

How to Recognize a Student in Distress

A student in distress might indicate a need for assistance with:

- Repeated requests for special consideration, extensions, etc.
- Unusual or exaggerated emotional responses
- Withdrawal from activities or friends
- Significant change in behavior, such as sleep or eating patterns
- Declining academic performance
- Excessive absences, especially if attendance was previously consistent
- Perfectionism, procrastination, excessive worrying
- Markedly changed patterns of interaction (avoiding participation or dominating discussion)

These signs might indicate a student in severe distress:

- Depressed mood
- Marked changes in personal hygiene; swollen, red eyes; falling asleep in class; excessively active and talkative
- Inability to communicate
- Garbled, slurred, disjointed or incoherent speech
- Loss of contact with reality
- Seeing/hearing things that do not exist
- Suicidal thoughts or intentions
- Overtly discussing, joking or hinting that suicide is a current and viable option
- Highly disruptive behavior
- Homicidal threats
- Hostile, threatening or violent behavior

How to Share your Concern with a Student

If you have a concern, talk to the student first. The student may have an explanation for the behavior or may ask for assistance.

- Talk to the student in private when both of you have time
- Give the student undivided attention
- Express your specific concern(s)
- Share an observation “I’ve noticed you’ve been acting differently than you usually do and I’m concerned”
- Listen in a non-judgmental, non-threatening way
- Communicate your understanding by repeating back the core of what the student has said
- Avoid judging, evaluating, or criticizing
- Respect the student’s value system, even if you disagree

When to Make a Referral

You are encouraged to submit a Care team referral if students:

- Do not respond appropriately when you share your concern
- Exhibit erratic or sudden changes in classroom performance
- Exhibit uncharacteristic behavioral, mood, attitude or appearance changes
- Are uncharacteristically inattentive, unresponsive, angry, argumentative or aggressive
- Exhibit behavior that is getting worse

You can always consult by calling Counseling Services when you:

- Feel overwhelmed or unsure of how to proceed
- If you feel that you are beginning to engage in treatment instead of gatekeeping
- Need to talk with someone about your observations or concerns

How to Encourage Students to Seek Assistance

- Let students know that it is not necessary to know exactly what is wrong in order to seek assistance; normalize help-seeking as a strength and that counseling is effective
- Explain what the student can expect if they seek assistance from counseling, Title IX, etc.
- Name counselors, suggest that students check out the website, assure confidentiality
- Assure students that they are not taking resources from others by seeking help – there are enough resources for everyone, and prevention is better than waiting until it gets worse
- Learn about resources so that you can suggest out of the box options for seeking help, see below.

Resources

Counseling Services: Heartmath biofeedback training, Relaxation Station, Ulifeline screening, website, Mindfulness drop-in session and classes, Counseling Groups

Counseling Services website for Faculty/ Staff

<https://hilo.hawaii.edu/studentaffairs/counseling/ForFacultyStaff.php>

Counseling Services website for Suicide Prevention

<https://hilo.hawaii.edu/studentaffairs/counseling/SuicidePrevention.php>

Confidential Advocate (for Title IX related incidents):

Destiny Rodriguez, destinyr@hawaii.edu, office 932-7958, cell 896-4994

Student Medical Services: <https://hilo.hawaii.edu/studentaffairs/health/> 932-7369

Student Conduct: Karishma Kamath, karishma@hawaii.edu, 932-7472

Care Team: <https://hilo.hawaii.edu/careteam/>

Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255

Crisis Text Line: Text “Aloha” to 741-741

Crisis Line of Hawai'i: 1-800-753-6879

adapted from: <https://www.wmich.edu/studentaffairs/studentdistress>