Working with Distressed Students: A Decision-Making Tree for Faculty & Staff

Eastern Kentucky University Counseling Center

For more information about assisting distressed students, please call us (622-1303) and/or visit the Counseling Center website at:

WWW.COUNSELING.EKU.EDU
Student is under distress.

**SIGNS OF DISTRESS** include (but are not limited to):
- Nervousness, agitation, or irritability
- Infrequent class attendance
- Tearfulness
- Changes in academic performance
- Changes in personal or classroom relationships
- Undue aggressive or abrasive behavior
- Fearfulness
- Dependency (e.g., student who is excessively clingy)
- Frequent alcohol and/or drug use

Express your concerns to the student, pointing out your observations and asking about his/her situation.

Are you worried about the student’s safety or do you see possible warning signs?

**WARNING SIGNS** include (but are not limited to):
- Withdrawal from others (isolation)
- Talks about or threatens suicide
- Makes statements such as “I want this all to end” or “I can’t go on anymore”
- Significant confusion
- Behavior is bizarre, alarming, and/or dangerous
- Makes statements about hurting or killing others
- Marked change in behavior, mood, and/or hygiene
- Appears depressed (frequent crying, insomnia, oversleeping, weight loss/gain, loss of pleasure)
- Appears/reports hopelessness or helplessness
- Engagement in self-harm (e.g., cutting)

1. **DIRECTLY** ask about your concerns and/or the warning signs.
2. **DIRECTLY** ask about suicide and/or homicide as it relates to the displayed warning sign(s).

Do You Believe There is Imminent Danger?

**YES, Imminent danger is clearly present**

Examples:
- Student found unconscious or unresponsive.
- Student tells you that they have ingested pills beyond the recommended dose (whether the student confirms it is a suicide attempt or not).
- Student is threatening immediate danger to self (e.g., threatening to jump out a window, ingest pills, shoot self, etc.).
- Student attempts, or threatens, to cause physical harm to someone else (or people in general).

Immediately call Campus Police at 911 (if calling from cell phone, call 622-2821).

**UNCLEAR** Whether imminent danger is present

Examples:
- Student reports a history of self-injurious behavior (e.g., cutting or burning) and now states a desire to engage in this behavior again.
- Student is found intoxicated or appears to be under the influence of substances.
- Student makes statements that are suggestive of suicidal/homicidal thinking that are not overtly indicative of imminent danger (e.g., I don’t know if I can keep going).
- Student appears emotionally distraught and does not respond to your attempts to calm him/her.
- Student experiences a sudden stressful event (e.g. death, breakup, divorce) and seems emotionally unstable/inconsolable, OR the student’s response appears unusual (e.g. uncontrollable crying over a failed exam, no apparent response to the death of immediate family member, etc.).
- Student’s work, assignments, and/or communications contain material that raises concerns about suicide, homicide, and/or violence.

**NO, Imminent danger is clearly not present**

Examples:
- You observe a student crying after getting off the phone during the break, she reports that she is sad about the end of a romantic relationship; she denies suicidal/homicidal thoughts and shows no warning signs.
- Student is struggling in your class due to academic skill deficits and test anxiety; he denies suicidal/homicidal thoughts and shows no warning signs.

As much as you and the student are comfortable, listen and provide support; but do not become the student’s therapist.
Contact your department head and inform him/her of the situation.

Write down:
1. Relevant details about the situation (who, what, where, when).
2. Any background information you have about the student's difficulties.
3. A number where you can be reached.
Give a copy to Campus Police (to assist emergency treatment providers) and a copy to your department head.

Call the Counseling Center and ask to speak with the on-call counselor. **DO NOT E-MAIL – This situation requires an immediate response.**

If the situation occurs after hours, contact Campus Police at 622-2821.

Provide all the relevant information you have about this student and the situation to the on-call counselor; because as faculty, you have had the opportunity to observe the student over time, and with guidance, you can provide valuable information about the student's mental health.

When you contact the Counseling Center about a student, we will work with you to determine the proper course of action.

Contact VP/Dean of Students (622-2642)
- The VP/Dean of Students can help provide university follow-up and can facilitate the use of appropriate university resources as needed.
- The VP/Dean of Students collects information about students, and works in cooperation with various departments across campus to address student issues and students of concern.

