

# Managing Students of Concern

A Guide for Faculty and Staff  
Involvement

# Training Objectives

- information about what's happening on campus regarding students of concern
- information about problematic behaviors (distressed, disruptive, threatening)
- some guidelines for understanding and dealing with students of concern
- practice in dealing with a student of concern
- sources of support & consultation

# Faculty and Staff As Helping Resources

- Students with problems will come to your attention before they come to ours.
- Students will often turn to you for help.
- Students will share personal information with you.
- You can assist the student before problems escalate.

# Campus Recommendations

(Mowbray et al., 2006)

- Prevention/outreach at orientation for students/parents.
- Educate faculty/staff re: mental health issues/resources.
- Specifically assign tasks of providing outreach and educational services (e.g. Counseling Center).
- Campuses should have “No Wrong Doors” policies.
- Comprehensive system to avert and/or respond to crises (training, timely services, service coordination, response and postvention procedures).

# Task Force on Students of Concern

- Policies & Codes
- Behavior Intervention Team (BIT)
  - Conduct Officer
  - Disability Resource Center
  - Campus Police
  - Counseling Center
- Campus-Wide Training
  - Students of Concern
  - Workplace Violence
  - Website & Information
- Reporting

# What Makes a Student a Student of Concern?

- Distressed Behaviors
- Disruptive Behaviors
- Threatening Behaviors

# Levels of Concern

**Disruptive**

**Threatening**

Inattentive--Interrupting--Insulting--Harassing--Aggressive--Threat to self/other



**Distressed**

**Threatening**

Upset----Absent-----Unkempt-----Erratic-----Irrational-----Threat to self/other



Level of Concern  
X  
Level of Intervention

**LOW CONCERN** —————→ **HIGH CONCERN**

Talk to Student

Consult Dept.

Consult BIT

Refer

Report

# Be Aware of Risk Factors

- Major life events causing severe stress  
e.g.: marriage, birth of child, significant death, trauma (including combat experience), etc.
- History of substance abuse, chronic physical illness or mental health issues.
- Feelings of hopelessness/withdrawal.
- Poor sense of self.
- Lack of or disconnected from social support.
- Disrupted family relations/possible abuse.
- Unmet emotional/psychological needs.

# Identifying Distressed Behavior

*Definition* – Students with distressed behaviors cause us concern for their well-being.

They appear to be struggling academically, physically, socially and/or emotionally.

# Examples of Distressed Behavior

- Writes or jokes about killing self
- Severe anxiety, stress, or sadness
- Discloses personal or family crisis
- Irrational, erratic, or paranoid thinking
- Reveals self-injurious tendencies
- Diminished ability to cope, attend to daily tasks, and/or take reasonable care of themselves

# Dealing with *Distressed* Behaviors

- Communicate understanding by repeating back the gist of what s/he has said.
- Talk openly and directly about your concerns, without judgment or critique.
- Listen to the student's concerns/feelings non-defensively.
- Look particularly for serious warning signs: giving away key possessions; increased substance abuse; sudden, dramatic personality or behavior change; loss of hope or purpose; extreme isolation [or other extreme or disturbing behaviors].
- Consult, consult, consult
- Make a referral or a report

# Consult about *Distressed* Students

The 3 C's: Consult, Consult, Consult

- Experienced colleague
- Department Head/Supervisor
- Counseling Center (797-1012)
- Disability Resource Center (797-2444)
- Student Health Center (797-1660)

# When to Refer

- The behavior/problem is beyond your skill level.
- The behavior is getting worse.
- Personality differences make it hard for you to help further.
- You know the student personally and don't think you could be objective.
- You feel overwhelmed or unsure of how to proceed.
- You simply feel the need to talk to someone about your observations or concerns.

# How to Refer

- Let the student know it isn't necessary to know exactly what is wrong in order to seek assistance.
- Assure the student that seeking assistance does not mean their problems are unusual or extremely serious.
- Be frank about your own limits of time, energy, training, & objectivity.
- Give the student information about available resources & reassure them that having an appointment isn't automatically a long-term commitment.
- Let them know that campus support services are generally confidential and no-cost.

