

# ASSISTING STUDENTS IN DISTRESS



## SEE SOMETHING.

CSU faculty and staff are in a unique position to demonstrate compassion for CSU students in distress.

Both undergraduate and graduate students may feel alone, isolated, and even hopeless when faced with academic and life challenges. These feelings can easily disrupt academic performance and may lead to difficulties coping and other serious consequences.

You may be the first person to **SEE SOMETHING** distressing in your students since you have frequent and prolonged contact with them. The California State University, in collaboration with the California Mental Health Services Authority (CalMHSA), requests that you act with compassion when assisting students.

## SAY SOMETHING.

Students exhibiting troubling behaviors in your presence are likely having difficulties in various settings including the classroom, with roommates, with family, and even in social settings.

Trust your instincts and **SAY SOMETHING** if a student leaves you feeling worried, alarmed, or threatened!

## DO SOMETHING.

Sometimes students cannot or will not turn to family or friends. **DO SOMETHING!** Your expression of concern may be a critical factor in saving a student's academic career or even their life.

The purpose of this folder is to help you recognize symptoms of student distress and identify appropriate referrals to campus resources.

## ACADEMIC INDICATORS

- Sudden decline in quality of work and grades
- Repeated absences
- Disturbing content in writing or presentations (e.g., violence, death)
- You find yourself doing more personal rather than academic counseling during office hours
- Continuous classroom disruptions

## SAFETY RISK INDICATORS

- Unprovoked anger or hostility
- Making implied or direct threats to harm self or others
- Academic assignments dominated by themes of extreme hopelessness, rage, worthlessness, isolation, despair, acting out, suicidal ideations/ violent behaviors

## PSYCHOLOGICAL INDICATORS

- Self-disclosure of personal distress that could include family problems, financial difficulties, depression, grief, or thoughts of suicide
- Excessive tearfulness, panic reactions, irritability or unusual apathy
- Verbal abuse (e.g., taunting, badgering, intimidation)
- Expressions of concern about the student by his/her peers

## PHYSICAL INDICATORS

- Marked changes in physical appearance including deterioration in grooming, hygiene, or weight loss/gain
- Excessive fatigue/sleep disturbance
- Intoxication, hangovers, or smelling of alcohol
- Disoriented or "out of it"

### The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) permits communication about a student of concern in connection with a health and safety emergency. Observations of a student's conduct or statements made by a student are not FERPA protected. Such information should be shared with appropriate consideration for student privacy.



## DISRUPTIVE OR DISTRESSED

### DISRUPTIVE STUDENT

A student whose conduct is clearly and imminently reckless, disorderly, dangerous, or threatening, including self-harmful behavior.

#### TO GET HELP

If you are concerned for your own or others' safety due to a student's disruptive and/or threatening behavior, call 911 or the Campus Police Department.

#### REPORT INCIDENT TO

Campus Police Department

### DISTRESSED STUDENT

A student with persistent behaviors such as

- Overly anxious
- Lacks motivation and/or concentration
- Sad
- Seeks constant attention
- Irritable
- Demonstrates bizarre or erratic behavior
- Withdrawn
- Expresses suicidal thoughts
- Confused

### IF A STUDENT IS CAUSING A DISRUPTION BUT DOES NOT POSE A THREAT

- Ensure your safety in the environment.
- Use a calm, non-confrontational approach to defuse/de-escalate the situation.
- Set limits by explaining how the behavior is inappropriate.
- If the disruptive behavior persists, notify the student that disciplinary action may be taken. Ask the student to leave. Inform him or her that refusal to leave may be a separate violation subject to discipline.
- Immediately report the incident to the appropriate resource.

If you believe there is a safety risk, contact Campus Police Department.



### RESOURCES & TIPS:

**BE PROACTIVE:** Engage students early on, pay attention to signs of distress, and set limits on disruptive behavior.

**BE DIRECT:** Don't be afraid to ask students directly if they are under the influence of drugs or alcohol, feeling confused, or having thoughts of harming themselves or others.

**LISTEN SENSITIVELY AND CAREFULLY:** Use a non-confrontational approach and a calm voice. Avoid threatening, humiliating, and intimidating responses.

**SAFETY FIRST:** The welfare of the campus community is the top priority when a student displays threatening or potentially violent behavior. Do not hesitate to call for help.

**FOLLOW THROUGH:** Direct the student to the physical location of the identified resource.

**CONSULTATION AND DOCUMENTATION:** Always document your interactions with distressed students and consult with your department chair/ supervisor after any incident.



## RESPONSE PROTOCOL

Follow the table to determine who to contact when faced with a distressed or distressing student.

Situation	Contact
The student's conduct is clearly and imminently reckless, disorderly, dangerous, or threatening including self-harm behavior.	Call 911 or Campus Police
The student shows signs of distress but I am unsure how serious it is. My interaction has left me feeling uneasy and/or really concerned about the student.	Consult with and/or refer to the Counseling Center
I'm not concerned for the student's immediate safety, but he or she is having significant academic and/or personal issues and could use some support or additional resources.	Refer students to an appropriate campus resource

## CAMPUS RESOURCES

California State University, Fullerton

Counseling Center (657) 278-3040

Student Health Services (657) 278-2800

University Police (657) 278-2515

Dean of Students (657) 278-3211

After Hours Counseling Support/Non-Crisis (657) 278-3040

Student Health and Counseling Services  
Website: <http://www.fullerton.edu/shcc/>