Discuss counseling services and/or other university resources that might be helpful, and address any concerns the student might have about these resources. If you need assistance in determining the appropriate resources(s), or about how to refer, contact the Counseling Center (622-1303) and ask to speak with the on-call counselor.

Should you decide to refer to the Counseling Center:
- Please know that we would like to hear your concerns about the student and your beliefs about the urgency of the situation.
- Consider calling with the student, or accompanying the student to the Counseling Center, to initiate counseling services.
- Continue to follow up with the student as appropriate; contact the Counseling Center if you observe a significant change.

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Note:
If at any point you believe the student's “Imminent Danger” status may have changed, return to the “Imminent Danger” steps outlined in this flowchart.

**Campus Resources**
- Academic Advising: 622-6967
- VP/Dean of Students: 622-2642
- Campus Recreation: 622-6751
- Career Services: 622-1568
- Counseling Center: 622-1303
- Education Pays Center: 622-6684
- Financial Assistance: 622-2361
- Multicultural Student Affairs: 622-4373
- Office of Services for Individuals with Disabilities: 622-2933
- Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities: 622-1500
- Police Department: 622-2821
- Registrar: 622-3876
- Student Health Services: 622-1761
- Student Life: 622-3855
- Tutoring Services: 622-6778
What is Counseling?
Counseling is a process during which students can discuss any matter of concern with a trained counselor. It is a professional relationship with someone who knows how to listen, help resolve issues, and facilitate growth. All counseling services are voluntary.

Why Counseling?
At some point in most people’s lives there is a need for help in resolving conflicts, anxieties and frustrations as well as the need to carefully plan a career direction. Counseling can provide another means of learning to address such issues while in college. Counseling is available to help students succeed in reaching their personal and academic goals. Students may request counseling to learn:

- Techniques for effectively relating to friends, parents, teachers, etc.
- Methods for dealing with disappointment, loss and/or other changes.
- Skills for coping with depression, anxiety and/or severe emotional difficulties.
- Techniques for improving concentration.
- Skills for combating procrastination and implementing effective time management.
- Strategies for overcoming test anxiety.
- Techniques for selecting a satisfactory major and/or career direction.
- Tools for achieving academic and personal goals.
- Approaches for challenging negative thoughts and improving optimism.
- Methods for improving motivation for consistent academic performance.

Services Available

Personal Counseling
Trained counselors are available to help students work through personal concerns and learn new strategies for dealing with stress and other difficulties. Counseling can also provide a means of learning how to achieve personal goals more effectively.

Career Counseling
Career Counseling Seminars (GCS 199) are offered for one credit hour. These seminars are taught by counselors who assist students with selecting a career direction. During class, students are encouraged to identify interests, abilities, personality characteristics and values relevant to their career choice. Students investigate career alternatives as well as learn effective decision-making strategies to help them with career-related decisions. Individual career counseling is also available on a limited basis.

Group Counseling
Therapy groups are offered throughout the year that focus on the development of effective personal and social skills, and the resolution of various types of personal concerns. Typical topics include: stress management, anxiety, depression, men's issues, relationship issues, etc.

Substance Abuse Services
Assessment, consultation, educational programming, and individual counseling services are available for alcohol and/or drug related issues.

Psychiatric Services
Psychiatric services are available to enrolled students on a limited basis at the Counseling Center as an adjunct to counseling.

Eligibility for Services and Fees
To be eligible for counseling, students must be enrolled in classes for which they are paying tuition during the time of receiving services. There is no cost for counseling services. For further clarification, see the EKU Counseling Center web site: www.counseling.eku.edu/students/counseling/eligibility-for-services.

Referral
College counseling services are designed to be short-term in nature; when students request or require services that are beyond the role and scope of the Counseling Center or beyond the qualifications of Counseling Center staff, referrals to other agencies or professionals are provided.

Consultation
Counselors are available to the entire EKU community to offer insights on how to be the most helpful to distressed students.

Confidentiality
Counseling sessions are kept in the strictest confidence as delineated by the American Psychological Association Code of Ethics and Kentucky state law. The few exceptions to confidentiality, as mandated by legal statutes, are reviewed with the student at the beginning of counseling.

Hours

Fall & Spring Semesters: Mon - Thur: 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.  
Fri: 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Summer Sessions: Mon - Fri: 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Accredited by the International Association of Counseling Services, Inc.