



Preventing Stop/Drop Outs

Responding to a student who is thinking about stopping or dropping out can be extremely challenging.

Following a recent webinar on this topic, we compiled a handy Q&A you can use to help with some of the most asked questions — including best practices, techniques for talking with students who want to throw in the towel, and the importance of connecting with students via their preferred method of communication. We hope you find this useful.



QUESTION ONE

What are some best practices for using the CLEAR framework if you're connected with a student via email or text versus in person?

ANSWER

Text and email give you a little more time to plan out what you're going to say and think through exactly how you're going to confirm and legitimize the student's statements. You can use the CLEAR framework in email and in text but just know that there may be a slower response.

When you're using an email or text to evaluate, only ask or answer one or two questions. With anything more than that, the student will get overwhelmed and won't answer any of the questions.

And just know that some conversations are best addressed via phone or Zoom and it's going to be up to you to know when to say "I know we've been talking via text (or email), but this conversation is important enough that a quick phone call or video chat seems like the best way to proceed." When the situation calls for it, saying something like "This is going to be best addressed with us talking live instead of going back and forth over several days via text" will also help with transparency and building trust.

For additional resources, view the [on-demand trainings](#).



QUESTION TWO

Many of us are working well outside our traditional/established roles — we're folks who aren't advisors or coaches and don't often have direct contact with students. What's the best way to be transparent about our new roles when talking with students?

ANSWER

It can be as simple as telling the student, "Hey listen, this is a bit outside my regular wheelhouse, but it's my role to make sure that I'm fully understanding you so we can get you set up for success." And even if your usual role is not to work directly with students, you can still use the CLEAR framework to get them to the best person to support them. Use your social capital and your expertise in your institution to say, "Okay, based on what I'm hearing you go through, this would be the best department or this would be the best person to connect you with."



QUESTION THREE

What are some techniques you use to pull students "off the ledge" when they just want to give up?

ANSWER

When a student's basic needs aren't being met, deciding whether to continue in school and seek this more advanced opportunity is really hard. So it's important to ask them questions around their basic needs — things like "Are you safe?" and "Can you feed your family?"

If their basic needs are being met and what's happening is that they're having anxiety or are feeling overwhelmed, it's important to listen to their story. Help them figure out what they can do to take care of themselves (and/or their family) before they make a decision.

Through speaking with the student and getting more details, you might end up saying something like "I hear that you're still feeling overwhelmed and have a lot of decisions you're trying to sort through — decisions that will impact your life right now. What I would recommend for you is to break down all the decisions you're trying to make, prioritize them, and take things one step at a time. What's the first one you want to start with? How can we support you with that?"

You can also offer to follow up in a week or so, giving them time to reflect, then come back to you to share their insights and thoughts so they don't feel like they have to make the decision solely on their own. Sometimes when using the CLEAR framework, the student doesn't make a decision, but in what they say, you get a better sense of the next steps they need to take — possibly delaying the decision to a time when their emotions are no longer heightened and their critical thinking is not clouded by the stress they're under now.

Ultimately, if they're so overwhelmed with everything that they do want to give up on school for now, that's OK. You can help them make a plan for how they're going to take care of themselves during this time so that they can return to "normal" life and their educational path in the future. When a student feels cared for by you, they'll come back to you. Care for them and make sure that your metaphorical door is open to them so they can always come back.





QUESTION FOUR

How much about yourself should you share with a student in order to help create that bond?

ANSWER

It's great to strategically share things about yourself and your experience. But the conversation should never be about you. Always make it student-focused. The reality is that they're probably not all that interested in what you're going through. So share less about yourself and don't speak a lot. Sharing too much about yourself can have the unintended consequence of a student that really cares about you as well and wants to support you and solve your problems.

So the goal is to introduce who you are, what you hope to do, and follow through on that expectation. That in and of itself will support you in gaining credibility and trust.

To view the on-demand training "[Gaining Trust with a Student](#)"



QUESTION FIVE

How do you make the case for students who are hesitant to do live communication? I have encountered students who don't like phone calls or Zoom meetings. What's the best way to support them?

ANSWER

Some students just don't like communicating via phone or Zoom — and that's OK. The key is to meet them where they're at. If they prefer text or email, then do your best to connect with and engage them via text and email. Any way you can build a relationship with them is great, and if that means connecting through written communication, then that's the way you do it.



QUESTION SIX

What do you do when you get a student who doesn't want to acknowledge any academic or financial concern? How do you deal with a student who wants to discuss anything and everything except the issue at hand, since avoidance and coping strategies are the norm for them?

ANSWER

Sometimes what seems like denial is really embarrassment or shame. In cases like this, you need to dig deep and read between the lines. "I hear you saying that you're upset with your professor, but I'm also wondering if there's something about the class itself you don't like." And when they talk about "financial aid," are they really talking about money to cover classes at school, or are they actually worried about paying rent or having their electricity turned off for a late bill?



A final note

Students are often afraid to say something as simple as “I don’t know how to do Zoom” or “I don’t know how to log into my online classes.” It helps to normalize their situation. Students often feel like they’re the only one who doesn’t get it, which just isn’t true. In fact, many students are in the same boat and feeling the same way. Some of their professors and instructors are feeling the same way too. Yet these difficulties can lead to feelings of being alone and feeling shame, too scared to speak up. By normalizing the experience, you’re telling them that they’re not alone and they’re not the first (or only) person to have the same issue. This can be a way to get the student to open up and feel more comfortable, knowing that they’re not the only one experiencing these issues.

More resources are available for [students considering stopping or dropping out](#)