What is the role of faculty and staff in recognizing and responding to students in distress?

Students often experience significant changes in their lives during the course of their education. Your role as faculty and staff gives you the opportunity to observe student behavior and identify problems. Recognizing and responding to student behaviors may be a critical factor in helping students address problems that are interfering with academic success.

Students in distress are likely to display one or more of the following signs, symptoms, indicators, or signals

**Academic and Employment Indicators**
- Repeated absences from class or employment
- Missed assignments, appointments, or meetings
  - Deterioration in quality or quantity of work
  - Continued request for special provisions
- Overblown or disproportionate responses to evaluation

**Behavioral and Emotional Indicators**
- Direct statements indicating distress, family problems, or loss
- Angry or hostile outbursts, yelling, or aggressive comments
  - More withdrawn or more animated than usual
- Expressions of hopelessness or worthlessness: crying or tearfulness
  - Expressions of severe anxiety, irritability, or depression
  - Shakiness, tremors, fidgeting, or pacing
  - Reference to plan/suicidal thoughts
- Isolating self in residence hall room or apartment

**Physical Indicators**
- Deterioration in appearance or personal hygiene
  - Noticeable cuts, bruises, or burns
- Substance abuse: Including coming to class intoxicated
  - Weight gain or loss
- Trouble staying engaged or awake in class
Crisis

The student’s situation may be a crisis if there is an expression of hopelessness, written or verbal reference to suicide, recent death of a friend or family member, or the student has experienced sexual or physical assault. The student is in serious need of help right now, but no one is in immediate danger.

Possible responses to a crisis may include contacting your supervisor for assistance; contacting the Behavioral Review and Recommendation Team through utilization of the concerns e-mail, (concerns@uwplatt.edu); or contacting the Dean of Students office for consultation at 608.342.1854. Staff at University Counseling Services are available for consultation at 608.342.1865, Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–4:30 p.m. If a student is willing to seek counseling, faculty and staff may help facilitate that process by encouraging the student to call Student Health Services at 608.342.1891, or you may walk them over to 220 Royce Hall.

Emergency

The situation may be an emergency if the student:

- Is displaying aggressive behavior, or if there is a threat of immediate physical danger to self or others.

- Has created a suicide plan which may include specific details, availability of means, and lethality of means.

- Is unresponsive to the external environment; they are incoherent or passed out.

In an emergency situation contact University Police immediately (911) and be prepared to give them the following information: your name, the name of the student, a concise description of current situation, kind of assistance needed, and your exact location. If a student appears dangerous or leaves your office abruptly, be prepared to give University Police an accurate description of the student and the direction they are headed.