

# Early Warning Indicators of Distress\*

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- **Please Note:** None of these warning indicators **alone** is sufficient for predicting mental health problems, aggression, and/or violence to self or others.
- When presented in combination, they indicate the need for consultation with your supervisor and possibly with University Counseling & Consulting Services (UCCS) staff, documentation, and further analysis to determine an appropriate intervention.
- Know your limits. Stay within the boundaries of your professional role.
- It is better to act sooner rather than later.

*\* Indicators of Distress adapted from the campus safety presentation developed at Arizona State University at the Tempe campus.*

## Academic Indicators of Distress in Students

- Missed assignments
- Deterioration in quality of work
- A drop in grades
- Repeated absences from class
- A negative change in classroom performance
- Verbal aggressiveness in class meetings
- Disorganized or erratic performance
- Continual seeking of special accommodations (late papers, extensions, postponed examinations, etc.)
- Essays or creative work that indicate extremes of hopelessness, social isolation, rage, or despair

## Personal/Interpersonal Indicators of Distress in Students

- Tearfulness
- Unprovoked anger or hostility
- Excessive dependency
- Expressions of hopelessness or worthlessness
- Exaggerated personality traits (e.g., more withdrawn or animated than normal)
- Direct statements indicating distress, family problems, or other difficulties
- A hunch or gut-level reaction that something is wrong
- Expressions of concern about a student in the class by his/her peers
- Changes in typical clothing (baggy clothing; long sleeves)

## **Physical Indicators of Distress in Students**

- Deterioration in physical appearance
- Visible changes in weight
- Lack of personal hygiene
- Excessive fatigue
- Coming to class bleary-eyed, hung over, or smelling of alcohol
- Appearing sick or ill
- Chapped hands

## **Environmental Indicators of Distress in Students**

- Observations from janitorial staff
- Not picking up mail in residence hall mailbox
- Not using meal card in the residence hall dining room
- Formal disciplinary notices in the residence hall

## **Safety/Risk Indicators of Distress in Students**

- Statements to the effect that the student is “going away for a long time”
- Any written note or verbal statement that has a “sense of finality” (suicidality)
- Severe depression
- Any history of suicidal thoughts or attempts
- Giving away of prized possessions
- Self-injurious or self-destructive behaviors
- Out-of-control behavior
- Essays or papers that focus on despair, suicide, death, violence or aggression
- Verbal or written (email) threats of harm to self or others