Campus Security** (dial 613-533-6080 for non-emergencies)

Class disrupted by students



Disruptions may arise from students within the class, such as organized protests, loud disagreements, or behaviour that interferes with the learning process.

- **Plan ahead:** Consider if it is appropriate to:
 - Include a statement about the Student Code of Conduct in the course outline and review it in the first class.
 - Take time to articulate or co-develop community codes of practice that guide respectful, generous, and patient ways of engaging with members of the classroom community and with challenging academic material.
- **Initial response:** If the reason for the disruption is unclear, calmly ask, *“Why are you interrupting this class?”* Request that students refrain from disrupting the session and offer to engage with them outside of class time to discuss their concerns further.
- **Respectful environment:** Remind students of the class’ community codes and that Queen’s University is committed to fostering a respectful and inclusive learning environment. You may use language such as:

“Queen’s University values respectful and constructive dialogue. Our classroom is a space where all voices should be heard thoughtfully, and it’s essential that we express our opinions in ways that do not disrupt others’ learning experiences.”
- **Code of conduct:** Remind students that their actions should align to the **Queen’s University Student Code of Conduct**, which emphasizes respect, fairness, and personal responsibility. You may say:

“The Student Code of Conduct outlines expectations for respectful behaviour and integrity within our University community. Actions that interfere with others’ ability to learn, or that violate these principles, may result in sanctions.”
- **Escalation:** If the disruption persists, politely ask the student(s) to leave. Should the disruption continue or escalate, contact the Queen’s **Emergency Report Centre** (613-533-6111).
- **Consider underlying factors:** Reflect on the reasons behind the students’ disruptive behaviour to assess whether a referral to **Care Support Services** is appropriate. If needed, referrals can be made through [Care Support Services](#), which will be supported by the [Student Conduct and Care](#) unit.
- **Reporting:** If the incident contravenes university policies, report the details to your Department Head (or Associate Dean in non-departmentalized units) for follow-up, and if appropriate, it may be escalated through the university’s non-academic misconduct process. After a non-emergency incident, you can also report the incident to **Campus Security** (dial 613-533-6080 for non-emergencies).

Online Class Disruptions

In online learning environments, disruptions may occur through unauthorized individuals joining a class or session and interfering (e.g., “Zoom Bombing”) or through disruptive students. These intrusions, such as inappropriate content sharing or interrupting discussions, can derail the learning experience.



- **Plan ahead:** Before the session, familiarize yourself with the platform’s security features, such as enabling waiting rooms, restricting screen sharing, and disabling participant renaming.
- **Control measures:** Suspend the disrupter’s participation using available security controls, remove them if necessary, and continue with the class if possible.
- **Acknowledge and support:** After the incident, acknowledge to students that a disruption occurred, and that such disruptions can be unsettling. Offer time to discuss the event and offer information for ongoing supports.
- **Reporting:** If interruption is a threat, contact Queen’s **Emergency Report Centre** (613-533-6111). Use the appropriate “report user” tool to report the disruptive participant to the tool’s trust and safety team.
- **Consider underlying factors:** If disrupted by a student, reflect on the reasons behind the behaviour to assess whether a referral to **Care Support Services** is appropriate. If needed, referrals can be made through [Care Support Services](#), which will be supported by the [Student Conduct and Care](#) unit.

Medical Incident in Class

A student experiencing a medical situation during class, such as a seizure or fainting, can be alarming in the moment. Prompt action is required to ensure the student receives proper care while maintaining a calm atmosphere in the classroom.



- **Contact Emergency Services:** For life-threatening situations or acute medical emergencies, such as anaphylactic allergic reactions, call 911 directly. For less serious incidents, such as slips, falls, or other non-life-threatening issues, contact Queen’s 24-hour **Emergency Report Centre** (613-533-6111). Centrally managed classrooms have emergency contact posters with the name and location of the classroom.
- **Provide or coordinate aid:** If you have first aid training, provide basic first aid. If not, ask if anyone in the class with first aid training can assist.
- **Manage bystanders:** Create space by asking people to move back. Consider asking students to leave the classroom during the event.
- **Acknowledge and support:** After the incident, acknowledge to students that a disruption occurred, and that such disruptions can be unsettling. Offer time to discuss the event if appropriate. Provide information about available support services.

Unannounced arrival of Campus Security or Police

Police or campus security may enter a classroom without prior notice, typically as part of an active investigation or when immediate safety concerns arise. This can cause confusion or alarm, requiring a calm response from the instructor while following directions.



- **Assess and engage:** Identify yourself as the instructor, so that information about the situation and the needs of campus security or the police can be communicated to you. Remaining calm helps set a tone for the class that can reduce the impact of the disruption.
- **Respond:** Follow the guidance provided by security or police, and assist, as directed, in communicating and providing direction to students.
- **Acknowledge and support:** After the incident, acknowledge to students that an interruption occurred, and that such incidents can be unsettling. Offer time to discuss the event and offer information for ongoing supports.

Potentially dangerous incidents

Situations involving a potential threat to the safety of students or instructors in the classroom require immediate action, and instructors need to be prepared to alert emergency services and take precautionary measures.



- **Immediate Action:** If an active threat arises, call 911 immediately, followed by Queen's **Emergency Report Centre** (613-533-6111).
- **Acknowledge and support:** After the situation is safe, acknowledge to students that a disruption occurred, and that such disruptions can be unsettling. Offer time to discuss the event and offer information for ongoing supports.

Further Resources

- **Campus Security:** 613-533-6111 (24-hour emergency contact)
- **Queen's Student Wellness Services:** 613-533-2506
- **Queen's Care Support Services:** [Online Resources](#)
- **Verbal Intervention Training:** Contact the Manager, Security Risk and Training (613-533-6733) for information on this half-day course, which [equips staff with skills to manage crisis behaviours](#).
- **Student Wellness Services Training:** [SWS offers workshops](#) such as ASIST, safeTALK, and sessions on responding to students in distress.
- **Employee and Family Assistance Program:** Available to all employees, [TELUS Health One offers confidential, professional, and personalized wellness services](#).
- **Emergency preparedness:** [Queen's Emergency Preparedness](#) website.

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This document was based on "[Guidance for dealing with classroom disruptions](#)"(2022) authored collaboratively by the Committee of Associate Deans Academic, Associate Deans Students at the University of British Columbia and used with permission.