

FACULTY & STAFF “911” GUIDE

HELPING STUDENTS IN DISTRESS

Students in Distress

The Division of Student Affairs has developed this informational guide to aid faculty and staff in assisting students that are experiencing difficulties.

Emergency	911
University Police Department	392-1111
Dean of Students Office	392-1261
Counseling Center	392-1575
Student Health Care Center	392-1161
Ombudsman Office	392-1308
Victim Services	392-5648
Alcohol & Other Drug Programs	392-1161, x4281
Housing & Residence Education	392-2161

If you are dealing with students in distress:

- Be aware of the location of the nearest telephone, whether it is within the building or a personal cell phone.
- If you are concerned for your safety or that of others, call 911 immediately.
- If the student is causing a disruption to the classroom or office environment but does not pose a threat:
 - discuss the situation with the student to address the inappropriate behavior.
 - ask the student to leave the room.

If in doubt, call the UF Police Department!

Disruptive Student

A student whose conduct is disruptive or dangerous, verbal or physical threats, active threats of suicide and resisting help.



Potential Harm to Self or Others

On Campus	UPD 392-1111
Off Campus	GPD or ASO - 911

Then

Administrative/Judicial

Dean of Students Office	392-1261
After Office Hours: Request Emergency Dean	392-1111

Consultation or Emergency Counseling

Counseling Center	392-1575
Student Mental Health	392-1171

Troubled Student

A student who is troubled, confused, very sad, highly anxious, irritable, lacks in motivation and/or concentration, demonstrating bizarre behavior or thinking about suicide.



Consultation or Questions

Counseling Center	392-1575
Student Mental Health	392-1171

Administrative/Judicial

Dean of Students Office	392-1261
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Academic Status

Assoc. Dean - College
Department Chair or Program Coord.

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, show signs of emotional distress and indicate that assistance is needed. They may also be reluctant or unable to acknowledge a need for personal help. Behaviors may include:

1. Serious grade problems or a change from consistently passing grades to unaccountably poor performance.
2. Excessive absences, especially if the student has previously demonstrated consistent attendance.
3. Unusual or markedly changed patterns of interaction, i.e., avoidance of participation, excessive anxiety when called upon, domination of discussions, etc.
4. Other characteristics that suggest the student is having trouble managing stress successfully e.g., a depressed, lethargic mood; very rapid speech; swollen, red eyes; marked change in personal dress and hygiene; falling asleep 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 which interferes with effective management of the immediate environment.
7. Unusual or exaggerated emotional responses which are obviously inappropriate to the situation.

Q. How should I respond to a disruptive student?

1. Remain calm and know who to call for help, if necessary. Find someone to stay with the student while calls to the appropriate resources are made. **See referral numbers on the front of this publication.**
2. Remember that it is NOT your responsibility to provide the professional help needed for a severely troubled/disruptive student. You need only to make the necessary call and request assistance.
3. 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 (352) 392-1111.

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

For students that are mildly or moderately troubled you can choose to handle them in the following ways:

1. Deal directly with the behavior/problem according to classroom protocol.
2. Address the situation on a more personal level.
3. Consult with a colleague, department head, Dean of Students Office professional, or a campus counseling professional at the Counseling Center or Student Mental Health Care Center.
4. Refer the student to one of the University resources. **See referral phone numbers in this publication for help.**

FAQ ON DEALING WITH STUDENTS IN DISTRESS

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Q. How should I respond when a student is disrupting my class?

Faculty members have broad authority to manage their classrooms and establish reasonable guidelines for class discussions that ensure everyone has an opportunity to participate in an orderly manner. If you believe a student's behavior is inappropriate, consider a general word of caution rather than singling a student out or embarrassing the student. "If the behavior in question is irritating, but not disruptive, try speaking with the student after class. Most students are unaware of distracting habits or mannerisms, and have no intent to be offensive or disruptive. There may be rare circumstances where it is necessary to speak to a student during class about his or her behavior. Correct the student in a manner, indicating that further discussion can occur after class." (Pavela, 2001, ¶ 5).

If a student's behavior reaches the point that it interferes with your ability to conduct the class or the ability of other students to benefit from the class, the student should be asked to leave the room for the remainder of the class period. The student should be provided with a reason for this action and an opportunity to discuss the matter with you as soon as is practical. In such situations, consultation and referral to the Dean of Students Office may be appropriate.

This item adapted from ASJA Law & Policy Report, No. 26, ASJA & Gary Pavela, 2001.

Q. What are warning signs of disruptive student behavior?

Severely troubled or disruptive students 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, etc.).
2. Inability to communicate clearly (garbled, slurred speech; unconnected, disjointed, or rambling thoughts).
3. Loss of contact with reality (seeing or hearing things which others cannot see or hear; beliefs or actions greatly at odds with reality or probability).
4. Stalking behaviors.
5. Inappropriate communications (including threatening letters, e-mail messages, harassment).
6. Overtly suicidal thoughts (including referring to suicide as a current option or in a written assignment).
7. Threats to harm others.

