

Responding to Troubled Students

Responding to Students of Concern

Dean of Students Office

Drake University

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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, dominating discussion, etc.).
- Other characteristics that may indicate a problem include depressed mood, lethargy, withdrawal, disturbing written assignments, excessive activity, marked changes in hygiene, anxious behavior, or falling asleep in class.

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 (e.g., deadline extensions).
- Behavior that interferes with classroom or work setting management.
- Exaggerated emotional responses inappropriate to the situation.

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

- Highly disruptive behavior (hostile, aggressive, violent).
- Inability to communicate clearly (garbled speech, disjointed thoughts).
- Loss of contact with reality (hallucinations, delusions).
- Overtly suicidal thoughts or homicidal threats.

What Can You Do to Help

If a student exhibits Level 1 or 2 behaviors, you may choose to approach the student. **If a student is in Level 3 or is making threats of violence to themselves or others, contact Drake Public Safety at 515-271-2222 immediately.** Take all threats seriously and never place yourself in an unsafe position.

TALK to the student in private and give your undivided attention.

LISTEN sensitively and non-judgmentally.

COMMUNICATE understanding by reflecting the student's concerns.

GIVE HOPE by suggesting options and resources.

MAINTAIN clear and consistent boundaries and expectations.

Removing a Disruptive Student from the Classroom

Instructors have the right to direct students to cease disruptive behavior or leave class. If they refuse or pose a threat:

- Stay calm and maintain control.
- Stay safe and keep access to a door.
- Use "I" messages to communicate clearly.
- If necessary, dismiss class and contact Public Safety (515-271-2222).

Refer students to campus resources when appropriate:

- Counseling Center – 515-271-3864
- Drake Public Safety – 515-271-2222
- Dean of Students Office – 515-271-2835
- Des Moines Police – 515-283-4824
- Student Counseling Center – 515-216-5100
- Polk County Crisis Services – 515-286-3600 / 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.