

HELPING STUDENTS IN DISTRESS

Faculty/Staff Response Guide

HIGH RISK

URGENT SITUATIONS REQUIRING IMMEDIATE ASSISTANCE

- Individual is a threat to self or others
- Reports of thoughts, plans, or intent to harm self or others
- Disruptive behavior and individual is not responding to attempts to redirect
- Argumentative, and increased use of profanity
- Expressing anger for being treated unfairly and talks about taking revenge

RESPONSE:

Call 911

Contact Mercy Public Safety:

Toledo: 419-251-4444

Youngstown: 330-480-3288

Follow up with Vice President Student Affairs/Dean of Students:

419-251-1512

Complete Concern and Complaint Form:

www.mercycollege.edu/concern

MEDIUM RISK

INDIVIDUAL IS A POSSIBLE RISK TO SELF OR OTHERS

- Disruptive behavior that interferes with the learning of students or impedes the delivery of college services
- Several indicators of distress are evident, such as difficulty focusing, decreased appetite, poor class attendance, sleep disturbances, and/or emotional reaction disproportionate to the situation
- Reports feeling depressed and/or anxious, expressing hopelessness
- Visibly impaired or appears to be impaired
- Verbally harassing or intimidating others
- Individual has experienced a sudden and distressing event (i.e. death of a loved one, divorce or break up, job loss)

RESPONSE:

If danger to self or others, contact Mercy Public Safety:

Toledo: 419-251-4444

Youngstown: 330-480-3288

Complete Concern and Complaint Form:

www.mercycollege.edu/concern

Follow up with Vice President Student Affairs/Dean of Students:

419-251-1512

Consult or refer to Counseling and Wellness Center:

Toledo: 419-251-1454

Youngstown: 330-480-2874

LOW RISK

EMOTIONAL DISTRESS

- Individual has identified emotional issues, academic challenges (i.e. poor grades, navigating the college system) or lack of resources (i.e. financial, housing, employment)
- Difficulty focusing, missing class, frequently late
- Reports feeling anxious or depressed, but denies any thoughts, plans, or intent to harm self or others
- Concerns for content of written material, either through email or coursework
- Stressed about upcoming assignments or test anxiety
- Often talks about stressful situations/events aside from school

RESPONSE:

Consult or refer to Counseling and Wellness Center:

Toledo: 419-251-1454

Youngstown: 330-480-2874

Complete Early Alert Referral:

www.mercycollege.edu/alert

Provide Resources to Student:

Crisis Resources:

Toledo – Rescue Mental Health: 419-255-9585

Youngstown – Help Hotline: 330-747-2696

National Suicide Hotline: 800-273-8255

Crisis Text Line: Text “START” to 741-741 anytime, about any crisis

United Way: Dial 211 for additional help with resources

Campus Resources:

Student Success Center: 419-251-1487

Academic Accessibility: 419-251-1784

Financial Aid: 419-251-1219

Campus Ministry: 419-251-1866

Diversity and Inclusion: 419-251-1203

Career, Professional Development, and Retention: 419-251-1339

Title IX Coordinator: TitleIX@mercycollege.edu

Deputy Title IX Coordinator (Youngstown): 330-480-2170

Distress from a student can be communicated through the following three areas:

ACADEMIC

- Lateness
- Absenteeism
- Missed, late, or incomplete assignments
- Lack of participation in class
- Missed appointments during office hours
- Grandiosity
- Procrastination
- Difficulty with core study skills
- Test anxiety/panic
- Inappropriately relating all assignments to his/her self
- Disorganized presentation of information, expansive writings, tangential thoughts, etc.
- Writing samples expressing personal troubles

BEHAVIOR

- Frequent entering/exiting
- Lack of social interaction in class and unresponsiveness to instructor
- Agitated, restless behaviors
- Difficulty concentrating
- Dazed expression
- Falling asleep in class
- Slow or rapid speech
- Demanding of time
- Avoidance of eye contact
- Irritable or aggressive
- Marked shifts in mood
- Expressed feelings of worthlessness, shame, humiliation, hopelessness or despair
- Tearfulness in class or meetings
- Impulsive or risky
- Sexually provocative
- Discloses difficulties

APPEARANCE

- Noticeable weight gain or loss
- Disheveled appearance
- Dilated or constricted pupils
- Sweaty or flushed skin when there is no exertion taking place
- Absence of facial expression
- Shaking, trembling, shivering when it's not cold
- Signs of possible drug or alcohol use

ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR ASSISTING STUDENTS

DEALING WITH AN AGGRESSIVE STUDENT:

- Acknowledge their feelings
- Validate the situation
- Speak slowly, quietly, and calmly
- Avoid body language that may appear challenging
- Be directive and firm about the behaviors you will accept; "Please stand back," or "I cannot listen to you when you are yelling."
- DON'T get into an argument or shouting match
- DON'T become hostile or punitive yourself
- DON'T press for explanations of behavior
- DON'T ignore the situation
- DON'T touch the student

IF YOU FEEL THREATENED OR UNSAFE:

- Alert Mercy College Public Safety that you will be meeting with someone who may pose a threat
- Keep the door open
- Position yourself so you can exit quickly
- If a weapon becomes evident, leave or ask the student to leave any weapon in a neutral position
- Terminate the meeting immediately if the student's behavior escalates and notify campus security

DEALING WITH A SUICIDAL INDIVIDUAL:

- Take the student seriously; 80% of completed suicides come with warning of the intent
- Be direct
- Be available to listen, but take the steps to refer the student to the Counseling & Wellness Center immediately
- If urgent and cannot reach the Counseling & Wellness Center, contact Campus Security/Police
- DON'T minimize the situation
- DON'T overreact by acting panicked or shocked
- DON'T engage in a philosophical debate on the moral aspects of suicide
- DON'T leave the student alone, especially if s/he has a plan
- DON'T be afraid of suggesting the idea of suicide
- DON'T over commit yourself

TIPS FOR APPROACHING STUDENTS:

- Approach students in a supportive manner
- Focus on things you have directly observed, showing curiosity and concern
- Listen carefully
- Do not make judgments or diagnoses
- Invite students to identify what they think is preventing them from performing as well as they can
- Ask open-ended questions
- Demonstrate respect for issues students show discomfort discussing
- Maintain appropriate boundaries
- Offer a referral if and when you feel that it is warranted

HELPFUL CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- "Tell me how things are going."
- "You seem very quiet and distracted. Is there something going on that you'd like to talk about?"
- "I am concerned about you. I have noticed _____. I am wondering if you need support right now."

THINGS TO AVOID:

- DON'T judge, evaluate or criticize, even if asked
- DON'T be a hero or savior; recognize the limits of your role and refer to other professionals
- DON'T give special consideration to a student unless you would do it for any student in a similar situation
- DON'T make promises you cannot or will not keep
- DON'T promise absolute confidentiality in all circumstances
- DON'T be afraid to intervene for fear you will say the wrong thing