

The Faculty Role

For most students at the University, personal and academic pursuits provide healthy experiences with positive results. However, for some, this time of growth produces high levels of anxiety, distress, and poor choices, such as high-risk drinking and/or drug use. As a faculty member or teaching assistant (TA), your on-going relationship with students allows you to detect changes in an individual's behavior that may signal a more serious problem.

You can play a unique role in assisting students through a difficult situation or experience. Students appreciate faculty and TA opinions and you can serve as a reliable and confidential source of information about the resources already in place at the University. Faculty and TAs are not expected to take on the role of counselor, but the following steps can help you identify students in distress and provide appropriate assistance.

1. Be alert to signs of difficulty.

Academic indicators may include:

- Deterioration in quality of work
- A drop in grades
- A negative change in classroom performance
- Repeated requests for extensions
- Missed assignments
- Repeated absences
- Disorganized or erratic performance
- Essays or creative work which indicate extremes of hopelessness, social isolation, rage, fear or despair

Interactional indicators may include:

- Direct statements indicating distress, family problems, or other difficulties
- Unprovoked anger or hostility
- Exaggerated personality traits; more withdrawn or more animated than usual
- Excessive dependency
- Tearfulness
- Expressions of hopelessness, fear, or worthlessness
- Expressions of concern about a student in the class by his/her peers

Physical indicators may include:

- Deterioration in physical appearance
- Lack of personal hygiene
- Excessive fatigue
- Visible changes in weight
- Coming to class bleary-eyed, hung over, or smelling of alcohol

Safety risk indicators may include:

- Any written note or verbal statement which has a sense of finality or a suicidal tone to it
- Essays or papers which focus on despair, suicide, acting out violent behaviors, or death
- Statements to the effect that the student is "going away for a long time"
- Giving away prized possessions
- Self-injurious or self-destructive behaviors
- Any other behavior which seems out of control

2. Take these signs seriously.

Don't disregard what you've observed. Contact any of the offices listed on the back of this brochure to help you determine the extent of the potential problem and possible courses of action or intervention.

3. Communicate with the student.

Meet, call or e-mail the student (as appropriate) and remember that talking about a problem does not make it worse. This is the first step toward resolving any difficulty.

4. Specifically point out the signs you've observed.

Say you're concerned and ask what is wrong.

- "I wanted to talk to you because I notice you've been late recently, you no longer participate in class, and you seem troubled. I'm concerned about you. Would you like to talk about it?"

5. Listen to the student's

response. Be open-minded and non-judgmental about what you hear.

6. Refer. If appropriate, talk with the student about seeing one of the professional counselors at Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). You may need to address the student's fears about counseling.

- "All sessions are confidential and free of charge."
- "If you like, we can call the office now to set up an appointment."
- "Recognition of and willingness to get help for a difficult situation is a sign of strength."

7. Respect the student's decision about counseling. If the student doesn't go now, he or she may reconsider later.

8. Recognize an emergency situation. An emergency means that the student's basic safety is jeopardized. This may include severe eating disorders, severe substance abuse, suicidal urges, or a serious threat from another person (such as a dating partner).

If you have immediate concerns about a student's safety, stay with the student and call CAPS and/or University Police *immediately*. If a student is suicidal, you **must** notify one of these University offices.

“Suicidal” means a student (1) has stated an intention to die or cause harm to him/herself, (2) has reported that he/she made a suicide attempt or self-inflicted injury within the recent past, or (3) has left you with a strong, troubled feeling with respect to his or her immediate safety.

9. Respect confidentiality. Do not discuss the student's name or problem in public areas or with people who do not need to know this information. When talking with the student, avoid making sweeping promises of confidentiality. Students who are suicidal need swift professional intervention and pledges of absolute confidentiality may make this more difficult.

This brochure is adapted from materials developed at the College of William and Mary and SUNY at Cortland.

Resources

Please contact any of these offices for a consultation. They welcome the opportunity to assist you with any student situation, not just an emergency.

On-Grounds

Ainsworth Psychological Clinic (Department of Psychology)	982-4737
Center for Alcohol & Substance Education	924-5276
Center for Clinical Psychology Services (Curry School of Education)	924-7034
Dean of Students Office	924-7133
Equal Opportunity Programs	924-3200
Sexual Assault Education Coordinator	982-2774
Student Health	924-5362
Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) 24-hour on-call system	924-5556
General Medicine	982-3915
Gynecology	924-2773
Learning Needs & Evaluation Center	243-2773
Office of Health Promotion	924-1509
University Ombudsman and ADA Coordinator	924-7819
U.Va. CARES: Eating Disorder Task Force http://www.virginia.edu/~uvacares	
University Police	924-7166
Emergency	911
Women's Center Counseling Services	982-2361

Off-Grounds

Mental Health Association Referral	977-HOPE
Region Ten Community Services Board	972-1800
Sexual Assault Resource Agency 24-hour hotline	295-7273 977-7273
Shelter for Help in Emergency	293-8509

This brochure is funded by the Office of the Dean of Students - Center for Alcohol and Substance Education.

Recognizing & Assisting Students in Distress

A Guide For Faculty & Teaching Assistants



Developed by the
University Advisory Committee on Alcohol
and Substance Abuse - 2000
Revised June 2008