Students in Distress: Graduate or Undergraduate

A Resource Guide for Faculty, Staff, and TAs

Warning Signals

Students may demonstrate behavior that indicates distress and a need for assistance. A combination of several factors more than a single circumstance is most likely to indicate a problem:

- Apparent memory loss or difficulty concentrating
- Cheating, rule breaking, or defiance
- Poor organizational skills or trouble with note taking
- Bizarre, aggressive, or morbid comments or written content
- Expressions of feeling hopeless, helpless, guilty, and/or worthless
- Self-injury or other self-destructive behavior
- Chronic fatigue, falling asleep in class
- Symptoms of being easily distracted or a tendency to daydream
- Poor or declining physical appearance, hygiene, and grooming
- Hyperactivity or rapid, pressured speech
- Extreme boredom, negativism, defensiveness, and secretiveness
- Erratic behavior, sudden mood swings, inappropriate anger, hostility, and irritability
- Talk of suicide or harm to self or others
- Signs of intoxication/substance abuse

For more information, links to additional training, and other resources, visit: vu.edu/facultyandstaff

Responding to Warning Signals

Imminent: Threat of Harm/Life Endangering Situation

In a situation where there is an imminent threat of harm to self or to others (suicidal statements or suicide attempt, loss of consciousness, violent behavior or threats), it is imperative that immediate action be taken. It is of utmost importance to ensure the safety of the student or others.

Call VPD at 615-42(1-1911), or 911, immediately.

Urgent: No Imminent Threat of Harm

Substance abuse, eating disorders, or verbal abuse require intervention because of the potential for future harm. You may need to be persistent in conveying your concern. Concerned individuals may call the Psychological and Counseling Center at 615-32(2-2371) for advice and consultation.

Distress: Non-urgent or Minimally Disruptive Behavior

Elicit feedback and support regarding your concerns from the Dean of Students, the A&S Dean’s Office, or other campus resources (below).

If you decide to express your concern to the student:

- Choose a place where you may talk quietly without interruption, at a time convenient for both of you.
- Be honest and focus on the specific signs that alerted you to a possible problem.
- Remain calm, compassionate, and willing to listen.
- Convey your willingness to help.
- Be aware that the student could respond in a variety of ways. Don’t interpret negative, indifferent, or hostile responses as a wasted effort.
- A decision to seek help often takes time.
- Provide the student with the phone number of relevant resources (below). Reiterate that the services are free and confidential. Occasionally, it may be helpful to assist a student with making a contact.

Need assistance or ideas for a difficult student-related situation?

Student wellness resources are not only for students. Assistance is available for faculty, staff, and TAs with questions about how to approach a student about a problem, and for those who wish to receive professional input about handling a difficult situation.

Available resources include counsel for ethical, medical, and legal issues related to students, as well as assistance in determining best courses of action for all parties involved. Contact G.L. Black in the office of the Dean of Students for more information. It is acceptable, and in some cases advisable, to consult with the office of the Dean of Students before raising an issue with a student.

Resources and Contacts

Call first for immediate help

Medical emergency
Call 911
The nearest emergency room to campus is at the VU Medical Center Complex on 22nd Avenue South.

On-campus emergency
Call 911 or call campus police: 615-421-1911

Off-campus emergency
Call 911

University Chaplain and Religious Life
615-32(2-2457)

Wellness Programs & Alcohol Education
615-32(2-0480)

Psychological and Counseling Center (PCC)
615-322-2371
Medschool.vanderbilt.edu/pcc
Location: 2015 Terrace Place
(across street from Baker Building)

Urgent Psychological Crisis/Triage:
Walk-in during business hours, or call 615-322-2371 at any time.

Project Safe Hotline
Staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week
615-322-SAFE (7233)
Vanderbilt.edu/projectsafe

Equal Opportunity, Affirmative Action, and Disability Services
615-32(2-4705)

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex (LGBTQI) Life
615-32(2-3310)

Margaret Cuninggim Women’s Center
615-32(2-4843)

Dean of Students
First point of contact for non-emergency situations wherein a direct referral to other resources listed here might be insufficient. Contact this office when it is unclear which resource(s) are appropriate for a particular student, or when complex ethical, medical, and/or legal factors may be involved.
615-32(2-6400)
Vanderbilt.edu/deanofstudents

Additional Local Resources

Alcoholics Anonymous, Middle Tennessee Central Office Hotline: 615-831-1050
Nashville Crisis Hotline: 615-284-7444
Nashville Rape and Sexual Abuse Hotline: 800-879-1999
OutCentral, Greater Nashville’s LGBT Center: (615) 864-8182

OutCentral, Greater Nashville’s LGBT Life
615-32-8779

Margaret Cuninggim Women’s Center
615-32-0480

SASin, Vanderbilt University
615-32-4705

Medical Center, Vanderbilt University
615-322-2371
Medschool.vanderbilt.edu/pcc
Location: 2015 Terrace Place
(across street from Baker Building)

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