**Suspicious and Paranoid Students**

Suspicious students are tense, cautious, mistrustful, and may have few friends. These students tend to interpret a minor oversight as a significant personal rejection and often overreact to insignificant occurrences. Usually they are overly concerned with fairness and with being treated equally. They project blame on to others and will express anger.

Paranoid students or those with poor reality contact have difficulty distinguishing “fantasy” from reality. Their thinking is typically illogical, confused or irrational. Their emotional responses and their behavior may be bizarre and disturbing.

The following are statements you may hear from a suspicious or paranoid student:

* **I know that you (they) are out to get me.**
* **I feel people spying on me.**
* **If I’m good in class then God will love me.**
* **If I get an A then my mom will get a job.**
* **The others are sabotaging me.**

HELPFUL

* Send clear, consistent messages regarding what you are willing to do and what you expect.
* Express compassion without being overly friendly or familiar.
* Be aware of personal boundaries and space when interacting (keep a comfortable distance, both physically and emotionally).
* Acknowledge the student’s feelings or fears without supporting his/her misperceptions.
* Acknowledge your concern and verbalize that he/she needs help.
* Respond with warmth and kindness.

NOT HELPFUL

* Do **not** be overly warm or sympathetically close to the student.
* Do **not** flatter the student, laugh with him/her or be humorous.
* Do **not** assure him/her that you are a friend or advocate.
* Do **not** argue or try to convince the student of the irrationality of his/her thinking, as this commonly produces a stronger defense of false perception.
* Do **not** play along (e.g.“Oh yes, I hear voices, devil, etc.”).
* Do **not** expect customary emotional responses.

**The Paranoid Student**

**Student Symptoms:**

* Feelings of
* Being the focal point of everyone’s behavior
* Tension
* Nervousness
* Caution
* Inadequacy
* Misinterpret minor oversights as significant personal rejection.
* Overreact to insignificant occurrences.
* Overly concerned with fairness, being treated equally.
* Difficulty with closeness or warmth.
* Project blame onto others.
* Express anger in roundabout ways.

**Instructor/Staff Response**

DO:

* Send clear, consistent messages
* What you will do
* What you expect
* Express compassion without intimate friendship.
* Maintain a professional distance from the student.
* Refer student to BCAT for assistance.

DON’T:

* Become a personal friend of the student.
* Become overly warm, nurturing or personal.
* Flatter, humor or “be cute” to relieve your won anxiety.
* Reinforce their beliefs.
* Try to argue against their beliefs.