

DEALING WITH STUDENTS IN DISTRESS OR CRISIS

Provided by the GRU Counseling Center

Locations: Summerville campus - Central Utilities Plant Building, Health Science Campus – Student Health

Hours: 8am - 5pm, Monday - Friday

Phone: 706.737.1471

Responding to a student in distress or crisis can pose dilemmas and you might need to seek the assistance of other campus supports and services, such as the Counseling Center, which serves to help both students and faculty/staff at these times. Here are some guidelines for managing the kinds of unpredictable situations you could encounter, and for enlisting the help of the Counseling Center and/or other campus services.

RECOGNIZING WARNING SIGNS

Crisis situations where students show unrestrained emotion, aggression or bizarre behavior or self-report severe problems such as suicidal feelings or disturbed thinking are not usually common. It is more likely that faculty or staff may become aware of warning signs that indicate a need for intervention. These signs are not necessarily urgent but may be used as guidelines to help you determine whether or not to intervene.

- * Changes in academic performance or obvious underperformance
- * Changes in physical appearance or behavior
- * Inadequate grooming or hygiene
- * Inappropriate social conduct
- * Poor attention/concentration or increased disorganization
- * Social withdrawal or disinterest
- * Increased absences/tardiness or erratic participation
- * Reports of stressful events (i.e. relationship problems, death of loved one, trauma, etc.)
- * Repeated requests for extensions or other special considerations
- * Increasing dependency on you
- * Coming to class intoxicated or 'high'
- * Talking/writing about death/suicide/violence, which is out of the ordinary for that person
- * Sleeping or eating disturbances

HOW TO TALK TO STUDENTS ABOUT YOUR CONCERNS (NON-EMERGENCY)

- **SPEAK PRIVATELY.** This may help minimize embarrassment and defensiveness.
- **BE HONEST.** Be frank about your concerns, sharing what you have observed without judging.
- **BE CLEAR ABOUT LIMITS.** Clearly communicate the limits of your ability to help. It is not your role or responsibility to counsel students, but you can help them find the support they need.
- **SUGGEST THE COUNSELING CENTER.** Examples: "Sounds like you are really struggling with _____. Many people find it helpful to talk with someone in confidence who is outside of the situation." or "I want to help you get the help you need and deserve. We have a Counseling Center on campus where students go for all kinds of reasons" or "Meeting with a counselor is free and confidential and will not go on your academic records."
- **CONSIDER MAKING A REFERRAL.** Suggest a student seek help instead of telling them or ordering them to attend. If they are receptive to seeing a counselor, consider providing them with the Counseling Center's phone number or allowing them access to your phone to make the call. Walking a student over to the Counseling Center or calling for them may also be helpful, particularly if the student is upset and may benefit from the extra support.

POSSIBLE EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

Urgent concerns that do require immediate attention may include:

- ✓ **SUICIDE**
- ✓ **FEAR OF LOSING CONTROL & POSSIBLY HURTING SOMEONE ELSE**
- ✓ **SEXUAL/PHYSICAL ASSAULT OR OTHER TYPES OF ABUSE**
- ✓ **RECENT DEATH OF LOVED ONE** (particularly if the person is unable to manage emotions)
- ✓ **THREATENING OR OVERTLY VIOLENT BEHAVIOR**

Emergency situations warrant referrals to either the Counseling Center or Public Safety. If there is an imminent threat of danger, contact Public Safety. Otherwise, contact the Counseling Center. For more information about how to make campus referrals, please see the reverse side of this document.

GRU POLICE: 706.737.1401/ 729.2911 COUNSELING CENTER: 706.737.1471 DEAN OF STUDENTS: 706.737.1411

REFERRAL AND CONSULTATION INFORMATION

Provided by the GRU Counseling Center

Location: Central Utilities Plant Phone:
Hours: 8am - 5pm, Monday - Friday (evening appointments available by

NON EMERGENCY CONSULTATION: If you are unsure of how to handle a situation, call the Center, inform the receptionist who you are (faculty, staff, administrator) and ask to speak with a counselor. If all counselors are engaged, your call will be returned as soon as possible. A brief consultation with a counselor may help you sort out the relevant issues and explore alternative approaches to use with the student. Conveying your concern and willingness to help in any way you can (including referral) is probably the most important thing you can do to assist a student in distress. Your support, encouragement and reassurance is very valuable. Disruptive classroom behavior is prohibited by the GRU Student Code of Conduct. The Counseling Center will be happy to consult with you about these cases. However, behavioral problems need to be referred to the Dean of Students Office. Refer to the GRU Student Handbook for further information.

NON EMERGENCY REFERRALS: When you discuss a referral to the Counseling Center, it would be helpful for the student to hear in a clear and concise manner your concerns and why you think counseling would be helpful. Having the student call for an appointment tends to increase her/his responsibility and commitment to follow up by keeping the appointment. HOWEVER, there may be some situations when it is more advantageous for you to call and make an appointment for her/him or even to accompany the student to our office. (Please refer to reverse side for tips on how to talk to students about your concerns.)

CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY: All client discussions are held *strictly confidential* except when the client is under 18 years of age, presents a danger to him/herself or others (including situations where abuse must be reported) or if information must be released due to a court order. Counseling referrals may only be acknowledged if the client gives the counselor permission to reveal to the referring person that they have attended counseling. All other release of information occurs only if the client signs a release form.

SERVICES PROVIDED: The Counseling Center provides FREE counseling to currently enrolled GRU students. Our individual counseling services are designed for clients who can benefit from time-limited counseling. If long-term therapy or other specialized services, such as hospitalization or medication are indicated, the client will be referred to an appropriate off campus resource.

POSSIBLE EMERGENCY SITUATIONS: Urgent concerns that require immediate intervention might include: suicide, fear of losing control and possibly hurting someone else, sexual or physical assault, abuse, a recent death of a loved one or students making threats or exhibiting violent behavior.

If a student is making threats:

- Take the situation seriously.
- Prioritize your safety and that of others.
- Avoid speaking privately if you feel unsafe. Consider leaving your office door open & notify someone nearby of your situation. You may consider having another faculty or staff member present for the conversation.
- Speak calmly, allowing the person a chance to verbalize concerns, where you can acknowledge the person's distress or frustration.
- Withdraw, and clear others away if direct threats are made or if behavior escalates to aggression.

If an emergency includes an imminent threat, Public Safety should be contacted immediately. If Public Safety determines the Counseling Center or Dean of Students Office needs to be involved, they will make that contact.

EMERGENCY COUNSELING REFERRALS: If the matter is not a public safety issue, contact the Counseling Center and inform the receptionist that you are dealing with an emergency situation and need to speak with a counselor immediately. Counseling staff will advise you of how to proceed. If the situation is determined to be a viable mental health emergency, the person will likely need to be seen by a counselor immediately, where it may be helpful for you to escort the student over to the Counseling Center (assuming you feel comfortable doing so). Please note that some counseling concerns may require that the student be referred off campus for crisis stabilization, hospitalization or other specialized treatment not available on campus. If this occurs, the Counseling staff will work with the client to establish an appropriate off campus referral.

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS:

GRU POLICE: 706.737.1401 or 729.2911 (for emergencies)

COUNSELING CENTER: 706.737.1471

DEAN OF STUDENTS: 706.737.1411

