Recognizing Students in Distress

Faculty and staff may find themselves in a position to observe and recognize changes that signal distress in students. Many students initially seek assistance from faculty or staff members, or you may become concerned with behaviors that you have observed in students.

- Some signs of psychological distress are:
- Social withdrawal
- Marked changes in personal hygiene
- Impaired speech
- Irritability
- Significant changes in academic performance
- Unusual acting out
- Threats to harm self or others
- Bizarre behavior not appropriate to the situation
- Infrequent class attendance with little or no work completed
- Disturbing material in submitted assignments

When is a Referral Appropriate?
A referral to Counseling and Psychological Services is appropriate any time you think a student might benefit from professional assessment and counseling. You should consider making a referral:

1. If you feel that the student's problem is more serious than you feel comfortable dealing with
2. If you are experiencing personal difficulties which are interfering with your ability to handle your student's needs
3. If you have attempted to resolve your concerns with a student without success
4. If the student asks for information or assistance about getting help

How to Address your Concerns with a Student
In raising your concerns with a student, it's best to be direct and straightforward about your concern for his or her welfare. Always talk to the student in private, convey respect and caring, and be specific regarding behaviors that have caused your concern.

How to Make a Referral
Suggest to the student that they visit the Office of Counseling and Psychological Services in Founder's Hall, Room 95 or call 610-902-8561. Sometimes it is helpful to assist the student to schedule an appointment by having them call from your office or by introducing them in person to a counselor.

If you feel the situation is an emergency or urgent enough to require immediate attention, contact Counseling and Psychological Services and inform them that you have an emergency. You will be put in touch with a counselor immediately who will advise on how to proceed. If there is an emergency after hours, contact Public Safety at 601-902-8245. If you are concerned about a student, but unsure about the appropriateness of a referral, please feel free to contact the office and a counselor will consult with you.

Dealing With Potentially Violent Students
Campus violence is a serious concern and as such, anyone aware of a potentially dangerous student needs to take that danger seriously. Some warnings signs include:

- Physical violent behavior towards person or property
- Verbally threating or overly aggressive behavior
- Threating emails, instant message, or letters
- Threating o violent material on academic assignments
- Harassment, including sexual harassment and stalking
- Possession of a weapon
- Sometimes these behaviors result from or are exacerbated by mental illness. You need to take appropriate actions to protect both the potential victim and the potentially dangerous student.

If the danger appears imminent, contact Public Safety at 610-902-8245 and 911 immediately for assistance. If you are uncertain about the course of action to take, it is recommended that you contact any or all of the following for consultation or assistance:

- Your department chair
- Vice President for Student Development 610-902-8416
- Vice Provost/Dean for Academic Affairs 610-902-8302
- Public Safety 610-902-8245
- Counseling and Psychological Services 610-902-8561

Other numbers to be aware:

- Health Services 610-902-8400
- Disability Resource Center 610-902-8572

The Office of Counseling and Psychological Services is located in Founder's Hall, Room 95 and operates during normal business hours Monday through Friday during fall and spring semesters. For more information, please contact 610-902-8561.