

Reunion Weekend Support & De-escalation Guide

For Vassar Student Employees Assisting with Alumni Events

Training handout for event briefings, shift leads, and quick-reference use

Core message

You are not expected to investigate, diagnose, mediate a political conflict, enforce policy alone, or physically intervene. Your job is to notice, steady the moment, set simple limits, and get the right backup involved.

Purpose

Reunion Weekend brings alums, families, guests, students, staff, faculty, and community members back into shared campus spaces. Most interactions will be warm and ordinary. Some may become tense because of alcohol use, trauma reminders, identity-based conflict, sexual misconduct concerns, protest activity, or guests who do not understand current campus expectations. This guide gives student employees simple language and decision points for common conflict scenarios. It is designed to give practical guidance on what to notice, what to say, when to step away, and when to call a supervisor, Campus Safety, medical support, the Office for Institutional Equity, or other designated staff. Use this guide alongside Vassar policies, Reunion Weekend instructions, and the emergency/contact sheet provided by your supervisor.

Your Role: The Small Rudder, Not the Whole Ship

You should	You should not
Greet guests and provide basic event information.	Investigate Title IX/VI, sexual assault, harassment, or discrimination concerns.
Remind guests of posted rules and event expectations.	Promise confidentiality or secrecy.
Use calm, brief, respectful language.	Argue about politics, religion, institutional history, or whether a rule is “fair.”
Create space, slow things down, and offer reasonable options.	Physically restrain, block, push, or touch someone unless directed by emergency personnel or necessary for immediate safety.
Call for backup early when behavior involves safety, alcohol, sexual misconduct, protest disruption, identity-based harassment, medical concerns, or refusal to comply.	Manage intoxicated or aggressive guests alone.
Document facts after an incident and notify the correct staff.	Make diagnoses, discipline decisions, or legal conclusions.

A-B-C-D

Step	What it means	Useful language
A - Assess safety	Scan for immediate danger: threats, weapons, someone unconscious, unwanted sexual contact, blocking exits, crowd surge, severe intoxication, escalating protest, or aggressive movement into personal space.	“I’m going to get help so everyone stays safe.”
B - Breathe and position	Lower your voice, slow your pace, keep an exit path, avoid crowding, and avoid mirroring anger.	“Let’s take one step over here so we can hear each other.”
C - Connect	Show that you heard the concern without condoning unsafe behavior or debating the issue in its entirety.	“I hear this is frustrating. I want to help with what I can.”
D - Direct to choices	State the rule or expectation briefly, then offer two acceptable options. Do not lecture.	“Alcohol must stay inside this area. You can finish it here or leave it and move along.”
E - Elevate and document	Bring in the shift lead, event staff, Campus Safety, medical support, OIE, or another designated resource. Write down objective facts afterward.	“I’m bringing my supervisor over so we can sort this out.”

Before Your Shift: Five-Minute Safety Briefing

Done	Check	Notes
☐	Know the contacts.	Campus Safety: 845-437-7333; Medical/EMS process: 845-437-7333. Title IX/Title VI: equity@vassar.edu.
☐	Know the alcohol boundaries.	Where alcohol may be served, where it may be consumed, who checks ID, how service is stopped, and who handles removal.
☐	Know the expectations for expressive activity/protest.	Where protest activity is permitted, what must remain clear, what counts as disruption, and who makes enforcement decisions.
☐	Know your backup signal.	Decide on a plain-language or discreet phrase that means “please get a supervisor/Campus Safety.”
☐	Know the private support location.	Identify a quieter place for a distressed guest, student employee, or reporting party to wait for trained staff.
☐	Know what you are not doing.	Student employees should not investigate, physically intervene, or manage serious incidents alone.

When to Get Help Immediately

Call Campus Safety/emergency support now	Call the event lead/supervisor now
Violence, threats of violence, weapons, or someone searching for something to throw/use as a weapon.	Repeated refusal to follow alcohol or event rules.
A person is unconscious, vomiting repeatedly, unable to stand, confused, or may have alcohol poisoning.	Sexual comments, sexualized behavior, identity-based slurs, harassment, or retaliation concerns.
Unwanted sexual contact, stalking, aggressive pursuit, or a person appears unable to consent.	A guest asks to report sexual assault, discrimination, harassment, or bias.
A protest or crowd blocks exits, entrances, emergency lanes, or creates a risk of injury.	Heated Israel/Palestine conflict that becomes personal, targeted, or disruptive.
Someone refuses to leave after staff direction and continues to escalate.	An alum guest asks for an exception you are not authorized to grant.
Property damage, fire risk, or any medical emergency.	You feel unsafe, overwhelmed, frozen, or unsure what to do.

