

DEALING WITH DISTRESSED INDIVIDUALS

You can help

You may be one of the first individuals to notice that something is wrong or that a person is distressed. Although emotional distress may be expected, especially during times of high stress, you may notice that a person is acting out of character or in ways that are inconsistent with typical behavior. Often, the person's behavior may cause you to become upset or worried. You may be a resource in times of trouble, and your expression of interest and concern may be critical in helping the individual regain emotional stability. You may also be in a good position to use campus and community resources so that appropriate interventions can occur. Refer to the enclosed campus card for resources in your area.

Signs of possible distress

- Marked change in performance or behavior
- Excessive absence or tardiness
- Trouble eating and/or sleeping
- Disruptive behavior
- Undue aggressiveness
- Exaggerated emotional response that is disproportionate to the situation
- Depressed or lethargic mood
- Hyperactivity or very rapid speech
- Marked change in personal hygiene
- Excessive confusion
- Dramatic weight loss or gain
- Dependency (e.g., individual spends an inordinate amount of time around you or makes excessive appointments to see you)
- Behavior indicating loss of contact with reality
- Feelings of helplessness or hopelessness
- References to suicide
- References to homicide or assault
- Isolation from friends, family or classmates
- Giving away personal or prize possessions
- Preparing for death by making a will and final arrangements

The DOs

- DO trust your intuition.
- DO speak with the individual privately and express your willingness to help in a direct and nonjudgmental manner.
- DO let the individual know you are concerned about the individual's welfare.
- DO listen carefully to what the individual is upset about; actively listen.
- DO acknowledge the feelings of the individual; help explore options.
- DO point out that help is available and that seeking help is a sign of strength and courage, rather than weakness or failure.
- DO suggest resources; make personal referrals when possible and call ahead to brief the person.
- DO maintain clear and consistent boundaries and expectations; recognize your own limits.
- DO call 911 if you are concerned for your immediate safety or that of others, or if the individual needs immediate attention.
- DO consult with an appropriate mental health resource if you are concerned for the individual but you are not concerned about any immediate danger (e.g., sexual assault, recent loss); see enclosed campus card for resources.
- DO refer an individual to an appropriate campus or community resource for support related to personal or academic issues. When in doubt, contact your supervisor or chair/director.

The DON'Ts

- DON'T ignore the unusual behavior.
- DON'T minimize the situation.
- DON'T ignore warning signs about the individual's safety or the safety of others.
- DON'T promise confidentiality.
- DON'T judge or criticize.
- DON'T make the problem your own.
- DON'T involve yourself beyond the limits of your time, skill or emotional well-being.

IF YOU ARE CONCERNED FOR YOUR IMMEDIATE SAFETY OR THAT OF OTHERS, CALL 911.

DEALING WITH DISRUPTIVE INDIVIDUALS

What is disruptive behavior?

Any behavior that interferes with students, faculty or staff and their access to an appropriate and/or safe educational or work environment is considered disruptive. It is important to note that disruptive behavior as defined in this section may differ from classroom disruptions. Policy information regarding classroom disruptions can be found at www.kent.edu/policyreg/administrative-policy-and-procedures-regarding-class-disruptions.

Examples of disruptive behavior

- Behavior that draws inappropriate attention to oneself
- Verbal outbursts (e.g., arguing, yelling, screaming)
- Words or actions that intimidate or harass others
- Words or actions that cause others to fear for their personal safety
- Threats of physical assault or violence

What steps should I take?

Disruptive behavior should not be ignored. It is important to remain calm. Remind yourself that the person is upset about the situation – not with you. Tell the person that such behavior is inappropriate and that there are consequences for failing to alter or improve the disruptive behavior. Many disruptive situations involve anger. Recognize that the period of peak anger usually lasts 20-30 seconds. Often it is best to wait out the initial outburst before addressing the individual. If you feel threatened, seek to remove yourself from the situation or secure appropriate assistance. For other options to consider, review the checklist at www.kent.edu/studentconduct/disruptivestudent.

The DOs

- DO call 911 if there is an immediate threat to the safety of individuals.
- DO actively listen to the person, through the anger.
- DO acknowledge the feelings of the individual.
- DO allow the person to vent and to tell you what is upsetting to him/her. Use the silence to allow the person to talk it out.
- DO set limits. Explain clearly and directly what behaviors are acceptable (e.g., "I will be willing to speak with you as long as you lower your voice") and not acceptable (e.g., "You have a right to be angry but breaking things is not OK").
- DO be firm, steady, direct and honest, but also compassionate.
- DO trust your intuition.
- DO focus on what you can do to help resolve the situation.
- DO suggest resources (see enclosed campus card); make personal referrals when possible, and call ahead to brief the person.
- DO report the behavior to the leadership in your administrative unit or academic department.
- DO consult with a campus resource (see enclosed campus card). If in doubt, contact your supervisor or chair/director.

