



# Higher Ed Handbook for **Disengaged** **Students**



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# What are the Signs of Disengaged Students?



It's no secret that the COVID-19 pandemic created many challenges for universities and Higher Ed professionals over the past few years. Even now, as we seek the return to normalcy, we're all working together to navigate a new path forward.

Of course, this has been equally true for our students whose education was totally disrupted by virtual classes, social distancing, uncertainty, being back at home, and significant numbers contracting COVID themselves.

College students reported [record levels of burnout and anxiety](#) in the wake of the pandemic.

When people are burned out, they tend to disengage. As an academic advisor, recognizing those signs of disengagement early and having ready-to-go plans in place are key to the role.

So, what does disengagement look like?

It can take many different forms because everyone responds differently when they're faced with challenges. There's no universal red flag to look for, but there are some trends of which academic advisors should be mindful.

Some of the common signs of disengagement among college students include:

- ◆ Missing classes
- ◆ Skipping meetings
- ◆ Infrequent attendance
- ◆ Minimal participation
- ◆ Not completing assignments
- ◆ GPA dropping

## Why Do Students Become Disengaged?

When schools primarily interact with their students in an academic context, it can be easy to forget that students have many other priorities in their lives that they're balancing besides their schoolwork.

In every term, you can be certain that some of your students will be struggling with life challenges, whether that's in personal situations with friends or family, their physical or mental health, or stress from their workload.

On top of that, you'll undoubtedly have students facing academic challenges, whether that's understanding the material, difficult classroom experiences, or too much work with not enough time to get it done.

What's important to remember is that **everyone responds differently to challenging situations.**



# Building a Plan for Disengaged Students



Having a plan in place will go a long way toward student engagement and retention. If you're able to anticipate these situations and create proactive solutions, then you'll not only help your bottom line but you'll help you students who need it most—all while strengthening your relationships with your student population.

As the saying goes, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

As you build your support system for disengaged students, think of this in two different ways:

1. How to respond when these situations arise **(AKA: The Short-Term Plan)**
2. How to help struggling students get back on track **(AKA: The Long-Term Plan)**

Let's take a look at how each of these works and what you can do to be ready.

## The Short-Term Plan

The first thing you need to be able to do is quickly identify those students who show signs of disengagement. As we already shared, many students will not admit they need help—even when asked.

That's why it's good to have a [software solution](#) in place that'll help you recognize these signs immediately and take action. With the right tool, you can set triggers for signs of disengagement, such as missing a certain amount of classes or GPA falling below a certain threshold. These touchpoints can also be automated—more on that in the next section!

When these triggers are activated, you can send thoughtful, helpful, and proactive communication [across multiple channels](#) to meet your students where they are and let them know that you're there for them.

The tone is *super* important in these communications. Lead with compassion and understanding instead of pointing out that they've missed another class or are doing something wrong. Be warm, encouraging, and an advocate for their success.

Another option you could try is to create a peer-to-peer “buddy system” among classmates. This way, you don't have to solely rely on the faculty-to-student dynamic. It might be easier for students to be open about what they're going through when they're not fearful that it'll go on their record or negatively affect their status at school.







## The Long-Term Plan

Once you've alleviated the immediate challenges, your next task as an advisor is to help set the student up for long-term success, which can mean many different things.

If a student is struggling in class, for example, maybe you can work with the student's professors to get them extended deadlines or make-up work opportunities.

If the student's issues are outside of school, you can advocate on their behalf for community resources they may need, such as counseling, social work, or law enforcement, depending on the situation.

**Remember, first and foremost it's about helping the *individual*, not the student.**

This means that, above all, you should be invested in helping them navigate whatever is happening in their lives, not merely getting them back on track in the classroom. There's a deeper sincerity to it—your students will be able to feel the difference when you're invested in their holistic wellness as opposed to just checking off a box to not skip class.

It's also a good idea to look for trends at your institution to see what's happening on a larger scale. If a lot of students are missing classes, for example, it may be that the classroom experience is not engaging enough.

Here's a helpful blog post you can read to gauge whether your student experience on campus is hitting all of the right notes:

**Are You Providing  
a Stale Student  
Experience?  
Here's How to Tell**



# How to Leverage Software Automation with Disengaged Students

When it comes to supporting disengaged students, software automation is your friend. Having tools in place can help you identify the symptoms of disengaged students before they turn into larger, harder-to-solve problems.

Remember, many students will never speak up to ask for help. If you wait until a professor brings the issue forward or a student misses too many classes, then it's likely too late to do anything about it.

However, with the right software in place, you can:

- ◆ **Identify the symptoms** of disengaged students early
- ◆ Create **triggers** based on the symptoms of disengaged students
- ◆ Build **internal alerts** to notify key stakeholders of when a student is at risk
- ◆ Send **external communication** to the students
- ◆ **Update the student's record** to track what's going on
- ◆ **Follow up** with students, faculty, administrators, and anyone else who needs to be in the loop

To learn more about how automation can help you, check out our resource: **Workflow Automation: Unlocking the Secret to Increasing Efficiency and Improving the Bottom Line.**



Ultimately, this is all about building trust, developing relationships with your students, being a helping hand in trying times, and setting them up for success.

If you want to learn more about how having software can help you provide better student experiences and increase student retention, then **schedule a demo** and we'll show you the way!