



# 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, such as deadline extensions, especially if the student appears uncomfortable or highly emotional while disclosing the circumstances prompting the request.

6. New or repeated behavior which pushes the limits of decorum and interferes with the instructor's effective management of the immediate environment.
7. Unusual or exaggerated emotional responses which appear inappropriate to the situation, irritability or outbursts of anger.

## Q. How should I respond to a disruptive student?

Remain calm and know whom 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 the University Police Department at 911.

## 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:

Deal directly with the behavior/problem according to classroom protocol.

Address the situation privately with the individual(s).

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

Refer the student to an appropriate University resource. See referral phone numbers in this publication for help.

## Q. What types of warning signs are most serious?

Severely troubled or disruptive students can 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; beliefs or 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 allusions, thoughts of burdening others, and/or not belonging).
7. Threats to harm self or others.

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



# Helping Students in Distress

## Action Guide for Faculty and Staff

### Students in Distress

The University has developed this informational guide to aid faculty and staff in assisting students that are experiencing difficulties.

### Emergency ..... 911

UofL Police (non-emergency) ..... 852-6111  
 Dean of Students Office ..... 852-5787  
 Counseling Center ..... 852-6585  
 Counseling Services (HSC) ..... 852-0996  
 Campus Health Services ..... 852-6479  
 Campus Health (HSC) ..... 852-6446  
 PEACC (Sexual Assault) ..... 852-7014  
 Housing ..... 852-6636  
 Disability Resource Center ..... 852-6938  
 Student Advocate ..... 852-8113

If you are dealing with students in distress:

- Be aware of the location of the nearest telephone.
- If you are concerned for your safety or the safety of others, call 911 immediately.
- If the student is causing a disruption to the classroom or office environment but does not pose a threat:

Review classroom disruption advisory on the back of this publication.

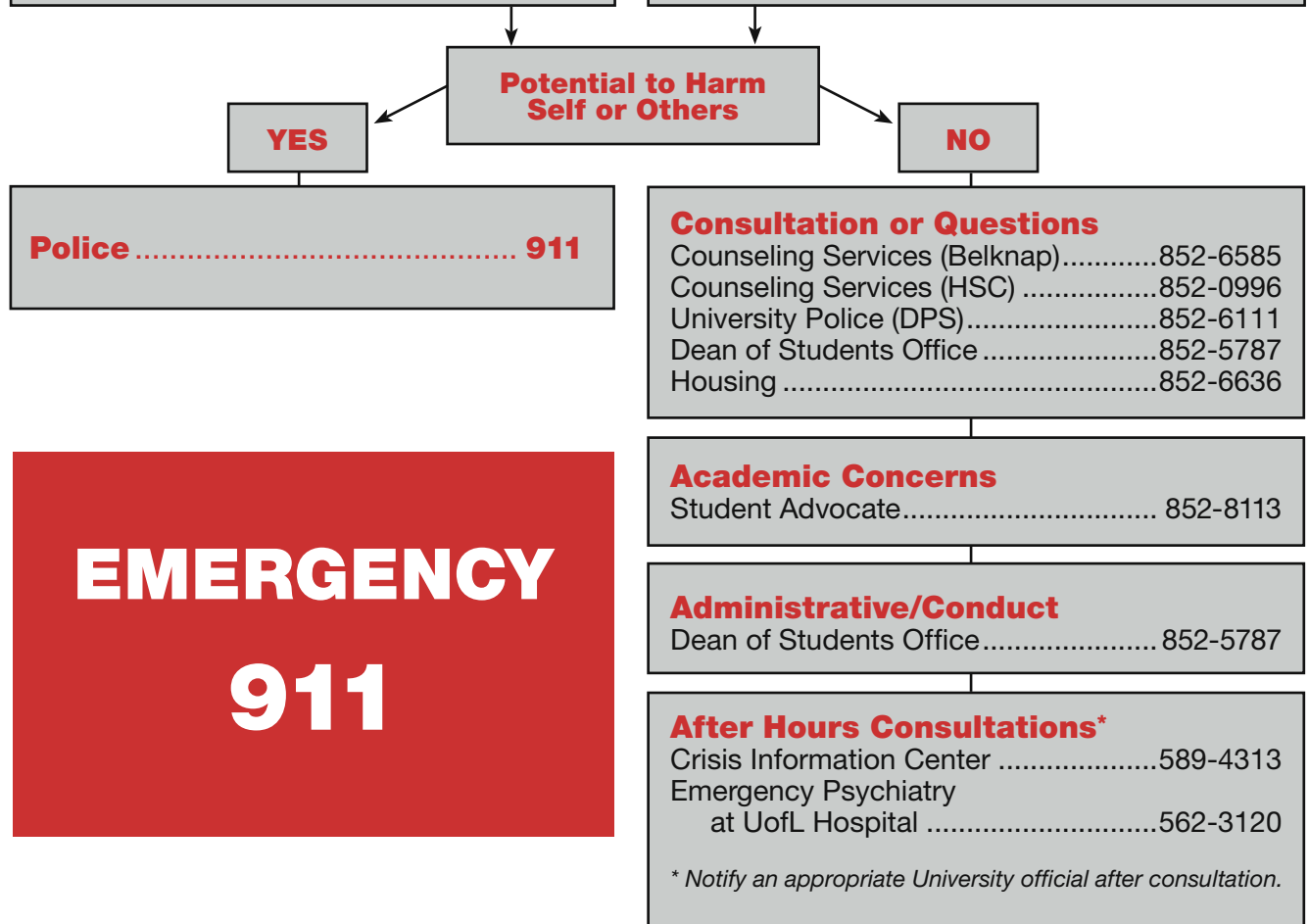
**When in doubt, call University Police!**

