Faculty and Staff Helping Students

Examples of Concerning Behaviors and Circumstances

- Threats/plans/evidence of self-harm.
- Noticeable cuts, burns or bruises.
- Emotional or physical outbursts.
- Extreme or sudden changes in mood or behavior.
- More withdrawn or animated than usual.
- Direct statements indicating distress, family problems, loss or traumatic experiences.
- Excessive or uncharacteristic decline in coursework and course attendance.
- Written or artistic expression of unusual violence, morbidity, isolation, despair.
- Continual seeking of special provisions.
- Overblown or disproportionate responses to evaluations or requests for improvement.
- Excessive alcohol or other drug use.
- Expressions of severe anxiety or irritability, hopelessness or worthlessness, crying or tearfulness.
- References to a plan to “end all of their problems.”

How Faculty Members Can Respond

- Imminent Threat? Call 9-1-1 in case of imminent harm to a distressed student or others.
- In other cases, speak directly with the student.
  - Meet privately.
  - Set a positive tone.
  - Express your concern and care.
  - Point out specific things you’ve observed.
  - Ask “How are things going for you?”.
  - Ask non-judgmental, open-ended questions.
- If there are signs of safety risk, ask directly.
- Suggest resources, such as Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) or the Dean of Students (DOS). Walk them to CAPS or DOS.
- Suggest they speak with Academic Advising if the cause of their distress is academic in nature.
- Email the Dean of Students at dos@unc.edu or submit a referral at dos.unc.edu/urgent-concerns/care-referral-form.

Managing Student Privacy and Confidentiality

- Faculty acting in the role of professor/instructor are not governed by the Health Insurance Accountability and Portability Act (HIPPA), which spells out how medical and health information must be protected.
- UNC-Chapel Hill’s Policies and Procedures under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974 permits disclosure of personally identifiable information to “School Officials who have a legitimate educational interest in the records,” including the Dean of Students, Counseling and Psychological Services, and your department chair or dean.
- Personal observations of and direct communication with a student are not governed by FERPA legislation. The Dean of Students or the Office of University Counsel should be contacted for assistance whenever possible to help make and document the decision that a health or safety emergency exists.

The bottom line: If you notice a student exhibiting signs of distress, do something.