

Identifying and Responding to People in Distress

As members of a caring campus community, all of us play integral roles in helping assure the safety and wellbeing of those around us. UMaine has an extensive array of support services yet there are things we can all do to help each other. Below is basic information about how to identify and what to do in case someone needs help or support and keep in mind that you can ALWAYS call Student Life and discuss any concern or issue you may (581-1406).

I. Recognizing People in Distress

A. Academic Indicators

1. Repeated absences
2. Missed assignments, exams, and/or appointments
3. Deterioration in quality or quantity of work
4. Extreme disorganization and/or erratic performance
5. Written or artistic expression of unusual violence, morbidity, social isolation, despair, confusion; essays or papers that focus on suicide or death
6. Continual seeking of special provisions (e.g., make-up exams, extensions on papers or other assignments)
7. Patterns of perfectionism (e.g., can't accept given grade, can't accept getting below an A, etc.)
8. Overblown or disproportionate response to grades or other evaluations

B. Behavioral and Emotional Indicators

1. Direct statements indicating distress, family problems, and/or loss
2. Angry or hostile outbursts, yelling, or aggressive comments/behavior
3. More withdrawn or animated than usual or in the past
4. Expressions of hopelessness or worthlessness; crying or tearfulness
5. Expressions of severe anxiety or irritability
6. Excessively demanding or dependent behavior
7. Lack of response to outreach from instructors, professors or other staff
8. Shakiness, tremors, fidgeting, or pacing

C. Physical Indicators

1. Deterioration in physical appearance or person hygiene
2. Deterioration in maintenance of room, apartment, office, other personal area
3. Excessive fatigue, exhaustion; falling asleep in class repeatedly
4. Visible changes in weight; statements about change in appetite or sleep
5. Noticeable cuts, bruises, or burns
6. Frequent or chronic illness
7. Disorganized speech, rapid or slurred speech, confusion
8. Unusual inability to make eye contact
9. Coming to class, lab or events bleary-eyed or smelling of alcohol

10. Violent behavior in and/or out of class (throwing things, hitting people, etc.)
11. Direct or veiled threats of harm (previous or current)

D. Other Factors

1. Concern expressed by co-worker, student, peers, instructors, etc.
2. A hunch or gut-level reaction that something is not right/wrong
3. Physical or verbal aggression directed at self, others, animals, property, etc.
4. Statements indicating the person will be going away for a long time, or no need to put up with them for much longer, etc.

II. Responding to People in Distress: Your level of experience, the nature and/or severity of the issue(s), your ability to give time to the situation, and a variety of other factors will influence how you choose to respond.

A. Respond Yourself (if you feel comfortable doing so, have had training, etc.)

1. If you know or have a relationship with the person, express concern in person, via email or other mode

B. Consult with Others

1. Student Life: 581-1406. Call Student Life, and this is strongly encouraged, for any concern no matter how major or minor it might seem to be. Student Life will gladly discuss any concern you may have and will help assess the situation and consult on best next steps. This is a great resource and again is strongly encouraged.
2. Counseling Center: 581-1392
3. UM Police Department: 581-4040 (non-emergency); 911 (emergency, immediate response by police needed)
4. Academic department dean, chair or director
5. Academic Advising Center (EDHD and LAS)

C. Make Referral

1. General referral of concern: Student Life (581-1406)
2. Specific concern referral: Student Life (581-1406)
 - a. Student Behavior Review Team (SBRT)—meets weekly
 - b. Dr. Kenda Scheele, Assistant Vice President (581-1406) and Dr. Doug Johnson, Counseling Center Director (581-1392) are co-chairs
3. Contact Counseling Center to make student referral (581-1392)
4. Contact Equal Opportunity (581-1226) or Human Resources/Employee Assistance Program (581-1581/581-4014) for employee referral
5. Contact University of Maine Police Department (581-4040 or 911 for emergencies)
6. On-line referral: <http://umaine.edu/studentlife/referral/>

D. No question is too big or too small to ask, simply contact Student Life at 581-1406. It is much better to ask questions or seek consultation than to ignore your concerns.