

RECOGNIZING AND RESPONDING TO STUDENTS IN DISTRESS

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Have this ever happened to you?

- A student comes to your office and is obviously intoxicated and disruptive?
- A student reveals to you that he/she is having thoughts of suicide?
- A student, obviously upset, tells you that despite her third year standing she is thinking about changing her academic major for the third time?
- A student, who is usually well-prepared for class begins to miss class, fails to complete assignments, and becomes inattentive to hygiene and personal appearance?

Signs of Distress

- Academic Problems
 - Career and course indecision
 - Excessive procrastination
 - Disruptive classroom behavior
- Interpersonal Problems
 - Always asking for help with personal problems
 - Withdrawing
 - Inability to get along with others
- Behavioral Problems
 - Change in personal hygiene
 - Dramatic weight gain or loss
 - Inability to communicate clearly

Behaviors

- Troubling Behavior
 - Jokes about killing himself or herself
 - Writing appears disjointed and fragmented or contain themes of violence
- Disruptive Behavior
 - Verbally abuses or intimidates others
 - Overly demanding
 - Interrupts educational process
- Threatening Behavior
 - Implies or makes a direct threat of harm
 - Displays a firearm or weapon
 - Stalks or harasses another person

Sources of Distress

- Relationship problems
- Grief and loss
- Loneliness
- Academic pressure
- Difficulty adjusting to university life
- Anxiety
- Eating disorders
- Sexual assault, physical violence, and/or stalking
- Identity confusion
- Depression
- Low self-esteem

When to Refer

- If your efforts to manage a significant classroom behavioral issue has not resolved the problem
- If you are concerned about the welfare of a student, yourself and/or other students
- If a student asks for help in dealing with personal issues that are outside your role as a faculty/staff member
- If you have referred the student for assistance in the past and there seems to be no improvement or things seem to be worsening

Tips for Supporting & Encouraging

- Request to see student privately
- Briefly acknowledge your observation
- Listen carefully to what the student is troubled about
- Follow up with student
- Strange and inappropriate behavior should not be ignored
- Help the student identify options for action and explore possible consequences
- Avoid labeling the student's behavior
- Be open about your limitations in abilities
- When you approach the limits of your abilities, remember the Counseling Center
- If the student clearly seems dangerous to you or others, contact the University Police
- **Do not promise to keep threats to self or others a secret**

Definitions of the 4Ds

Distressed	Disturbed	Disruptive	Dangerous
Distressed behavior causes concern for the person's wellbeing.	Disturbed behavior may be highly inappropriate, irrational, delusional, and makes others uncomfortable.	Disruptive behavior interrupts the classroom or work environment, and represents an escalation or "acting out" of distress or inner disturbance.	Dangerous behavior threatens the safety and wellbeing of others.

Examples of Each of the 4Ds

Distressed <i>Examples</i>	Disturbed <i>Examples</i>	Disruptive <i>Examples</i>	Dangerous <i>Examples</i>
<p>Tearful Highly anxious, agitated, panicky shut down.</p>	<p>Paranoid Hallucinatory Disorganized thought/speech Extremely agitated.</p>	<p>Hostile, defiant Harassing, Bullying Monopolizing Chronic rules Violation. May include substance abuse, or other mental health concerns.</p>	<p>Threatening verbal, nonverbal, and/or written violence.</p>

Some Guidelines for What to Do

Distressed <i>What to do</i>	Disturbed <i>What to do</i>	Disruptive <i>What to do</i>	Dangerous <i>What to do</i>
<p>Offer compassionate concern. Consider proposing contact with respective Student Affairs Deans and/or Counseling Center, especially if it persists.</p>	<p>Consult with the Counseling Center.</p>	<p>Use classroom management to de-escalate primarily annoying persons. Consult with HUPD and your Departmental chain of command. Consult with Counseling Center.</p>	<p>Immediately contact HUPD. Follow your Departmental chain of command reporting policy.</p>

What the Student Counseling Center Will Do

Distressed	Disturbed	Disruptive	Dangerous
<p>Invite the student to make an appointment when appropriate.</p> <p>Accept referrals for counseling from faculty/staff regarding the student of concern.</p>	<p>Invite student to make an appointment when appropriate.</p> <p>Accept referrals for counseling from faculty/staff regarding student of concern.</p> <p>Screen for serious mental health concerns.</p> <p>If necessary, contact HUPD and/or Community Services Board to assess for Danger and possible hospitalization.</p>	<p>Invite the student to make an appointment when appropriate.</p> <p>Accept referrals for counseling from faculty/staff regarding student of concern.</p> <p>Screen for serious mental health concerns.</p> <p>If necessary, contact HUPD and/or Community Services Board to assess for Danger and possible hospitalization..</p>	<p>Will contact HUPD and/or Community Services Board for hospitalization.</p>

Examples of 4D Behaviors

- Class comments, written assignments or statements to you privately about personal problems-anxiety/depression/abuse
- Repeated requests for private meetings, long detailed emails, or any related boundary violations between teacher and student
- Aggression and intimidation-verbal, written or non-verbal
- Threats or acts of violence against you, another individual, the class or community.

PROCEDURE FOR REFERRING TO THE COUNSELING CENTER

- Share your concern about the student's specific behavior(s) with him/her. If you want/intend to make a referral, say so, thus normalizing the Center as one among many useful resources.
- Do speak with a Counselor regarding your concerns about the student's distressed, disturbed or non-aggressive disruptive behavior.
- Download the Student Counseling Center Referral Form from Faculty/Staff Forms or the Counseling Center web page. Fax, hand deliver or mail (confidential) the completed referral form. **Do not email the form or any mental health concerns.**
- Report aggressive, threatening, dangerous and violent behavior to **HUPD**.

Outline for Difficult Conversations With Students

1. Determine the best/safest environment.
2. Explain why you are meeting.
3. Describe the behavior and its impact on the teaching & learning process.
4. Seek to understand and address, not to judge, defend, or excuse.
5. Listen to the student's perspective & response (Do not get defensive – manage personal triggers, ask questions, set appropriate boundaries, if needed).
6. Reiterate or set parameters for future behaviors.
7. Share consequences for noncompliance.
8. Summarize the conversation.
9. Inform student of any follow up.
10. Document the conversation and plan.
11. Decide whom you will inform.