

# Dean of Students Faculty and Staff Guide for Helping Students



**CASE WESTERN RESERVE  
UNIVERSITY**  
Division of Student Affairs



# Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the many universities and the teams of professionals whose combined efforts made their information, and thus ours, accessible and easy to use. Materials in this guide have been gratefully adapted from the following institutions of higher education:

- University of South Florida
- University of Pennsylvania
- Cornell University's Gannett Health Services
- Emory University
- University of California at Berkeley's Counseling & Psychological Services

CWRU Edition: Fall 2024

# Quick Reference Guide: Helping Troubled Students

## Seeking Guidance or Advice

- Communication with a student indicates their loss of touch with reality
- Communication reflects suicidal thoughts or actions, depression, anxiety, or difficulty dealing with grief



Dean of Students Office  
216.368.1527  
University Health & Counseling  
Services  
216.368.5872

- Communication indicates having been a victim of stalking, harassment, hazing or other crime
- Communication reflects sexual assault or relationship violence



Office of Equity  
216.368.3066  
Student Advocate for Sexual  
Assault Prevention & Response  
216.368.0985

- Has not attended class for an extended period of time
- Is overwhelmed by a problem with the university
- Is debilitated or overwhelmed by a family emergency



Dean of Students Office  
216.368.1527  
University Health & Counseling  
Services  
216.368.5872

- Substantially impairs, interferes with or obstructs orderly processes and functions of the university
- Deliberately interferes with instruction or office procedures
- Is lewd or indecent
- Breaches the peace



Office of Student Conduct and  
Community Standards  
216.368.3170  
Dean of Students Office  
216.368.1527

## Reporting Concerning Behavior

- Acts significantly out of character
- Behaves peculiar and this is cause for alarm
- Displays unhealthy or dangerous patterns of behavior
- Continues to appear distressed despite prior referrals made



Dean of Students Office  
216.368.1527

## Immediate Action

- Threatening the safety of self or others
- Acting in a frightening or threatening manner
- Not complying with directives (e.g., refusing to leave the classroom when asked to leave)



CWRU Public Safety  
216.368.3333  
Threat Assessment Behavior  
Intervention Team (TABIT)  
216.368.4389

Regardless of the situation contact any of the above offices for support or information. For more information on helping distressed students contact the Dean of Students Office at 216.368.1527.

Dean of Students Office  
10900 Euclid Avenue  
Cleveland, Ohio 44106-7060  
Visitors and Deliveries  
110 Adelbert Hall  
Phone 216.368.2020  
Fax 216.368.6957  
studentaffairs@case.edu  
deanofstudents@case.edu

Dear Faculty and Staff:

Students often encounter challenges during their educational experiences at CWRU. The Faculty and Staff Guide for Helping Students has been developed to provide you with a useful resource for recognizing students who may be experiencing a variety of challenges and personal difficulties. It is to provide you with helpful guidelines for addressing a wide range of student behaviors and also serves as a reference for making referrals to university resources.

As students adjust to the demands of balancing expectations and their experiences, some pressures they may face can become overwhelming and challenging to manage. As a faculty or staff member interacting with students, you are often in the position to identify and offer assistance to a troubled or distressed student. Your ability to recognize the signs of distress and other potential issues can help to initiate an intervention and have a significant impact on a student's well-being and success.

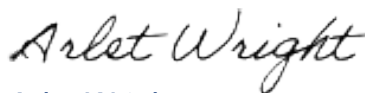
We hope the information in this guide is helpful as you work with students, be mindful of their needs and facilitate referrals to the Dean of Students Office, University Health and Counseling Services, Disability Resources, and other university resources.

The Dean of Students Office is here to assist and provide direct consultation to you regarding problems or situations that you may encounter with students.

