

# Assisting Students in Distress

## See Something

Students in distress may be struggling with academic or personal challenges.

Remember that you are in a unique position to identify students who may be in need of help.

## Say Something

Sharing your concern directly with the student and reaching out to campus/community resources are important first steps in the healing process.

A counseling referral is a way to communicate your concern about a student to get them connected to resources. **The referral form can be accessed here: [iw.edu/counseling-referral-form](http://iw.edu/counseling-referral-form)**

## Do Something

Students may not be aware of what resources are available or how to find help. It's okay to check in with students to see how they're doing.

Demonstrating a culture of care and compassion strengthens the campus community.

## Indicators of Distress: What to Look for

### Academic Indicators

- Sudden decline in quality of work/grades
- Repeated absences
- Disorganized performance
- Multiple requests for extensions
- Disengagement through failure to hand in assignments, missing exams, and lack of participation
- Overly demanding of faculty/staff time and attention
- Bizarre content in writing/presentations

### Physical Indicators

- Marked changes in physical appearance (deterioration in grooming or hygiene, significant weight gain/loss)
- Excessive fatigue or sleep disturbance
- Intoxication, hangovers
- Smelling of alcohol and marijuana
- Disoriented or 'out of it'
- Garbled, tangential, disconnected or slurred speech

### Psychological Indicators

- Self-disclosure of personal distress, including family problems, financial difficulties, suicidal thoughts, grief
- Unusual/disproportional emotional response to events
- Excessive tearfulness
- Panic reactions
- Irritability or unusual apathy
- Verbal abuse (e.g. taunting, badgering, intimidation)
- Withdrawn

### Safety Risk Indicators

- Unprovoked anger or hostility
- Physical violence (shoving, grabbing, assault, use of weapon)
- Implying or making a direct threat to harm self or others
- Academic assignments dominated by themes of extreme hopelessness, rage, worthlessness, isolation, despair, acting out, suicidal ideations, violent behaviors, or other 'cries for help.'
- Stalking or harassing
- Communicating threats via email, texting, phone calls

## Resources and Tips

### Safety First

The top priority is always the welfare of the campus community. Do not hesitate to call for help if someone is displaying threatening or violent behavior.

### Listen Sensitively & Carefully

Use a calm voice and a non-confrontational approach. Avoid threatening, humiliating, and intimidating responses.

### Reach Out

Engage students early on and set limits for disruptive behavior.

### Be Direct

Don't be afraid to ask students directly if they are under the influence of alcohol/drugs, feeling confused, or having thoughts of harming themselves or others.

### Follow Through

Ensure the student knows the physical location of the identified resource. Consider walking over together to help them get connected when possible and appropriate.

### Be Proactive

Always document your interactions with distressed students. Consult with your department chair/supervisor after any incidents of concern.

# Response Protocol

Follow the chart to determine what to do when faced with a distressed or disruptive student.

**Is the student a danger to self, or others, or does the student need emergency assistance?**

## “Yes”

The student’s conduct is clearly and imminently reckless, disorderly, dangerous, or threatening and is suggestive of harm to self or others in the community.

Call 911 and Campus Security 319.450.2038 (Campus Security available 9:00 PM-5:00 AM)

After calling 911, Call the Mental Health Coordinator 319.385.6483 (if after hours leave a voicemail message), email the mental health coordinator at [counseling@iw.edu](mailto:counseling@iw.edu)

Notify the on-call Area Coordinator 319.201.9523 to contact the Dean of Students or Assistant Dean of Students and have them call you. Stay with the student until help arrives (unless it is unsafe to remain with them)

## “I’m not sure”

The student shows signs of distress, but I am not sure how serious it is. My interaction has left me feeling uneasy and/or concerned about the student.

Call the Mental Health Coordinator 319.385.6483 (if after hours leave a voicemail message), email the mental health coordinator at [counseling@iw.edu](mailto:counseling@iw.edu)

Notify the on-call Area Coordinator 319.201.9523 to contact the Dean of Students or Assistant Dean of Students and have them call you. Stay with the student until help arrives (unless it is unsafe to remain with them)

## “No”

I am not concerned for the student’s immediate safety, but he/she is having significant academic and/or personal issues and could use some support or additional resources.

Provide information to the student about available services and referral process.

For referrals call the Mental Health Coordinator 319.385.6483 (if after hours leave a voicemail message), email the mental health coordinator at [counseling@iw.edu](mailto:counseling@iw.edu)

Follow up with the student within the next business day to make sure they have been connected to the mental health coordinator

## Resources for Students

### Same-Day Crisis Appointments at IW Counseling Center

Monday-Friday, 8:00am - 5:00pm

**No appointment needed for a crisis situation to speak with the Mental Health Coordinator.**

### Crisis/Urgent Consultation

Available at Henry County Health Center, 24 hours. See number below.

**If you are in a life-threatening emergency, call 911**

### For 24-Hour Phone Counseling, Call:

Your Life Iowa Crisis Hotline	855.581.8111
National Suicide Prevention Hotline	800.273.8255
Veterans Crisis Hotline	800.273.8255, press 1
Rape Victim Advocacy	800.228.1625

### Essential Numbers

Henry County Health Center	319.385.3141
IW Student Counseling Services	319.385.6483 <a href="mailto:counseling@iw.edu">counseling@iw.edu</a>
Disability Resource Center (OASIS)	319.385.6334
International Student Advisor	319.385.6205
Hillcrest Family Services	319.385.7177
Mount Pleasant Police Department	319.385.1450 319.385.3511 (after hours)
IW Security	319.450.2038
Optimae Life Services	319.385.2830