FAQ on Dealing with Students in Distress

Q. What are some signs that a student may be in distress?

A student in distress may not be disruptive to others, but may exhibit behaviors which indicate something is wrong. Behaviors may include:

1. Serious grade problems or a dramatic change in performance.
2. Excessive absences or inconsistent attendance.
3. Unusual or changed patterns of interaction (e.g., avoiding participation, excessive anxiety when called upon, domination of discussions).
4. Other characteristics that suggest the student is having trouble managing stress (e.g., depressed, lethargic, or rapid speech; swollen, red eyes; marked change in personal dress and hygiene; sleeping during class).
5. Repeated requests for special consideration, especially if the student appears uncomfortable or highly emotional while disclosing the circumstances prompting the request.
6. New or repeated behavior which interferes with the instructor’s effective management of the immediate environment.
7. Unusual or exaggerated emotional responses which appear inappropriate to the situation, infidelity or outbursts of anger.

Q. What types of warning signs are most serious?

Severely troubled or disruptive students may exhibit behaviors that signify an obvious crisis and that necessitate emergency care. These problems are the easiest to identify. Examples include:

1. Highly disruptive behavior (e.g. hostility, aggression, violence).
2. Inability to communicate clearly (e.g. garbled, slurred speech; unconnected, disjointed, or rambling thoughts).
3. Loss of contact with reality (e.g. seeing or hearing things that others cannot see or hear; belief in actions greatly at odds with reality or probability).
4. Stalking behaviors (threatening behavior, unwanted advances or communication).
5. Inappropriate communications (e.g. including threatening letters, e-mail messages, harassment).
6. Overtly suicidal thoughts (expression of a specific plan including referring to suicide as a current option or in a written assignment, statements of hopelessness, death, suicidal thoughts, thoughts of burdening others, and/or not belonging).
7. Threats to harm self or others.

Q. How should I respond to a student that is troubled or showing signs of distress?

For students who are mildly or moderately troubled, you can choose to respond to them in the following ways:

- Directly with the behavior/problem according to classroom protocol.

Address the situation privately with the individual(s).

Consult with a colleague, department head, the Dean of Students Office, the Counseling Center or Campus Health Services.

Refer the student to an appropriate University resource.

See referral phone numbers in this publication for help.

Helping Students in Distress

Q. How should I respond to a disruptive student?

Remain calm and know who to call for assistance. Find someone to stay with the student while calls are made. See referral numbers on the front of this publication.

Remember that it is NOT your responsibility to provide the professional help needed for a severely troubled/disruptive student. You need only make the necessary contact on their behalf.

When a student expresses a direct threat to themselves or others, or acts in a bizarre, highly irrational or disruptive way, call University Police at 911.
Other Resources

Response Guide for Difficult Student Situations

When responding to a difficult student situation:
• Don't personalize the situation; take a breath and look at the situation as objectively as possible.
• Maintain records of interactions with difficult students.
• Identify the specific behavior of concern.
• Avoid creating an adversarial relationship.
• Look for the educational opportunity. An educational conversation from a University official can have a lasting impact on a student. Look for the opportunity to dialogue about the situation.
• Maintain professional communication.
• Address inappropriate, disruptive, or concerning behavior from the beginning. If you have a concern, do not wait to see if it happens again.

Use “I” statements:
• “I am happy to discuss this or speak with you about this matter; however, I do not/will not speak with another adult who is yelling/cursing, etc.”; and/or
• “As an educator, I do not/will not speak to anyone who uses vulgar/crass/inappropriate language.”
• “I recognize how frustrated you are and I want to work with you. We need to take a step back for a minute so we can look at this situation together.”

For additional information about responding to specific difficult student situations, please visit http://louisville.edu/dos/faculty-staff/difficult-student-guide

Suicide Prevention Training
What is QPR Training?
QPR stands for Question, Persuade, and Refer—3 simple steps that anyone can learn to help save a life from suicide.

Request QPR Training
To request QPR Training for your department or group, please submit the online request form at http://louisville.edu/dos/faculty-staff/qpr-training.

Student Care Team (SCT)
The purpose of the Student Care Team is to provide a regular opportunity for communication between departments, ensuring that all the resources of the University of Louisville are available to students in crisis.

Reporting a Concern to SCT
For more information about SCT contact the Dean of Students Office, 852-5787
https://louisville.edu/dos/forms/sctreporting

Gender Based Harassment—Title IX
Policy and/or Objective
The University of Louisville’s Title IX Policy reflects the commitment to maintain a community that is free from harassment based on gender. Harassment based upon gender is not acceptable at the University and is in violation of Title IX, Education Amendments of 1972. It is inconsistent with the University’s commitment to excellence and respect for all individuals.

If you have a concern about a harassment situation, contact Title IX coordinators.

Title IX Coordinators
Deputy Title IX Coordinator (Complaints against Students)
Dean of Students Office
2103 S. Floyd Street
Student Activities Center – W301
Louisville, KY 40208
Phone: (502) 852-5787
email: dos@louisville.edu

Deputy Title IX Coordinator (Complaints against Employees)
Human Resources
1980 Arthur Street
Louisville, KY 40208-2770
Phone: (502) 852-6688
email: employmentrelations@louisville.edu

Deputy Title IX Coordinator (Complaints against Non-University Community Members)
University Police Department
Rowd Street Parking Garage
Suite 100
Louisville, KY 40202
Phone: (502) 852-7036
email: uoflpolicechief@louisville.edu

Request QPR Training at the University and is in violation of Title IX, Education Amendments of 1972. It is inconsistent with the University’s commitment to excellence and respect for all individuals.

If you have a concern about a harassment situation, contact Title IX coordinators.

Helping Students in Distress

When in doubt, call University Police

Explore the classroom disruption advisory
reporting an incident of a student in distress.
If you are concerned for your safety or the safety of others, call 911 immediately.
If you are dealing with students in distress:
• Be aware of the location.
• If you are engaged with a student or other consultative office, call University Police, the Dean of Students Office or other consultative offices listed when necessary.

If you are engaged with a student in distress:
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