# Make a Referral

- USU Counseling Center (no charge) 7-1012
- USU Student Health & Wellness Center (little or no charge) 7-1660
- Disability Resource Center (little or no charge) 7-2444
- Academic Resource Center (no charge) 7-1128
- Trusted Religious/Spiritual Advisor
- Other Community Resources (usually for a fee)

*It is important they get connected somewhere....if one office feels too threatening at first, try a different office. Call ahead and let that office know of your concerns.*

# Quick Note on Confidentiality

- Mental health providers (including those on campus) are exempted from FERPA.
- These providers are governed by state mental health laws (more stringent than FERPA).
- Exceptions to confidentiality:
  - Person is a clear danger to self or others.
  - Person reports abuse of minor, elderly, or impaired person.
  - Court order from a judge (not just a subpoena).

# Identifying Disruptive Behavior

*Definition* -- Disruptive behaviors are ineffective strategies for meeting needs that interfere with or interrupt the day-to-day functioning of a classroom, living community, or other university functions.

They may not pose an immediate threat, but may be resistant to intervention or corrective action.

# Examples of Disruptive Behavior

- Interfering with ability to teach, learn, or conduct university business
- Demanding inordinate amounts of time
- Dominating class time or lecture
- Requesting unreasonable accommodations
- Verbally aggressive, hostile, intimidating or abusive

# Dealing with Disruptive Behaviors

- Establish clear expectations, protocols, boundaries/limits.
- Correct innocent mistakes and minor first offenses.
- Give a general word of caution to the class.
- Request that the student stop the behavior.
- If possible, speak to the student about their behavior after class, in a private but safe place.
- If behavior persists, ask the student to leave the area.

# Dealing with Disruptive Behaviors (cont'd)

- Discuss alternatives, reasonable goals, consequences.
- Document behavior/s and discussion content.
- Provide student with a copy of expected changes, time line, and potential consequences.
- Refer student for additional support.
- Report the behaviors to the Chief Conduct Officer.
- Consult with colleagues and/or others for support and assistance.

# Identifying Threatening Behaviors

*Definition* - endangering, physically intimidating, making actual threat or alluding to physical harm, or causing physical harm to self or someone else.

These behaviors often leave us feeling concerned for our own or someone else's safety.

Take them seriously.

Threats can be verbal or physical; direct, indirect, or veiled; with or without a weapon; and often escalate over time.

# Examples of Threatening Behavior

- Implies or makes direct threat to harm self or other.
- Uses words or actions that reflect intention to instill fear of physical or psychological harm in someone.
- Causes destruction of property or substantial disruption to campus community.
- Displays or makes serious reference to any weapon.
- Physically confronts or attacks another person.
- Stalks or maliciously harasses another person.
- Content of e-mail, letter, voice mail, Facebook, assignment, exam, etc. includes words and ideas that a reasonable person would find threatening.

# Dealing with Threatening Behavior

- If the threat appears to be imminent, call 9-1-1 (from campus phone) or 797-1939 (from cell phone).
- Be Prepared.
  - Workplace Violence Workshop by USU Police
  - Have personal & office safety plans in place and review regularly
- Consult.
  - USU Police (in volatile situation, can request officer presence)
  - Conduct Officer
  - Student Services VP
  - Supervisor, Department Head, Dean, etc.
  - Counseling Center professional staff
  - Disability Resource Center professional staff
- Document the interaction thoroughly.
- Report.

## In an Intense Situation:

- Stay on equal footing w/ student.
- Respond only to specific unwanted behavior; avoid assumptions or “diagnoses.”
- Don’t take it personally.
- Remain calm (or fake it).
- Give the person time to “run down.”
- Be open to problem-solving.
- Do not unwittingly reward threatening behavior.

# In an Intense Situation (cont'd)

- State only the facts.
- Always be respectful.
- Be concise.
- Focus on responding rather than reacting.
- Be willing to give space.
- Ask for specific complaints to be put in writing.
- Ask, “How do you want this discussion to end?”
- Seek help, consultation, and referral.

## In an explosive situation:

- Immediately contact Police (9-1-1).
- Do what you can to be safe.
- Contact your Department Head, Dean, Supervisor, etc., a.s.a.p.
- Inform Judicial Officer (7-1754) or file a student behavior report a.s.a.p.
- Consult with USU Counseling Center (7-1012) for post-incident assistance.

