



KNOWING WHEN TO ESCALATE - 5 QUICK TIPS

1. *Know the warning signs*

There are some 'classic' scenarios you will want to be aware of that often warrant a formal process for handling the complaint. These can include cases where there is a large power difference between the people in question; when the problem is deeply rooted and extends back many years; the problem may involve serious or possibly criminal allegations; or where multiple people in the situation are involved in a sexual relationship. Know in advance who is on campus that can help you: human resources, the counseling center, even the provost's office. Find out who they are and what they offer before you find yourself in need of them.

2. *Have a third party present*

In cases where emotions are running very high, such as when you're delivering bad news or receiving a complaint from an unusually volatile individual, it can be beneficial to ask a colleague to sit in on the meeting to act as a witness. Sometimes people who are wrapped up in a problem can display selective hearing for what they were told during a meeting. Some people may have a history of turning on those who have tried to help them. In these cases it can be particularly helpful to have another person present during the meeting, both to record what was said, and to help maintain a level of calmness.

3. *Avoid false compassion*

You can't rescue people from the natural consequences of their own bad choices. While it can pay to give extra chances to people, be sure to consider the repercussions of doing so. False compassion can cost time and money by encouraging repeated poor performance or behavior. Further, when the line is finally drawn, it will incur unpleasant consequences and the resulting problem may be much more difficult to handle than the outcome of an even-handed application of the rules. Even worse, granting exceptions to rules may make them unenforceable and lead to claims that they are enforced arbitrarily or in a discriminatory fashion.

4. *Trust your instincts*

If you're worried that someone may be in danger when you're dealing with a situation, trust your instincts and call upon someone else in the University for help. Be sure to choose someone you trust who will not talk about the situation beyond the appropriate boundaries. No one will think less of you for asking for help and it's far better to be safe than sorry.

5. *Don't believe everything you hear...*

Sometimes a fantastical story is just that – fantasy. If someone tells you that “everybody knows” about a certain aspect of a situation, dig a bit deeper and ask how that person heard about it. Go for specifics: ask for dates, times, places and names of people involved who may have relevant information. Many widely known “truths” have no factual basis. Stick to the facts.

