

For Faculty and Staff: Dealing with Students who are Dangerous, Disruptive, or Distressed

CAPS counselors may not be the first people to whom students turn when they need help. They may talk with roommates or friends. They may also talk directly to faculty and staff. Many times, students avoid direct communication and may instead give you behavioral clues to their problematic states. This page is designed to help you distinguish among dangerous behaviors, disruptive behaviors, and distressed behaviors, and provide you with direction on handling each of those behaviors on campus.

Dangerous Behavior in Your Classroom

When a student is acting in a manner that causes you to fear for the physical safety of that student or the physical safety of others, you should contact the KSU Police Department. KSU Police officers have standard operating procedures for dealing with emergency situations and will involve CAPS emergency on-call staff according to those procedures. The phone number for emergencies is 770-423-6666.

Disruptive Behavior in Your Classroom

It is in the best interest of the entire campus community if instructors provide written behavioral expectations of students enrolled in their courses. Further, defining clear consequences for violating behavioral expectations assists students in making appropriate choices. These expectations and consequences can easily be included in the syllabus for each course you teach. You may also include a reference to the KSU Student Code of Conduct with the expressed written expectation that the Code be followed in your classroom.

The Kennesaw State University Handbook contains the Student Code of Conduct which addresses the issue of disruptive behavior. Belligerent, abusive, profane, threatening and/or inappropriate behavior on the part of students is a violation of that code. Even if a student is in distress, that student must still behave appropriately within the “laws” of the campus. Just and fair conduct measures which hold the student accountable for behaviors that violate campus or community standards are often just what the student needs to regain self control and to have a positive developmental outcome. Faculty or staff who witness (or

are victims of) incidents of alleged violations of the Code should immediately contact the University Judiciary Office and submit the proper documentation. www.kennesaw.edu/judiciary/

Distressed Behavior in Your Classroom

At one time or another, everyone experiences stress and discomfort. Although it's not unusual to feel anxious, depressed, or confused, these feelings become significant when they are recurrent, extreme, or begin interfering with adequate functioning. Faculty and staff often play critical roles in identifying and interacting with students in distress.

The following guidelines may be helpful to you in assisting students in distress:

Observe: Look for emotional and behavioral changes. Take note of behavior that appears strange, inappropriate, or unusual. Pay attention to both verbal and nonverbal communication.

Trust Your Gut: If you sense that something is wrong there is a good likelihood something is wrong!

Reach Out: Ask to talk with the student in private at a time when you can both focus on the problem and do not feel rushed. Be direct in expressing your concerns in a nonjudgmental manner based on your observations and perceptions.

Listen: Encourage the student to respond to your concerns. Listen to both thoughts and feelings. Let the student talk.

Offer Support: Your care, interest, and listening may prove pivotal in encouraging a distressed student to seek assistance.

Make a Referral: Be candid with students about your limits to assist them. Encourage them to seek help through the CAPS Center. You could allow the student to use your office phone to call for an appointment, while you step outside your office to allow some privacy. The number is 770-423-6600. You may also walk over to the CAPS Center with the student if the student would feel better with your support.

Consult, Consult, Consult: The student may present concerns or situations that leave you feeling "in over your head?" Utilize CAPS counseling staff to discuss how to best respond in these sorts of situations. Faculty and staff are often

concerned about what happens to students after they refer them to CAPS. This certainly is an understandable, caring reaction. However, CAPS staff adheres to legal and ethical confidentiality parameters and cannot talk with you about any student specifically. We do encourage you to follow-up directly with the student. This follow-up not only helps put your mind at ease, it also helps communicate your concern and interest in the well-being of the student.

Maintain: Continue to maintain clear and consistent boundaries and expectations with the student in your staff or faculty role.

Behavioral Cues

Some behaviors that may suggest a student could be in distress are described as follows:

Academic:

- Excessive procrastination
- Change in preparation or performance behaviors
- Repeated requests for special consideration or accommodations
- Excessive absence or tardiness
- Excessively anxious when called upon in class
- Unusual or changed patterns of interaction
- Inability to stay awake in class
- Disruptive or threatening behavior
- Written work with reference to self harm or content that appears strange

Interpersonal:

- Inability to get along with others
- Concerns and complaints from other students
- Social withdrawal from others

Other:

- Change in appearance and hygiene
- Dramatic weight gain or loss
- Swollen or red eyes
- Change in mood
- Impaired speech
- Inappropriate or exaggerated emotional reactions
- Smell of alcohol/marijuana or evidence of excessive alcohol/drug use
- Difficulty concentrating
- Disrupted sleep or appetite

When in Doubt...

CAPS counselors are happy to talk with you about your decisions regarding student behavior, process your feelings about dealing with a student who may be dangerous, disruptive, or distressed, or otherwise help when a student's needs go beyond your role as faculty or staff. You need not feel as if you must go "out on a limb" or "get in over your head". A quick call to CAPS can bring relief.
770-423-6600