

# WORKING WITH STUDENTS IN DISTRESS

## POSSIBLE SIGNS OF EMOTIONAL DISTRESS

### Emotional / Interpersonal Indicators:

- Poor self-esteem / worthlessness
- Pessimism / hopelessness
- Persistent sad mood
- Crying
- Irritability, restlessness, mood swings
- Overreaction
- Anxiousness or intense fearfulness
- Isolative behavior
- Withdrawal
- Loud, fast, or inappropriate speech
- Poor judgment
- Inappropriate social behavior (obnoxious, provocative, or intrusive behavior)
- Sudden paranoia or rage
- Delusions or hallucinations
- Preoccupation with death & dying (often indicated in writing or artistic assignments)
- Any noticeable change in behavior

### Academic Indicators:

- Poor attendance
- Excessive tardiness
- Deterioration in academic performance
- Often requiring special consideration, extensions on work, etc.

### Physical Indicators:

- Changes in personal appearance
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Disorientation / Confusion
- Lethargy (i.e., falling asleep in class)
- Extreme weight gain or loss
- Psychosomatic complaints, such as recurrent headaches, stomach aches, or pains
- Self-abusive behavior (noticeable cuts, scratches, burn marks, welts, etc)
- Signs of physical abuse (often students will attempt to cover up with clothes and/or make-up)
- Smell of alcohol; possible drug usage
- Consistently red, glazed eyes
- Shaking

# HOW TO WORK WITH STUDENTS IN DISTRESS

Life's stressors for students, whether financial, social, or familial, are often exacerbated when compounded with the stress of academia. Although it is not your duty to provide counseling for students, you are often the first person – and sometimes the only person - students confide in. In addition, daily or weekly contact with students affords you the opportunity to notice when they are in distress. Use the following as a guide to intervening when you notice a student in distress:

- Faculty members who are concerned about a student should meet with the student in their office (or in another private setting) to discuss, in behavioral terms, their observations about the student that are causing concern. For example, "I've noticed that you've been late every day this week and that you appear exhausted in class. Is everything alright?"
- Avoid judging the student, and simply note behavioral observations. Hopefully, this exchange will open the door for discussion regarding the student's problem(s).
- If the student does not open up, the faculty member can simply state, "If at any time you need to talk to someone, we have a counselor who can offer support and guidance."
- If the student does begin to talk about his or her problems, you can convey that you are not a counselor and that it would behoove the student to speak with someone experienced in these matters. You can provide information on how the student can contact the NLC Counselor or, if the situation warrants, you may want to walk the student to the office to ensure the student's needs are met.
- If you are concerned that there may be a potential for suicide, please make sure that you personally escort the student to the NLC Counselor's office or contact 486-5496 to have the Counselor meet the student in your office. If the Counselor is not available in case of emergency, contact the Campus Police at 222-0911.

If, at any time, you have questions regarding a particular student, please call 486-5496 or stop by the Counselor's office. Many times you will notice that the simple act of listening is enough to help the student. Usually, students will respond favorably to your concern. However, you cannot force help upon someone who is not interested in or ready for help. If you are faced with this situation, unless it is an extreme case and a student intends to harm him/herself or another, it is alright to simply impart information regarding counseling services so that the student will know where to go when the time is right.

Thank you!  
Stacie Williams  
NLC Counselor

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