THE STUDENT WHO IS IN POOR CONTACT WITH REALITY

(May appear to be Severely Disoriented)

These students have difficulty distinguishing fantasy from reality, the dream from the waking state. Their thinking is typically illogical, confused, disturbed or irrational; they may have irrational beliefs, and exhibit bizarre or inappropriate behavior; and their emotional responses may be incongruent or inappropriate for the situation. They may experience hallucinations and may report hearing voices or seeing things no one else can. If they are speaking in class or turning in academic assignments, their work may be unintelligible and they may use words that don’t make sense (may coin new words). While this student may elicit alarm or fear from others, they are generally not dangerous and are more frightened and overwhelmed by you than you are by them. If you cannot make sense of their work or their speech, they may be in need of immediate assistance.

**Facts about Psychotic Thinking**

The main feature of psychotic thinking is “being disconnected from reality.”

**SYMPTOMS CAN INCLUDE:**

* speech that makes no sense
* extremely odd or eccentric behavior
* significantly inappropriate or an utter lack of emotion
* bizarre behavior that indicates hallucinations
* strange beliefs that involve a serious misinterpretation of reality
* social withdrawal
* inability to connect with or track normal interpersonal communication
* extreme and unwarranted suspicion

**Bipolar disorder** involves periods of serious depression which can be combined with periods of extreme euphoria and frenzied thinking and behavior, the latter of which can reflect a poor connection with reality. A person with bipolar disorder can appear psychotic.

**Psychological illnesses that involve psychotic features** often have an onset between the late teens and early 30s.

**WHAT TO DO:**

* Respond with warmth and kindness, but with firm reasoning. Consult with Disability Support Services Counselors.
* Speak to the student in a direct and concrete manner regarding your plan for getting him/her to a safe environment. (“I am worried you are having trouble tracking things right now, and I think it would be best for you to come with me to speak with someone about this so you can feel safe again.”)
* Recognize that psychotic states can involve extreme emotion or lack of emotion and intense fear to the point of paranoia.
* Recognize that a student in this state may be dangerous to self or others.

*HELPING the Student Who is in Poor Contact with Reality*

**WHAT NOT TO DO:**

* Don’t presume the student will be able to care for him/herself.
* Don’t agitate the student with questions, pressure, etc. (“You have to do something about yourself, as you are really upsetting others.”)
* Don’t argue with unrealistic thoughts. (“Don’t think that; it makes no sense and you know it’s not real.”)
* Don’t try to convince them of the irrationality of their thinking. This commonly strengthens the defense of their false perceptions.
* Don’t play along with or encourage further discussion of the delusion processes, e.g., “Oh yes, I hear the voices (or see the devil)”
* Don’t presume that the student understands you.
* Don’t expect customary or usual emotional responses.
* Don’t allow friends to care for that student without getting professional advice.
* Getting locked into one way of dealing with the student. Be flexible.
* Don’t presume the family knows about the student’s condition.
* Don’t presume that the student has a family or a network of support.

# Contact the MCC College Police if it appears the student is a danger to themselves or others:

***531-622-2222 or from campus phone, 2-2222.***

\*\**When in doubt, if any personal information the student tells you raises red flags, consult with* the Student Advocacy and Accountability team. <https://webapps.mccneb.edu/bcat/>