# What to Report

- Persons at risk of:
  - Serious harm to self
  - Serious harm to others
- Persons who show evidence of:
  - Serious mental health concerns
  - Serious substance abuse
  - Behavior that is significantly disruptive to the learning, living, or working environment

# How to Report

(G. Deisinger, Ph.D., Iowa State University)

- Document exact words and actions— include date, time, behaviors, witnesses
- Document personal reactions and protective actions
- Preserve evidence— keep copies of e-mails, memos, voicemails, papers, etc.
- Report concerns in a timely manner.

# Where to Report

- VP for Student Services (797-1712)
- University Police (797-1939 OR 9-1-1)
- Chief Conduct Officer (797-1754)
- Campus Safety Website

[www.usu.edu/campussafety](http://www.usu.edu/campussafety)

OR

Visit USU Home Page and click on “Campus Safety”-- then “Reporting”-- then “Student of Concern”--complete & submit the form.

# Things to Discuss as a Department

- If a student has been exhibiting unusual behavior and other students are complaining, what should I do?
- What are my rights as a professor, instructor, or staff member?
- What are my students' rights?
- What is due process?
- What if a student confides emotional difficulties to me?

# Things to Discuss as a Department

(cont'd)

- What if a student presents me with a veiled or overt threat?
- Do we have a safety plan and what is it?
- Can I tell a student to leave my class or my office and not come back?
- What should I do if students begin to challenge my authority?
- How should I handle incivility?

# WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

## Three Realistic Scenarios

Amy comes into the Financial Aid Office, where you work, almost in tears, to ask about the terms of her scholarship. She is concerned that her grades will not be good enough this semester to keep the scholarship. When you look up her records, you see that her grades in previous semesters have been all A's. Her scholarship requires a 3.75 GPA. She thinks she might be getting an A- in her art history class--this is the grade about which she is concerned.

As you are talking with her, you notice several small fresh cuts on her arm.

While you are having lunch in the Marketplace, you notice a commotion over by the cash register.

A young man is harassing the cashier about the price of lunch. Although he raised his voice, he did not touch her and he eventually walked away. A few days later, you see this same young man in the bookstore, where he is asking every customer who comes in if they agree that professors get kickbacks from certain expensive textbooks. Later that same day, you see the same young man jumping out in front of cars as they leave the parking terrace.

You work in Career Services (liaison to the College of HASS). You have been working with a student in the English Department on developing her curriculum vita to send with applications to graduate schools. She has brought in a sample of her writing to be included in her application portfolios. Although her appointment is in only five minutes, she leaves the document in your mailbox, as you are still with another student. This is typical behavior for her—she is often impatient and reluctant to speak with you face to face (many of your interactions are via phone messages and e-mails). As you read through the writing, you become uncomfortable, as it is a seething essay on the excesses of higher education. She specifically mentions several upper-level administrators at USU, making numerous irrational accusations of connections with organized crime. She states that these illegal activities are the reason that tuition keeps going up and that she is not going to take it anymore. She mentions a plan to sabotage one administrator’s car. Although she often seems a little angry, the tone of this essay is extreme. You decide to contact her. Unable to reach her by phone, you send her an e-mail expressing your concern about her essay. Her cryptic response is,

“It’s a !@\$%\*! work of fiction....art imitates life....no, life imitates art. I’m LOL.”

# SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION OF SCENARIOS

# REVIEW OF SCENARIOS

# ROLE PLAYING EXERCISE

# REVIEW OF ROLE PLAYING EXERCISE

# USU Referrals and Support

- Campus Police (797-1939 OR 9-1-1)
- Counseling Center (797-1012)
- Disability Resource Center (797-2444)
- Conduct Officer (797-1754)
- Student Health & Wellness (797-1660)
- VP for Student Services (797-1712)

*Call Us!!*

# Remember:

- When in doubt...check it out (the 3 C's).
- Be prepared—have a plan.
- Document concerns.
- Err on the side of caution.
- Report any serious incidents.
- Cache Valley was named the safest metropolitan area in the nation, 2005 & 2007.
- Everyone is responsible for campus safety.

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? QUESTIONS ?  
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