Handling Disclosures of Sexual Assault or Harassment

Helpful responses	Avoid
“I’m sorry that happened.”	“Are you sure?”
“Thank you for telling me.”	“Why were you drinking?”
“You’re not in trouble.”	“Why did you go with them?”
“Would you like to step somewhere quieter?”	“What exactly happened?” repeated detailed questions.
“I can stay with you while we contact trained staff.”	“I won’t tell anyone.”
“I may need to share this with someone who can help, but I will share only what is needed.”	“This definitely is/is not a Title IX case.”

After the person is connected to trained staff, write down objective basics while fresh: date/time, location, who was notified, your actions, and any exact words you remember. Do not write opinions about credibility, intoxication, mental health, or motives.

Protest and Hard Conversation Guidance

Student employees should focus on behavior and process, not viewpoint. The aim is to preserve safety, access, dignity, and event continuity while quickly engaging trained staff when conduct may involve harassment, discrimination, disruption, or safety concerns.

Use this frame	Avoid this trap
"Can we lower the volume and make sure the pathway stays open?"	Debating history, geopolitics, theology, or which side is right.
"People can hold strong views and still share space without targeting each other."	Calling protesters "troublemakers" or guests "oppressors."
"I'm going to get event staff to clarify expectations."	Promising removal or discipline.
"I hear you want this addressed. I can notify the event lead."	Arguing over whether speech is protected or punishable.
"Please critique ideas or actions, not a person's identity."	Using shame, force, sarcasm, or dismissive comments.

Alcohol-Specific Guidance

Alcohol can turn a small policy reminder into a fireworks drawer. Keep the language simple. Do not shame the person. Do not match volume. Do not debate how much they had. Let trained staff, servers, supervisors, or Campus Safety handle service decisions, removal, medical response, and transportation decisions.

Notice	Say	Do
Unsteady, slurred, confused, argumentative, sleeping in public, vomiting, or unable to care for self.	"I'm concerned about you. I'm going to get help."	Stay nearby if safe, alert supervisor/Campus Safety/medical support, and do not leave the person alone if medical risk is present.
Trying to leave with open alcohol.	"Alcohol needs to stay in this area."	Offer a compliant choice and notify staff if they refuse.
Pressuring another person to drink.	"Let's not pressure anyone to drink."	Distract or delegate if the pressure continues or the target seems uncomfortable.
Angry reaction to service being stopped.	"I hear you're upset. The staff decision stands. I'm getting the event lead."	Back up, keep exit path, delegate immediately.

Incident Documentation: Write Like a Camera, Not a Commentator

Good notes help the next person respond accurately. Write facts you observed, not conclusions. Use names only when known. Put exact quotes in quotation marks. Keep it brief and timely.

Objective and useful	Subjective or risky
"At 8:42 p.m. near the tent entrance, guest said, 'I am not leaving.'"	"Guest was a belligerent drunk."
"Guest moved within about one foot of student employee and pointed finger toward their face."	"She was lying."
"Guest appeared unsteady and leaned on table; I notified [supervisor]."	"He was crazy."
"Reporting party stated, 'He touched me after I said no.' I contacted [designated staff]."	"This was definitely sexual assault."
"Chanting blocked the doorway for approximately three minutes; event lead was notified."	"The protesters were antisemitic/Islamophobic," without describing words/actions.

Quick Incident Note Template

Date/time:	
Location:	
People involved/witnesses:	
What I directly observed:	
Exact words used, if remembered:	
Actions I took:	
Who I notified and when:	

Core Skills for De-escalation

1. Stay curious, not combative

Curiosity does not mean agreement. It means you avoid the trap of proving a point while the situation gets louder. Use short questions to understand the immediate need, like “What are you trying to do right now?” “What would help in this moment?” “Can I connect you with the event lead?”

2. Use boundaries without a speech

A boundary is a clear limit paired with a next step. It works best when it is brief and calm. Use “I” or “we” language.

Situation	Boundary script	Next step
Guest yells at you	“I want to help, and I can’t do that while being yelled at.”	“I’m going to pause and bring over my supervisor.”
Sexual comment toward a student employee	“I’m here to help with the event. That comment is not okay.”	“I’m stepping away and getting my supervisor.”
Guest enters restricted area	“This area is not open to guests.”	“You can return to the event space, or I can ask staff to assist.”
Guest demands an exception	“I can’t approve that.”	“I can connect you with the event lead.”
Guest wants secrecy after disclosing harm	“I’m glad you told me. I can’t promise to keep this private because I may need to share it with someone who can help.”	“Would you like me to stay with you while we contact trained staff?”

