Warning Signs and Indicators of Students in Distress

Students in distress and/or crisis may exhibit the following warning indicators:

Early Warning Signs

- None of these warning indicators alone is sufficient for predicting mental health problems, aggression and/or violence.
- When presented in combination, they indicate the need for documentation and further analysis to determine an appropriate intervention.

Academic Indicators

- Missed assignments
- Deterioration in quality of work
- A drop in grades
- Repeated absences from class
- A negative change in classroom performance

Academic Indicators

- Verbal aggressiveness in class meetings
- Disorganized or erratic performance
- Continual seeking of special accommodations (late papers, extensions, postponed examinations, etc.)
- Essays or creative work that indicate extremes of hopelessness, social isolation, rage, or despair

Personal / Interpersonal Indicators

- Tearfulness
- Unprovoked anger or hostility
- Excessive dependency
- Expressions of hopelessness or worthlessness
- Exaggerated personality traits (e.g., more withdrawn or animated than normal)

Personal / Interpersonal Indicators

- Direct statements indicating distress, family problems, or other difficulties
- A hunch or gut-level reaction that something is wrong
- Expressions of concern about a student in the class by his/her peers

Physical Indicators
- Deterioration in physical appearance
- Visible changes in weight
- Lack of personal hygiene
- Excessive fatigue
- Coming to class bleary-eyed, hung over, or smelling of alcohol
- Appearing sick or ill

Safety Risk Indicators

- Any written note or verbal statement that has a “sense of finality” (suicidality)
- Statements to the effect that the student is “going away for a long time”
- Severe depression
- Any history of suicidal thoughts or attempts

Safety Risk Indicators

- Giving away of prized possessions
- Self-injurious or self-destructive behaviors
- Out-of-control behavior
- Essays or papers that focus on despair, suicide, death, violence or aggression
- Verbal or written (email) threats of harm to self or others

-Source: Arizona State University Counseling and Consultation Services