POOR CONTACT with REALITY

Students in poor contact with reality have difficulty distinguishing “fantasy” from reality. Their thinking is typically illogical, confused or irrational (e.g., speech patterns that jump from one topic to another with no meaningful connection); their emotional responses may be incongruent or inappropriate; and their behavior may be bizarre and disturbing.

These students may experience hallucinations, often auditory, and may report hearing voices (e.g., someone is trying to harm/control them).

WHILE THESE STUDENTS MAY ELICIT ALARM OR FEAR FROM OTHERS, THEY GENERALLY ARE NOT DANGEROUS OR VIOLENT. If you cannot make sense of the student’s conversation, try to consult with or refer him/her for counseling as soon as possible.

Helpful to:
- Respond with warmth and kindness. Use firm reasoning.
- Remove extra stimulation from the environment (e.g., turn off the radio, step outside a noisy room).
- Acknowledge your concerns and verbalize their need for help.
- Acknowledge their feelings or fears without supporting the misperceptions (e.g., “I understand you think someone is following you, and it must seem real to you, but I don’t see anyone and I believe you are safe.”)
- Acknowledge your difficulty in understanding them and ask for clarification.
- Focus on the “here and now”.

Not helpful to:
- Argue or try to convince them of the irrationality of their thinking as this commonly produces a stronger defense of the false perception.
- Play along (e.g., “Oh, yes, I hear voices, see the devil, etc…”)
- Encourage further discussion of the delusional processes.
- Demand, command, or order them to do something to change their perceptions.
- Expect customary social and emotional responses.