

EMERGENCIES

There are some behaviors which students will exhibit that indicate they are in crisis and need emergency attention. These include:

- Highly disruptive behaviors, hostility, aggressiveness, violence, etc.
- Inability to communicate clearly (garbled, slurred speech, unconnected or disjointed thoughts)
- Loss of contact with reality, for example, seeing or hearing things that are not there, beliefs or actions that are greatly at odds with reality or probability
- Suicidal thoughts that are immediate, including plans and/or methods
- Homicidal thoughts

WHAT YOU CAN DO IN AN EMERGENCY

Crises are the easiest form of student distress to identify and, in some ways, the easiest to handle. Assistance and emergency referral procedures are outlined here for your convenience:

- Stay calm. Try not to leave the student alone.
- Find someone to stay with the student while calls are made to helping resources.
- If the student directly threatens himself or herself or someone else, or otherwise behaves bizarrely, immediate attention is needed.
- Call: Public Safety: 888-2330 (24 hours), or 911 for the Buffalo Police.
- Stay with the student, or have someone else stay with the student until help arrives.

HELPING THE DISTRESSED STUDENT NOT NEEDING EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE

Some situations are not as obvious as crises, yet you may know that something needs to be done. You have a variety of choices for dealing with behavior that indicates to you that a student may be troubled, but is not in crisis. If you decide to approach the student or the student approaches you directly, and you decide to handle the problem personally:

- Give the student your undivided attention by discussing the matter privately. Just a few minutes of effective listening by faculty or staff can make a large difference in a student's perception of a problem, and often, of the college.
- Express your concern in behavioral, nonjudgmental terms. For example, "I've noticed you've had some absences lately, and I'm concerned."
- Let the student talk. Try to communicate to the student that you have listened to what was said. Try to repeat back or paraphrase the "gist" of what was said.
- Help the student clarify advantages and disadvantages of various courses of action for handling what the student perceives the problem to be.
- Avoid judgments, evaluations and criticisms as they may make the student less inclined to talk with you. Even if you do not agree with the student's value system, try to respect it. It is important to identify your opinions clearly as your own, not what you think the student should think or feel.

How Can Faculty & Staff Help a Distressed Student?



**Canisius College
Counseling Center**

Bosch Hall 105

716-888-2620

RECOGNIZING STUDENTS IN DISTRESS

Everyone, at one time or another, has experienced unhappiness or depression. The “blues” are common to everyone, and usually do not last long. However, we are able to identify certain patterns of behavior which, when present over a period of time, indicate that something is wrong, and professional help may be needed.

Behaviors that indicate emotional distress are not always disruptive to the classroom and living situation. Faculty and staff are in a unique position to observe the patterns a student’s actions suggest.

There are three ways in which you can make a

NON-DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIORS THAT MAY INDICATE A NEED FOR HELP

- A change from consistently good grades to unaccountably poor performance, or serious problems with grades.
- Excessive absences. This is especially true if the student has previously demonstrated good attendance.
- Markedly changed or unusual patterns of interaction. This may mean completely dominating a discussion, or avoiding any discussion whatsoever.

OTHER SIGNS OF EMOTIONAL DISTRESS

- Depressed or lethargic behavior patterns
- Excessive activity or talking (rapid, pressured speech)
- Red or swollen eyes
- Marked change in dress or personal hygiene
- Sweating when the room is not hot
- Falling asleep in class

THE DISRUPTIVE STUDENT

Although it is fairly rare, some students are so disturbed that they become disruptive in the class, dorm, or social situation. Many faculty or staff will make efforts to contain the situation and deal with it directly by speaking with the student after class about their behavior. There, the student may reveal personal problems and a referral to the Counseling Center can be made. Often however, the first effort may not get results. Calling the Counseling Center for a consultation might prove to be helpful. Together, we can develop a strategy to deal with the disruptive behavior, and get the student help if possible. Discussing the disruptive student with your Department Chair, Dean, or Supervisor may also prove to be helpful.

Sometimes students, even those in significant distress, are reluctant or unable to acknowledge a need for help.

BEHAVIORS WHICH MAY INDICATE SEVERE DISTRESS

- Repeated requests for special consideration, for example, deadline extensions; especially if the student seems uncomfortable or highly emotional when disclosing the reasons for the request.
- Behavior, new or regularly occurring, that is vastly out of place, and interferes with the effective management of the classroom or other academic situations.
- Unusual or exaggerated emotional response that is inappropriate to the situation, for example, needing to leave the room upon presentation of certain material.

REFERRALS

Frequently, faculty or staff are the first point of contact for students in mental-emotional distress. A student’s respect and regard for a professor plays a major role in his or her willingness to accept a referral for help.

referral to the Counseling Center.

1. Tell students about the Counseling Center. This tends to be least likely to succeed, as the student may procrastinate following up on the information.
2. Call and make an appointment for them. This should be done while the student is still with you, so you can help them work out an agreeable time for their appointment.
3. Walk them down to the Counseling Center, and remain with them while they set up an appointment. This tends to be the most successful type of referral, and students are most likely to follow up. If it is mutually agreeable, you may choose to sit in on the beginning of the first session to help clarify what issues need to be worked on.