3. Use motivational interviewing “micro-skills”

- Express empathy: “I can see why this feels important.”
- Develop discrepancy: “You want to stay at the event, and the way this is going may lead to you being asked to leave.”
- Avoid argumentation: do not debate every factual claim or insult.
- Roll with resistance: “You do not have to agree with the rule, but we do need to follow it tonight.”
- Support self-efficacy: “You can still have a good night from here. Let’s reset.”

4. Use the 4Ds of bystander empowerment

Direct	Distract	Delegate	Delay
Name the behavior if safe. “Hey, let’s keep this respectful.”	Change the channel. “Can you help me find the check-in table?”	Get backup with specifics. “I’m at [location]. A guest is refusing to stop touching someone.”	Check in later. “I noticed what happened. Are you okay? Want me to connect you with someone?”

5. Use the ABCs to manage your own reaction

During Reunion Weekend, the activating event may be an angry alum, a political argument, a drunken insult, or a report of harm. Your belief about that event affects your consequence. Helpful beliefs keep you steady.

Activating event	Unhelpful belief	Better belief and consequence
An alum says, “I donate more than you make in a year.”	“I have to defend myself.”	“This is about compliance, not my worth.” Consequence: you stay brief and get a supervisor.
A guest is intoxicated and angry.	“I need to handle this alone.”	“Alcohol plus anger needs backup.” Consequence: you create space and delegate.
A protest chant interrupts the event.	“I need to solve the whole Israel/Palestine conflict right now.”	“My job is safety, access, and event process.” Consequence: you notify event staff and avoid content debate.
Someone discloses sexual assault.	“I must ask enough questions to understand what happened.”	“My job is support and connection, not investigation.” Consequence: you listen, avoid blame, and connect them to trained staff.

Scenario Scripts

Scripts should sound like you. The goal is a calm first sentence that keeps the moment from catching fire.

Alcohol Use, Overuse, and Rule Compliance

Scenario	Goal	Sample language
Open alcohol outside the permitted area	State the rule and offer two choices.	"Welcome back. Just a quick reminder: alcohol needs to stay inside the event area. You can finish it here or leave it here before heading out."
Guest appears intoxicated and wants another drink	Stop service through the proper channel and get backup.	"I'm concerned you may have had enough for now. I'm going to get a staff member so we can help with water and a safe next step."
Guest says, "I'm an alum; rules don't apply to me."	Avoid status debate; return to expectation.	"I'm glad you're here. The rule applies to everyone at Reunion. I can get the event lead if you want to talk more, but I need your help following it now."
Guest tries to bring alcohol into a restricted area	Set a simple condition for entry.	"You're welcome to enter once the drink stays outside this area. I can show you where to place it."
Guest becomes loud after limit-setting	Slow the exchange and delegate.	"I hear you disagree. I'm going to bring over my supervisor. Please stay here and give us a minute."

Title IX, Sexual Assault, and Sexual Misconduct Concerns

Scenario	Goal	Sample language
Sexualized comment toward student employee	Set a boundary and exit to support.	"That comment is not okay. I'm here to help with the event. I'm going to step away and bring my supervisor over."
Unwanted touching observed	Use Direct if safe; otherwise, Distract or Delegate.	"Hey, give them some space." Then tell staff: "At [location], I saw [brief objective behavior]. The person looked uncomfortable and tried to move away."
Guest appears to be pressuring someone who is intoxicated	Interrupt safely and get backup.	"Excuse me, can I borrow you for a second? We need help at the check-in table." Then delegate to supervisor/Campus Safety with specifics.
Someone discloses sexual assault	Listen, support, avoid investigating, connect.	"I'm sorry that happened. Thank you for telling me. You're not in trouble. I'm not the trained person for this, but I can stay with you while we contact someone who can help."
A person asks you not to tell anyone	Do not promise secrecy.	"I hear that you want privacy. I can't promise secrecy, as I may need to share this with someone who can help keep people safe. We can still move at a pace that feels respectful."
Person asks what will happen if they report	Give process humility, not legal advice.	"I don't want to guess or give you wrong information. Let's connect you with the office or staff member who can explain options and support."

General Alumni Frustration and Refusal to Comply

Scenario	Goal	Sample language
Guest angry about campus change	Validate without getting trapped in a debate.	"A lot has changed, and I hear that it feels different. Right now, I can help you find [location/person/resource]."
Guest refuses badge/check-in process	State condition of participation.	"Everyone needs a badge for this event. I can help you check in, or I can call the event lead to assist."
Guest insults student employee	Set a boundary and exit.	"I want to help, and I won't stay in a conversation where I'm being insulted. I'm going to get my supervisor."
Guest follows you after you disengage	Increase safety and delegate.	"Please stop following me. I'm getting staff now." Move toward other staff, open space, or Campus Safety.
You feel your body alarm going off	Trust safety cues.	"I need to pause this conversation." Step away and get backup. You do not need to explain your intuition in the moment.