Best wishes,



Gregory J. Harris  
Associate Vice President for Student Affairs  
and Dean of Students



Arlet Wright  
Senior Associate Dean of Students and  
Special Assistant to the Vice President for Student Affairs



Kimberly Scott  
Associate Dean of Students



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# Signs and Sources of Distress

## Academic Problems

- career and course indecision
- excessive procrastination
- uncharacteristically poor preparation or performance
- repeated requests for extensions or special considerations
- disruptive classroom behavior
- excessive absence/tardiness
- avoiding or dominating discussions
- references to suicide or harm to others in verbal statements or writing

## Interpersonal Problems

- always asking for help with personal problems
- dependency
- hanging around office
- withdrawing
- disruptive behavior
- inability to get along with others
- complaints from other students

## Behavioral Problems

- change in personal hygiene
- dramatic weight gain or loss
- frequently falling asleep in class
- irritability
- unruly behavior
- impaired speech
- disjointed thoughts
- tearfulness
- intense emotion
- inappropriate responses
- difficulty concentrating
- physically harming self
- destruction of property
- anxiety and panic
- inability to communicate clearly
- loss of reality contact (e.g., hallucinations, poor thought connections)

## Sources of Distress

- relationship problems/break-ups
- roommate problems
- family problems
- grief and loss
- divorce of parents
- loneliness
- sense of not belonging
- academic pressure or failure
- serious illness or injury
- difficulty adjusting to university life
- anxiety
- eating disorders
- trouble adjusting to American and or university culture
- sexual or physical abuse or assault
- identity issues
- depression
- alcohol/substance abuse
- career indecision
- loss of goal or dream
- low self-esteem
- unplanned or undesired pregnancy
- language barriers
- financial problems
- experiencing perceived bias behavior or prejudice

# What You Can Do

A faculty or staff member is often the first person to recognize when a student is in distress and to reach out to that student. Faculty and staff are not expected to provide personal counseling to students. Faculty and staff play an important role in encouraging students to use campus resources and make referrals.

We encourage you to speak directly to students when you recognize they are in academic or personal distress. Openly acknowledge you are aware of their distress, that you are sincerely concerned about their welfare and that you are willing to help them explore their options. Not all students will be receptive to your help. In some cases, and in order to ensure students of concern do not fall in the gaps between observers and interveners, a referral to the Dean of Students Office may be warranted. You can submit an online **CARE Report**.

# Responding to Mental Health Emergencies

Immediate and decisive intervention is needed when student behavior poses a threat to self or others, including:

- Suicidal gestures, intentions, or attempts
- Other behavior posing a threat to the student (e.g., hallucinations, drug abuse)
- Threats or aggression directed toward others
- Demonstrated inability to care for oneself

**For consultation with a counselor call**  
216.368.5872

**For after hours, weekends and holidays:**  
Counselor On-Call: 216.368.5872

## What to Do

1. Move the student to a quiet and secure place.
2. Listen attentively and respond in a straightforward, considerate way.
3. Enlist the help of a colleague so you are not alone with the student.
4. Make arrangements for appropriate university intervention.
5. When contacting a campus resource, try to have the following information
  - Student name
  - Physical description of student
  - Your location
  - Description of circumstances
  - Type of assistance needed

**Call CWRU Police when: 216.368.3333**

- Immediate medical attention is required
- The student is unmanageable, aggressive, or hostile
- You are directly threatened or feel at risk



# Referring Students to the CARE Team

## When to Refer

- If your efforts to manage a significant classroom behavioral issue has not resolved the problem.
- If you are concerned about the welfare of a student, yourself, and/or others.
- If a student asks for help in dealing with personal issues that are outside your role as a faculty or staff member.
- If you have referred the student for assistance in the past and there seems to be no improvement or things seem to be worsening.

## What to Do

Submit a **CARE Report**, call University Health and Counseling Services at 216.368.5872, or the Dean of Students Office at 216.368.1527.

Information for an effective referral should include the following:

- Student name
  - Student CWRU ID number
  - Student phone number
  - Dates, times, locations of events
- Your observations:
- What was said and by whom
  - What has been done so far (if anything) to address the concern and the student response to those efforts.

## Should you refer?

Remember that in any given situation, there are probably several “right ways” to address your concern for a student in distress. Please contact the Dean of Students Office to discuss your concerns and options.