The DON'Ts

- DON'T ignore the disruptive behavior.
- DON'T interrupt, particularly during the first 20-30 seconds of peak anger.
- DON'T minimize the situation.
- DON'T enter into an argument or shouting match.
- DON'T blame, ridicule or use sarcasm.
- DON'T touch or become physical.
- DON'T ignore your own limitations.

Additional Online Resources

- ★ If you are concerned about a student's writing, please consult: <http://caps.umich.edu/article/concerns-about-students-writing>.
- ★ If you are concerned about an individual's posts on social media, please consult: www.kent.edu/stepupspkout.
- ★ If you are concerned about a student studying abroad, please consult: www.kent.edu/stepupspkout.

STEP UP SPEAK OUT

Mental health issues are an increasing concern on college campuses, with faculty and staff in the role of “first responders” to crises and other difficult situations. **Step Up and Speak Out** was created to assist you in making choices when responding to individuals in emotional distress, those at risk for suicide and those who may exhibit disruptive behavior. Kent State University is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for our campus community, and you can be part of this effort. Helping those in need strengthens our community and is an integral part of keeping the campus safe and ensuring individuals can be linked to appropriate services and resources. For more information, visit www.kent.edu/stepupspeakout or download the Step Up and Speak Out app on Android or Apple platforms.

It's our campus. It's our community. We're all responsible. Step Up and Speak Out.

Printed on this folder, you will find information about:

- Identifying and responding to suicide risk.
- Identifying and responding to distressed individuals.
- Identifying and responding to disruptive individuals.
- General guidelines to help you feel more comfortable when determining what steps to take.

Inside this folder, you will find:

1. A resource card with information about national, community and campus resources specific to your location.
2. A response guide with information about what steps to take and whom to consult in urgent situations requiring immediate assistance, situations that you may need assistance with and situations you can address and make referrals.

Step Up and Speak Out is a collaborative effort of Kent State University Psychological Services, University Health Services, the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs and University Police Services. Adapted with permission from The Ohio State University.

www.kent.edu/stepupspeakout



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- For people with a history of suicide attempt(s).
- Following a loss or tragic event.
- For individuals abusing alcohol, other substances or prescription medication.
- For LGBTQ individuals.
- For members of the military or veterans.
- For those who have experienced the loss of a loved one to suicide.
- For American Indians and Alaska Natives.

The risk for suicide may be greater:

- Talking or writing about death, dying or suicide.
- Talking of feeling hopeless or having no reason to live.
- Talking about feeling trapped or being in unbearable pain.
- Talking about being a burden to others.
- Threatening to hurt or kill oneself.
- Seeking pills, weapons or other means to kill oneself.
- Giving away personal or prized possessions.
- Displaying extreme mood swings.
- Taking risks/engaging in reckless behaviors.
- Increasing use of alcohol and/or drugs.
- Withdrawing from friends and family.
- Having made previous suicide attempt(s).

Warning signs of suicide risk:

Are you thinking of suicide? Are you considering harming or killing yourself? or Have things gotten so bad that you don't care if you live or die?

You can help: It is a myth that asking someone about suicide actually creates suicidal thoughts. Talking to individuals about suicide does not increase their risk. Ask the question –

24-Hour Resources

*** If you are concerned about suicide risk:** call: 1-800-273-TALK or visit: www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

*** If you are concerned about a veteran:** call: 1-800-273-8255 or visit: www.veteranscrisisline.net

*** If you are concerned about an LGBTQ individual:** call: 1-866-488-7386 or visit: www.thetrevorproject.org

*** If you are in crisis or in need of support:** Txt: 4HOPE to 741741

The DON'Ts

- DON'T ignore the warning signs.
- DON'T leave someone alone if there is a risk of self-harm.
- DON'T minimize the situation.
- DON'T make the problem your own.
- DON'T argue or try to change the individual's emotions.

The DOs

- DO trust your intuition.
- DO call 911 if you are concerned for an individual's immediate safety or if an individual needs immediate attention.
- DO stay calm.
- DO take your time and be patient when responding to someone at risk.
- DO listen carefully to better understand the individual's concerns.
- DO take concerns seriously.
- DO offer hope, reasons to be hopeful, alternatives to the situation, resource information and information on how helpful treatment can be.
- DO urge the individual to accept professional support. Consider making a phone call to a mental health resource to connect the individual to appropriate services. Review your campus card for resources specific to your location.

RESPONDING TO SUICIDE RISK