### Student in Crisis

A student whose conduct is markedly bizarre, disruptive, or dangerous; verbal or physical threats, active threats of suicide.

### Troubled Student

A student who appears confused, very sad, highly anxious, irritable, lacks motivation and/or concentration; may be thinking about suicide.



# Classroom Disruption

## An Advisory from the Dean of Students Office

1. Classroom disruption is seen as a disciplinary offense, as defined by the University's Code of Student Conduct. Classroom disruption is behavior a reasonable person would view as substantially or repeatedly interfering with normal class activities. Examples include repeatedly leaving and entering the classroom without authorization, making loud or distracting noises, persisting in speaking without being recognized, or resorting to physical threats or personal insults.
2. A faculty member is responsible for management of the classroom environment. Teachers can be compared to judges; both focus on relevant issues, set reasonable time limits, assess the quality of ideas and expression, and ensure participants are heard in an orderly manner. While their ultimate goals may be different, both judges and teachers need to exercise authority with a sense of fairness, and with appreciation for the reality of human fallibility.
 

Disruptive conduct may determine a student's fitness to continue in an academic program. Faculty should keep their department chair informed of any situation involving student behavior so that the appropriate assessments may be made regarding the student's status.
3. A student has the right to freedom of inquiry, of legitimate classroom discussion, and of free expression of his or her opinion, subject to the teacher's responsibilities to maintain order and to complete the course requirements. (See Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities, Section 4).
4. Rudeness, incivility, and disruption are often indistinguishable, though they may intersect. Most often, it's better to respond to rudeness by example and situation (e.g., advising a student in private that he or she appears to have a habit of interrupting others). Rudeness can become disruption when it is repetitive, especially after a warning has been given.
5. Strategies to prevent and respond to disruptive behavior include the following:
  - a. Share with students your explicit expectations for conduct in the course or classroom. For example, if you want students to raise their hands for permission to speak, say so, using reminders, as needed.
  - b. Serve as a role model for the conduct you expect from your students.
  - c. If you believe inappropriate behavior is occurring, offer general words of caution, rather than warning a particular student (e.g., we have too many contemporaneous conversations at the moment; let's all focus on the same topic).
  - d. If the behavior is inappropriate, but not disruptive, speak with the student after class. Most students are unaware of distracting habits or mannerisms, and have no intent to be offensive or disruptive. Give the student a specific example of the behavior you want them to modify or eliminate.
  - e. There may be rare circumstances when it is necessary to speak to a student during class about his or her behavior. Try to do so firmly and with respect, indicating that further discussion can occur after class. Public arguments and harsh language must be avoided.
  - f. A student who persists in disrupting a class may be directed to leave the classroom for the remainder of the class period. Whenever possible, consult with the Department Chair and the Assistant Dean of Students (852-5787) to review applicable University procedures.
  - g. If disruption is serious, and other reasonable measures have failed, the class may be adjourned and the University Police summoned (852-6111). Faculty members must not use force or threats of force, except in immediate self-defense. Prepare a written account of the incident(s). Identify witnesses for the University Police, as needed.
6. The Dean of Students Office can review University conduct procedures with you, and meet with accused students formally or informally. It is important to document and report disruptive incidents promptly, even if they seem minor. One of our preferred strategies is to outline behavioral expectations with students, so they have clear guidelines about what is expected of them in the classroom setting.