## What about confidentiality?

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) does not prohibit the sharing of personal observations and knowledge about a student among campus officials when there is a legitimate concern related to campus safety.

## Does the referral need the student’s participation?

Simply put, no it does not. There may be times when a student is not receptive to help or support, or when the student has long left your class or office and the link between your concerns and making a referral occurs.

# Distressed Behavior Continuum

There are different levels of distress that can be represented through a continuum. This list is not comprehensive nor does each behavior need to be present. Additionally, the list of interventions provides the options available. When referring a student in distress, it is advised to make a parallel referral to the Dean of Students Office or University Health and Counseling Services so follow-up and feedback loops are complete.

MILD	MODERATE	DISTRESSED	CRISIS	SEVERE
Disruptive	Failing in school	Alcohol/drug use	Irrational fears	Highly disruptive
Failing grades	Defiance to rules	Irritability and agitation	Excessive risk taking	Disjointed thoughts and/or speech
Poor performance	Lethargic	Depression/anxiety signs	Heightened emotional reactivity	Loss of contact with reality
Absences	Feelings of depression	Unusual behavior	Hostility	Hallucinations and/or paranoia
Difficulty managing stress	Falling asleep (at odd times and situations)	Pushing limits of social decorum	Aggression and/or violence	Stalking
	Changing hygiene	Suspiciousness	Self-harm/harm to others (thoughts, not action)	Direct threats to self or others
	Alcohol use	Criminal tendencies	Self-destructive behavior/threats	Suicidal and/or homicidal intent

## INTERVENTIONS

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dean of Students</li> <li>• CARE Team</li> <li>• Faculty/staff consultation with appropriate office and/or department</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dean of Students</li> <li>• CARE Team</li> <li>• Faculty/staff consultation with appropriate office and/or department</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dean of Students Office</li> <li>• CARE Team</li> <li>• TABIT</li> <li>• CWRU Police</li> <li>• University Counseling Services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dean of Students Office</li> <li>• CARE Team</li> <li>• TABIT</li> <li>• CWRU Police</li> <li>• University Counseling Services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dean of Students Office</li> <li>• CARE Team</li> <li>• TABIT</li> <li>• CWRU Police</li> <li>• Conduct and Community Standards</li> <li>• University Counseling Services</li> </ul>
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# Tips for Supporting and Encouraging Students

- Request to see the student in private.
- Briefly acknowledge your observations and perceptions of the student's situation and express your concerns directly and honestly.
- Listen carefully to what the student is troubled about and try to see the issue from their point of view without agreeing or disagreeing.
- Follow up with the student to see how they are doing.
- Strange and inappropriate behavior or rationalizations should not be ignored.
- The student can be informed that such behavior is distracting and inappropriate.
- Your ability to connect with an isolated student will allow them to respond more effectively to your concerns.
- Help the student identify options for their behavior and explore possible consequences. If possible, offer to call or accompany the student to the appropriate resources.
- Avoid labeling the student's behavior or the issues presented.
- Inform the student about what can be gained by meeting with a counselor or other professional to talk about their problems.
- Be open about the limits on your ability to help the student.
- If the student appears to be in imminent danger of hurting themselves or others, consult University Counseling Services or CWRU Police immediately.
- Do not keep threats of self-harm or harm to others a secret.

# Identifying Troubling Behavior

Troubling behavior from a student usually causes us to feel alarmed, upset, or worried.

When faculty or staff members encounter troubling behavior, they should feel concerned about the student's well-being. Students exhibiting troubling behavior may have difficulties in and out of the classroom. Some examples include:

- A student who jokes about killing themselves.
- A student who perspires profusely when giving a presentation in front of a group.
- A student who discloses that their loved one was diagnosed with a terminal or serious illness.
- A student who seems to work harder than most students but cannot pass an exam.
- A student who appears to be losing significant weight yet speaks with pride about how little they eat.
- A student whose writing appears disjointed and fragmented, as though they cannot maintain a logical sequence of thought, or contains themes of violence which are out of context with the assignment.
- A student who reports that FBI agents (or similar) are following them around campus.

