

# ASSISTING STUDENTS IN DISTRESS

**SEE something, SAY something, DO something**

SUNY MORRISVILLE

— EST. 1908 —

This document serves as a reference guide to help you recognize symptoms of student distress and identify appropriate referrals to campus resources. Remember, you can **always** ask for help and seek consultation from Counseling Services, your peers, supervisors or the Vice President of Student Affairs. Contact information can be found on the reverse side of this guide.

## SEE SOMETHING

Students may feel *alone, isolated* and even *hopeless* when faced with challenges in their academic and personal lives. These feelings can disrupt academic performance and lead to dysfunctional coping and other serious consequences. **YOU may be the first person to SEE something** distressing in a student, especially if you have frequent and prolonged contact with them. As members of the SUNY Morrisville community, it is important that we act with compassion.

## SAY SOMETHING

Students exhibiting troubling behaviors in your presence are likely having difficulties in other areas of their lives, including the classroom, social settings, with roommates or with family. Trust your instincts and **SAY SOMETHING** if a student leaves you feeling worried, alarmed or threatened. You are not alone nor should you be dealing with any issues alone. Counseling Services consultations, coworkers, supervisors, department chairs and the Coordination, Assess, Response and Educate (CARE) Team all are resources to help. Additional resource information can be found on the back of this document.

## DO SOMETHING

Sometimes students cannot, or will not, turn to family or friends. Your expression of concern may be a critical factor in saving a student’s academic career or their life.

## WHAT ABOUT PRIVACY?

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) permits communication about a student of concern in connection with a health and safety emergency. Observations of a student’s conduct or concerning statements made by a student are not protected by FERPA. Appropriate consideration for student privacy should be given before information is shared with people other than those suggested in this document.

## INDICATORS OF DISTRESS

Use the following chart to identify a student in distress. Look for context, patterns, frequency, duration and severity.

ACADEMIC	PHYSICAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Sudden decline in quality of work and grades</li><li>▪ Repeated absences</li><li>▪ Disorganized performance</li><li>▪ Multiple requests for extensions</li><li>▪ Overly demanding of faculty or staff time and attention</li><li>▪ Bizarre content in writings or presentations</li><li>▪ You find yourself providing more personal than academic support</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Marked changes in physical appearance (e.g., grooming, hygiene, weight loss/gain)</li><li>▪ Excessive fatigue or sleep disturbance</li><li>▪ Intoxication, hangovers or smelling of alcohol/drugs</li><li>▪ Disoriented or “out of it”</li><li>▪ Garbled, tangential, disconnected or slurred speech</li><li>▪ Behavior is out of context, disruptive or bizarre</li></ul>
PSYCHOLOGICAL	SAFETY RISK
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Self disclosure of personal distress (e.g., family or financial problems, grief, suicidal thoughts)</li><li>▪ Change in usual demeanor</li><li>▪ Unusual or disproportionate emotional response to events</li><li>▪ Excessive tearfulness or panic reactions</li><li>▪ Irritability or unusual apathy</li><li>▪ Verbal abuse (e.g., taunting, badgering, intimidation)</li><li>▪ Concern from peers</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Unprovoked anger or hostility</li><li>▪ Physical violence (e.g., shoving, grabbing, assaulting, displaying weapons)</li><li>▪ Implying or making a threat to harm self or others</li><li>▪ Academic assignments dominated by themes of hopelessness, rage, worthlessness, isolation, despair, acting out, suicidal ideations or violent behaviors</li><li>▪ Stalking or harassing</li></ul>



# ASSISTING STUDENTS IN DISTRESS: REFERENCE GUIDE



Is the student an immediate danger to self or others? Does the student need immediate assistance for any reason?

**YES**  
The student's conduct is clearly and imminently reckless, disorderly, dangerous or threatening, including self-harm behaviors or having a weapon.

**I'M NOT SURE**  
The student shows signs of distress but I am unsure how serious it is. My interaction has left me feeling uneasy and/or concerned about the student.

**NO**  
I am not concerned for the student's immediate safety, but they are having significant academic and/or personal issues and could use some support.

**Call 911**  
For University Police

**You are NOT with student**  
**OPTIONS:**  
Call Counseling Services for consultation  
*and/or*  
Notify Care Coordinator/ CARE Team  
*and/or*  
Consult with Supervisor

**You are with student**  
**OPTIONS:**  
Have student call Suicide and Crisis hotline at 988  
*and/or*  
Have student call another appropriate hotline  
*and/or*  
Provide Resources such as 988, counseling brochure or emergency card

**OPTIONS:**  
Call Counseling Services for a consultation  
*and/or*  
Refer the student to appropriate campus resource or office  
*and/or*  
Provide Resources such as 988, counseling brochure or emergency card

After speaking with 911, report the concern to your supervisor and notify the Care Coordinator/ CARE Team.

## Tips

### PREPARING TO REACH OUT

- Know the available campus resources and the referral process.
- Review information on privacy rules.
- If safe, meet privately and always allow sufficient time to meet.
- Ensure your safety.
- If you decide not to have direct contact with the student, refer the incident to your supervisor, **Care Coordinator/CARE Team**. It is best if you can have a conversation with the student.
- Call 911 if a student expresses a direct threat to self or others, or acts in a bizarre, highly irrational and disruptive way.

### CONNECTING WITH THE STUDENT

- Clearly express your concerns, focusing on the behavior using compassionate terms.
- Allow the student to talk and actively listen to them.
- Do not become argumentative with the student.
- Ask directly if the students wants to hurt themselves or others.
- Respect the student's privacy without making false promises of confidentiality.
- Document all conversations and attempts to resolve the situation.
- Consult with Counseling Services for further guidance if needed.

### MAKING THE REFERRAL

- Recommend services and provide direct referrals; assist student in contacting resources.
- Frame any decision to seek and accept help as an individual choice.
- Clearly explain any actions that are necessary.
- Be frank with the student about your limits and boundaries (e.g., time, expertise).
- Encourage and assist the student to make and keep an appointment.
- Set a follow-up meeting with the student.

## RESOURCE INFORMATION

Office	Phone
University Police Emergency	911
University Police Non-Emergency	315.684.6410
Suicide & Crisis Lifeline 24/7; call or text	988
Health & Counseling Services	315.684.6078
Madison County Mental Health Crisis Line	315.366.2327
Care Coordinator & Coordination, Assess, Response and Educate (CARE) Team	315.684.6313
Office of Student Rights & Responsibilities	315.684.6070
Help Restore Hope Hotline Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault	855.966.9723
SUNY Crisis Text Line	Text "Got5U" to 741-741

Office	Phone
LGBTQIA+ National Hotline	888.843.4564
Affirmative Action Office	315.684.6829
Title IX Office	315.684.6997
Accessibility Services Center (ASC)	315.684.6349
Residence Life Office	315.684.6043
Tutoring Center	315.684.6042
Career Services	315.684.6615
Campuswide Advising	315.684.6335
School of Agriculture, Business & Technology	315.684.6056
School of Liberal Arts, Sciences & Society	315.684.6081