

Responding to Students of Concern  
Dean of Students Office  
Drake University

*Revised 7/1/2017*

**Students of Concern Can Present in Different Ways**

Student is confused, upset, very sad, highly anxious, irritable, lacking in motivation and/or concentration, showing signs of depression and variable emotions, demonstrating change in behavior, or thinking about suicide. Student's conduct interrupts educational activities of class or is dangerous; student uses verbal or physical threats; student is actively threatening suicide or violence; or is actively harassing others and resisting help from faculty and staff.

Given the history of violence on college campuses, the Dean of Students Office has listed three levels of student distress, which when present over a period of time, suggest the problems are more than "normal" ones. Faculty and staff should not hesitate to communicate with the [Dean of Students Office](#), [Drake Public Safety](#), and/or the [Counseling Center](#) if there are reasons to believe students are facing the following circumstances:

**Level 1** Although not necessarily disruptive to others, these behaviors may indicate that help is needed:

- Serious grade problems or a sudden change from consistently good grades to unaccountably poor grades.
- Excessive absences.
- Unusual or markedly changed pattern of interaction in class; Becoming excessively anxious when called on, dominating, discussion, etc.;
- Other characteristics that may indicate a problem include:
  - depressed mood and lethargic behavior;
  - withdrawing from social circles or groups;
  - written assignments that are disturbing because of the emotional tone or disclosure;
  - excessive activity and very rapid speech;
  - marked change in personal dress and hygiene;
  - anxious behavior;
  - Falling asleep in class or at work.

**Level 2** These behaviors may indicate significant emotional distress and also a reluctance or inability to acknowledge a need for personal help:

- Repeated requests for special consideration, such as deadline extensions (especially if the student appears uncomfortable or highly emotional disclosing the circumstances prompting the request);
- New or consistent behavior which pushes the limits of decorum and which interferes with the effective management of your class or work setting;
- An unusual or exaggerated emotional response that is obviously inappropriate to the situation.

**Level 3** These behaviors usually indicate students in obvious crisis and need emergency care:

- Highly disruptive behavior (hostile, aggressive, violent, etc.);
- Inability to communicate clearly (garbled, slurred speech, unconnected or disjointed thoughts);
- Loss of contact with reality (seeing/hearing things that aren't present, beliefs or actions greatly at odds with reality or probability);
- Overtly suicidal thoughts (referring to suicide as a current option);
- Homicidal threats.

## **What Can You Do To Help**

In dealing with a student who exhibits Level 1 or Level 2 behaviors you may choose to approach the student. In other cases, the student may seek your help with a problem. Here are some suggestions, which might be helpful for you in working with a student of concern.

**If a student is in Level 3 or is making threats of violence to themselves or to others, contact Drake Public Safety at 515 271-2222 immediately. Faculty and staff should take all threats seriously and never place themselves in an unsafe position.**

**TALK** to the student in private and give the student your undivided attention. It is possible that just a few minutes of effective listening on your part may be enough to help the student feel cared about as an individual and more confident about what to do. Even a simple, "How are you doing?" can be helpful.

**LISTEN** in a sensitive, non-threatening way. If you have initiated the contact, express your concern in behavioral, nonjudgmental terms. For example, "I've noticed you've been absent from class lately and I'm concerned," rather than "Where have you been lately? You should be more concerned about your grades."

**COMMUNICATE** understanding by repeating back the essence of what the student has told you. Try to include both content and feelings ("It sounds like you're not accustomed to living away from home and you're feeling homesick"). Let the student talk.

**GIVE HOPE** by helping them realize there are options and suggests resources such as friends, family, or professionals on campus. "There are some options here; let's discuss some possible solutions."

**MAINTAIN** clear and consistent boundaries and expectations. It is important to maintain the professional nature of the faculty-to-student or staff-to-student relationship and the consistency of academic expectations, exam schedules, etc. "Let's figure out a way that I can help you while still being fair to the other students", or, "I'm unable to meet with you right now but I will be available this afternoon."

## **REMOVING A DISRUPTIVE STUDENT FROM THE CLASSROOM**

As an instructor, you have the right to direct students to cease disruptive classroom behavior immediately. If it becomes necessary, you can also direct a student to leave your classroom for the rest of the class period. If they fail to comply with your directives to cease their disruptive behavior or leave the classroom:

- Stay calm—keep emotions in check and maintain control of the classroom.
- Stay safe and have access to a door; keep furniture/desk between you and the student.
- Observe—stand firm where you can observe the student but with some distance to monitor the entire class and show that you are in control. Do not threaten, touch, corner, or invade the student's personal space.
- Use "I" messages" to communicate clear and direct language to the student, such as "I need; I want; I will; and, I feel" to control the situation.
- If the student disregards your directives to leave class, and, if student appears to be a threat to the safety and wellbeing of others, dismiss class and immediately contact Drake Public Safety by calling 515-271-2222. If necessary, get help immediately by sending a student for other staff/faculty and Public Safety.

- You should report the student's failure to comply with your directives to your Academic Dean and the Dean of Students Office promptly following the class via email or phone call (515-271-2835).
- Use classroom phone or personal cell to dial Public Safety at 271-2222. If you feel it is necessary, dial 911.

### **REFER**

Refer to other resources, such as the Counseling Center, when the problem is more serious than you feel comfortable handling;

- when you are extremely busy, stressed or cannot find the time to deal with the problem;
- when you have helped as much as you can and further assistance is needed;
- when you think your personal feelings about the student will interfere with your objectivity;
- when the student admits that there is a problem, but does not want to talk to you about it; or
- when the student asks for information or assistance that you are unable to provide. "I'm not sure if I can provide the help that you need, but I know who can."

### **How To Make A Referral**

- Be frank with the student about the limits of your time, ability, expertise and/or objectivity.
- Let the student know that you think it is best for them to get help from an expert/other.
- Assure them that there is nothing wrong with seeking help and that many students do during their academic career.
- Try to let the student know what to expect if the student follows up on a referral.

### **When in Doubt, Consult**

If you have specific questions about a student, or are unsure about whether to or how to approach this individual to make a referral, call the Dean of Students Office (2835), Counseling Center (3864) or if after hours Drake Public Safety (2222).

DOS or DPS can help you:

- Assess the seriousness of the situation;
- Suggest potential resources.
- Find the best way to make a referral if needed.
- Clarify your own feelings regarding the student and the situation.

### **Other Campus and Community Resources**

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| • Counseling Center                        | 515 271-3864                 |
| • Drake Public Safety                      | 515 271-2222                 |
| • Dean of Student Office                   | 515 271-2835                 |
| • Des Moines Police                        | 515 283-4824                 |
| • Health Center                            | 515 271-3731                 |
| • Polk County Crisis and Advocacy Services | 515 286-3600 or 515 286-3535 |
| • Residence Life                           | 515 271-3781                 |
| • Student Disability Services              | 515 271-1835                 |
| • Title IX Office                          | 515 271-2982                 |

### **Medical Emergencies:**

Call Public Safety at 515-271-2222