## Interventions for Troubling Behavior

Faculty and staff have options for responding to student behavior that they find troubling. If a university official is unsure how to respond to a troubled student, here are some suggestions:

- Seek advice and counsel from the department chair or supervisor, University Health and Counseling Services or the Dean of Students Office.
- Initiate a discussion with the student about the behavior that is of concern.
- If you believe the situation deserves university attention or follow-up, submit a **CARE Report**, email [deanofstudents@case.edu](mailto:deanofstudents@case.edu), or call 216.368.1527.



# Identifying Disruptive Behavior

Disruptive behavior is conduct that interferes with or interrupts the educational process of other students or the normal operations of the university.

A disruptive student typically resists interventions or corrective action. Some examples include:

- A student who verbally abuses or intimidates another.
- A student who is overly demanding of faculty or staff.
- A student who interrupts the educational process in the class by:
  - Making hostile remarks out of turn/or concerning gestures
  - Aggressively taking over the lecture
- A student who notably disrupts the environment outside the classroom.

## Interventions for Disruptive Behavior

Faculty and staff may find the following procedures helpful when dealing with disruptive behavior:

- Verbally request that the student stop the disruptive behavior.
- If the problem persists, ask the student to leave the class or the area.
- Initiate a discussion with the student about the behavior that is of concern.
- Inform the student of the behavior that needs to change, define a timeline for when the change needs to be made, and explain the consequences if the change does not occur.
- After meeting with the student, document the content of the meeting in writing. It is sometimes helpful and/or necessary to provide the student with a written copy of the requirements and the consequences discussed.
- Contact the department chair or supervisor for advice and support.
- Follow up with a referral to the Dean of Students Office or submit a **CARE report** if you believe the situation has or has not been resolved.
- Consult with University Health & Counseling Services to assist you and all concerned.

**If the situation is serious and requires immediate assistance call CWRU Police at 216.368.3333**

# Identifying Threatening Behavior

Threatening behavior from a student typically leaves us feeling frightened and in fear for our personal safety. These behaviors should be taken very seriously.

Examples of threatening behavior include:

- A student who implies or makes a direct threat to harm themselves or others.
- A student who displays a firearm or other weapon, or makes reference to owning or possessing a firearm/weapon.
- A student who physically confronts or attacks another person.
- A student who stalks or harasses another person.
- A student who sends threatening correspondence to another person.
- A student whose writing contains themes and threats of violence.

## Interventions for Threatening Behavior

The safety and well-being of the campus community is the top priority when a student exhibits threatening or potentially violent behavior. Specific interventions include:

Immediately contact CWRU Police at 216.368.3333.

Activate the Threat Assessment and Behavioral Intervention Team (TABIT) at 216.368.4389.

# The Student Contemplating Suicide

Suicide is the second-leading cause of death among college students (according to the American Psychological Association).

Suicidal persons are intensely ambivalent about killing themselves and typically respond to help. Suicidal situations are time-limited and most who commit suicide are not mentally ill. High-risk indicators include: feelings of hopelessness and futility, a severe loss or threat of loss, a detailed suicide plan, history of a previous attempt, history of alcohol or substance use, and feelings of alienation and isolation. Students contemplating suicide usually want to communicate their feelings; any opportunity to do so should be encouraged.

## DO

- Be available to listen, to talk, and to show concern privately.
- Acknowledge that a threat or attempt at suicide is a plea for help.
- Take the student seriously. Eighty percent (80%) of those attempting suicide give warning of their intent.
- Call the Counselor On-call at 216.368.5872.

## DO NOT

- Minimize the situation or depth of feeling, e.g., “Oh, it will be better tomorrow.”
- Be afraid to ask the student if they are so depressed or sad that they want to hurt themselves (“You seem so upset and discouraged that I’m wondering if you are considering harming yourself.”)
- Overcommit yourself, therefore not being able to deliver on what you promise.
- Ignore your limitations.

# Dean of Students Office

216.368.1527 or 216.368.2020

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