Q. How to make a referral

While many students go to counseling or to the Dean of Students Office on their own, your exposure to students increases the likelihood you will identify signs or behaviors of distress in a student. What can you do?

- Recommend campus services to the student.
- Determine the student's willingness to go to a helping resource. Reassure the student that it is an act of strength to ask for help.
- Dispute the myth that only "weak or crazy" people go for counseling or use others for help.
- Remind them that campus counseling resources are free and confidential services.
- Offer to help make the initial contact with the helping resource.

GETTING HELP

Disruptive Student Behavior

The Student Conduct Code outlines the standards and expectations for students' conduct and behavior at the University of Florida.
website: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/conductcode.php>

Conduct Disruptive to the University Community

Conduct that is disruptive to the University's educational objectives, to its operations, or to its officials, staff, and faculty in the performance of their work, or to any other aspect of its mission. Such conduct includes, but is not limited to:

1. Disruption of a class, University activity, or any other normal activity held on University property or at a University location.
2. Classroom behavior that interferes with either (a) the instructor's ability to conduct the class or (b) the ability of other students to benefit from the instructional program.
3. Violation of the Campus Demonstration Regulation, Regulation 6C1-2.002.
4. Conduct which is disorderly or a breach of the peace.

Causing Physical or Other Harm to Any Person

1. Conduct causing physical injury or endangering another's health or safety, which includes, but is not limited to, acts of physical violence, assault, and relationship or domestic violence.
2. Actions causing physical injury or endangering one's own health or safety.

Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct

1. Sexual Assault. Any sexual act or attempt to engage in any sexual act with another person without the consent of the other person or, in circumstances in which the person is unable, due to age, disability, or chemical or other impairment, to give consent.
2. Sexual Misconduct. Any intentional intimate touching of another without the consent of the other person or, in circumstances in which the person is unable, due to age, disability, or chemical or other impairment, to give consent.

Harassment

1. Harassment or Threats. Verbal or written abuse, threats, harassment, coercion or any other conduct that places another individual in reasonable fear of his or her safety through words or actions directed at that person, or substantially interferes with the working, educational or living environment of the individual, including stalking and racial harassment.
2. Sexual Harassment. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for favors, and/or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when:
 - a. Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment or status in a university activity, or
 - b. Submission to, or rejection of, such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment or decisions affecting such individual's employment or status in a University activity, or
 - c. Such conduct has the purpose or effect of interfering with an individual's work or academic performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive employment or academic environment.

Class Attendance

The university recognizes the right of the individual professor to make attendance mandatory. After due warning, professors can prohibit further attendance and subsequently assign a failing grade for excessive absences. Clearly communicate your attendance policy in your course syllabus. Absences count from the first class meeting.

In general, acceptable reasons for absence from class include illness, serious family emergencies, special curricular requirements (e.g., judging trips, field trips, professional conferences), military obligation, severe weather conditions, religious holidays and participation in official university activities such as music performances, athletic competition or debate. Absences from class for court-imposed legal obligations (e.g., jury duty or subpoena) must be excused. Other reasons also may be approved. Students may be required to provide appropriate documentation to support their absence.

Students cannot attend classes unless they are registered officially or approved to audit with evidence of having paid audit fees.

Notification Letter from the Dean of Students Office

Students that experience a family or personal emergency (death in the family, unplanned hospitalization, etc.) may contact the Dean of Students Office and request notification letters be sent to their professors. The Dean of Students Office will issue notification letters to a student's faculty members if the situation will result in the student being absent for three or more days. Such letters are not excuse letters, as these absences have not been verified, but instead are courtesy letters for students that have reported an emergency and are unable to contact faculty members prior to their departure. Students are required to provide faculty members with appropriate documentation to support their absence.

Student Death Notification

In the event of the death of a currently enrolled student, an official notification of Student Death will be issued by the Dean of Students Office. Records pertaining to this student will be restricted by the Office of the University Registrar and no grade will be submitted for the student.

Faculty or staff members receiving information that a currently enrolled student has died, are asked to contact the Dean of Students Office (352-392-1261). The Dean of Students Office will verify such reports with appropriate officials and issue official notifications to the campus community.

Illness Policy

Students who are absent from classes or examinations because of illness should contact their professors. The Student Health Care Center will only write excuse notes for illnesses or injuries that have resulted, or will result, in absence of three or more days of class. Any shorter term absences will not receive notes. If an instructor requires a note for an absence of fewer than three days, one can be written upon the written request of the instructor. This request must be on official UF letterhead.