Protest Activity and Identity-Based Harm

Scenario	Goal	Sample language
Heated political argument at an event table	Seek alignment without deciding who is right.	"This is clearly important. We're not going to resolve it here. We do need this table to stay respectful and usable by everyone."
Guest uses identity-based insult/slur	Set a behavior limit and elevate.	"Personal or identity-based comments are not okay here. Please stop. I'm getting the event lead now."
Protesters block entry/exit	Do not debate content; focus on access and safety.	"I'm not here to debate the message. We need this pathway to remain open. Please move to [designated area]. I'm bringing event staff over to clarify expectations."
Chanting disrupts a program	Elevate quickly; avoid content policing.	"I'm going to get event staff. The concern is that the event needs to continue and people need safe access."
Alum demands you remove protesters because of viewpoint	Do not make enforcement promises.	"I hear that you're upset. Decisions about event response are made by event staff and Campus Safety. I'll notify them now."
Protester reports harassment by alumni	Support and connect.	"Thank you for telling me. Let's step somewhere quieter if you'd like. I'll contact the event lead so this can be addressed."

Disability, Accessibility, and Communication Differences

Scenario	Goal	Sample language
Guest is frustrated about access, seating, noise, or mobility	Acknowledge and ask what would help.	"I'm sorry this has been difficult. I won't guess at what you need. What would help right now, and may I contact the accessibility/event lead?"
Person misses subtle cues or repeats questions	Use calm, clear, concise, consistent communication.	"I'm going to say this simply: this entrance is closed. The open entrance is to your left. I can walk you there or get someone to assist."
Guest uses stigmatizing language about a disability	Redirect respectfully.	"Let's use respectful language. I can help connect you with staff if there is an access concern."
Crowd/noise overwhelms a guest or student employee	Reduce stimulation and delegate.	"Let's step to a quieter spot. I'll get the event lead so we can figure out the next step."

Self-Care During and After the Shift

Student employees may be close in age to current students, targets of comments, or connected to the topics being argued about. You are allowed to need support. Ask to rotate out if a scenario hits a personal hot button, especially related to sexual violence, identity-based harm, political trauma, disability, intoxication, or threats.

- Debrief with the shift lead after a difficult interaction: What happened? What affected me? What support do I need before returning?
- Use a reset routine: water, bathroom break, two minutes outside, slow breathing, or switching tasks.
- Do not carry the incident alone. If you are still thinking about it after the shift, tell a supervisor and ask about support resources.
- If you made a mistake, report it early. Clean-up is easier when the ink is still wet.

Pocket Card: What to Say First

Situation	First sentence
Angry guest	"I want to help. I can do that better if we slow this down."
Rule refusal	"The expectation tonight is [rule]. You can choose [option A] or [option B]."
Sexual comment	"That comment is not okay. I'm getting my supervisor."
Possible sexual misconduct	"Hey, give them space." / "I'm getting help now."
Disclosure of sexual assault	"I'm sorry that happened. Thank you for telling me. I'll stay with you while we get help."
Alcohol overuse	"I'm concerned about you. I'm going to get someone to help."
Protest disruption	"I'm notifying event staff. We need to keep access open and the event safe."
Identity-based insult	"Personal or identity-based comments are not okay here. Please stop."
You feel unsafe	"I need to pause this conversation." Then leave and get backup.
You do not know	"I don't want to give you wrong information. I'm going to connect you with the event lead."

One-Page Practice Exercise for the Briefing

Use the following short exercise during orientation or a shift huddle. It helps student employees practice quick choices without turning the training into a policy seminar.

1. Pair up. One person plays the guest, and one person plays the student employee.
2. Choose one scenario: alcohol refusal, sexualized comment, protest blocking access, or angry alum complaint.
3. The student employee uses ABCDE: Assess safety, Breathe/position, Connect, Direct to choices, Elevate/document.
4. After 90 seconds, stop. The observer answers: What worked? Where should backup have been called? What exact phrase helped lower the temperature?
5. Switch roles and repeat with a new scenario.

Scenario	Activating event	Better belief	Positive consequence
Alcohol	Guest refuses to stop carrying alcohol outside permitted area.	"I do not need to win. I need to set a choice and get backup."	The guest either complies or trained staff take over.
Title IX	Guest makes sexual comments toward a student employee.	"A clear boundary is enough. I do not need to tolerate this."	Student employee disengages, and supervisor responds.
Protest	A group blocks a doorway while chanting.	"The issue is access and safety, not my opinion on the message."	Event staff manage expectations and student avoids debate.
Angry alum	Guest says the student employee is incompetent.	"This is not about me. I can offer the next step."	The guest is connected to the event lead or leaves the interaction.