**WAYS TO DEAL WITH A STUDENT IN DISTRESS: GENERAL**

**GUIDELINES**

* Request to speak with the student in private. This is especially important to minimize any shame or embarrassment. The request can be made in person, through email or a phone call.
* Provide sufficient time to meet and speak with the student. When speaking with the student, give them your undivided attention. Put aside other work, and hold off on answering phone calls, etc. This conveys the message that you are genuinely interested, concerned, and want to help.
* Communicate your concerns directly and in a non-judgmental manner. Let the student know what you have observed in terms of specific behaviors or signs that concern you (e.g., I’ve noticed that you haven’t turned in the last several assignments and I’m concerned about you).
* Listen attentively. This is probably one of the most important things you can do for a student, as it shows genuine interest, and care for the individual.
* Repeat back the essence of what the student has shared with you (e.g., I’m hearing that you’ve been having trouble sleeping lately and it’s tough to wake up for early morning classes). Seek additional or clarifying information by asking open-ended questions (e.g., so what happened then?). Both of these are ways of communicating to the student that you are listening and doing your best to clearly understand him/her.
* Avoid questions that may be critical or judgmental (e.g. Why are you always being disruptive in class, or Why haven’t you turned in your last three assignments?).
* Be aware of your body language. It is important that your body language communicates interest and concern. This is done with your facial expression, posture, tone of voice, and eye contact.
* Offer hope for the student. Help the student realize that there are options, resources, and/or support available to them. Suggest specific resources for the student such as friends, family, clergy, and other professionals on campus (e.g., Academic Advising, Student Health Center, University Counseling Services, etc.).
* Maintain clear and consistent boundaries with the student. It is important that while offering support and assistance, you also maintain the professional nature of your relationship with the student.
* Consider University Counseling Services as a resource and discuss a referral with the student. If a student is particularly distressed, you can choose to escort the student directly to University Counseling Services.
* Ask the student directly about thoughts of suicide if you are concerned about this. Do not be afraid to talk about suicide. Be very straightforward and know that your question is not going to cause them to act on their suicidal thoughts. In fact, suicidal students usually want to communicate their feelings. A way of asking question can include, “I can see that this is a difficult time for you and you are feeling very upset right now. Are you having thoughts of hurting yourself or killing yourself”?
* If you are unsure of how to proceed with a student or if a student refuses help and you have concerns, contact staff at University Counseling Services. They can provide you with support, consult with you about a particular situation, and offer suggestions for how to assist a student.
* Be aware of UCS after hours urgent care phone services. Dial (818) 677-2366 and press option 3 to speak with a counselor

**Don't**

* Ignore or minimize the situation or the student’s distress.
* Meet with the student alone if you feel uncomfortable or unsafe.
* Overreact.
* Be judgmental, critical, or embarrass the student (e.g., Oh, you finally decided to grace us with your presence this morning in class).
* Tell the student what to do. Instead, help the student identify options for themselves including relevant resources available on-campus (e.g., Academic Advising, Student Health Services).
* Feel responsible to solve the student’s problems. Instead, focus on helping provide the student with enough hope to lead them to utilize resources and/or seek support.
* Forget that you can call to consult with a counselor at University Counseling Services.

**Taken From**: The manual for [Assisting Students in Distress](http://www.csun.edu/sites/default/files/assisting-distress-students.pdf)- ( A. Eipe & J. Pearce, 2009) is a comprehensive guide that covers a range of topics for helping your students: <https://www.csun.edu/sites/default/files/assisting-distress-students.pdf>