



Plan to comply with Public Act No. 08-157

Overview

In order to comply with Public Act 08-157, Goodwin College has initiated a plan designed to educate all faculty and staff on how to recognize and respond to students and other individuals on campus who may be at risk to harm themselves or others.

Effective communication of the plan to faculty and staff occurs through various actions. Goodwin College will send an information e-mail to all employees about Public Act 08-157 and about how they can access the full text of the College's plan and procedures on the Goodwin College website. The Plan will be posted on our website. This information is also an important part of our Emergency Response Plan that is prepared and available to the College community each year. As new employees are hired, they will learn about the plan as part of their orientation. Finally a resource center for faculty and staff has been established in a visible section of the Library. In addition, Goodwin College is contracting with Intercommunity Mental Health Center to offer training to staff and faculty on how to recognize and assist others at risk and to learn basic de-escalation techniques

The Plan

Recognizing Students or Others in Distress

Many colleges and universities are experiencing an increase in the number of distressed or disruptive students on their campuses. As a Goodwin College employee, you may encounter a student in distress. Many of you regularly interact with our students and others both in and out of the classroom. Given this unique position, it is not surprising that you are often the first to notice when a student or coworker is distressed or begins to act in a disruptive or threatening manner. College students who experience overwhelming stress often seek help from trusted faculty and staff members. Faculty and staff who are seen as caring and trustworthy are in a unique position to offer support to students and to point them in the direction of the assistance they need.

This resource is offered to help you recognize signs of student distress and to suggest basic guidelines for effective interventions; however, each student presents a unique situation. If you are concerned about a student's behavior and/or health, it is always wise to seek consultation with a professional.

Sources of Student Distress

Students may experience distress as a result of the various concerns they face. While most students successfully cope with the pressures of college life, others need assistance. Some common sources of student distress include:

- Family Problems
- Relationship Problems
- Academic Difficulties
- Diversity-related Adjustment or Identity Problems
- Alcohol or Drug Problems
- Depression
- Financial Concerns
- Balancing School and Work

Signs a Student May be in Distress

Because students often seek the support or advice of faculty/staff when they are feeling overwhelmed, it is helpful for you to be aware of the signs that a student is in distress. At times, a student may not openly disclose their concern or ask for help, but their behavior or attitude may be noticeably changed. Being cognizant of these distress signals can help you be more in control of situations that may present themselves and to facilitate the helping process for the student. Some common signs of psychological distress include:

- Decline in academic performance
- Excessive procrastination or very poorly prepared work, especially if inconsistent with previous work
- Excessive absences or tardiness
- Disruptive behavior - behavior that regularly interferes with the decorum or effective management of class
- Changed pattern of interacting with others
- Depressed or lethargic mood
- Feelings of hopelessness or helplessness
- References to suicide, homicide, or death - overtly suicidal statements (i.e., referring to suicide as a current option)
- Threat of harming self or others
- Dependency (e.g., a student who hangs around your office or makes excessive appointments)
- Marked changes in personal hygiene, appearance, or behavior
- Isolation from others
- Repeated requests for special consideration, such as deadline extensions or examination deferrals
- Impaired speech or garbled, disjointed thoughts
- High levels of irritability
- Inability to make decisions, despite repeated attempts to clarify and encourage
- Alcohol or other drug abuse
- Dramatic weight loss or weight gain

- Bizarre or strange behavior obviously inappropriate to the situation (e.g., talking to “invisible” people)
- Emotions (e.g., fearfulness, tearfulness, or nervousness) displayed to an extreme degree or for prolonged periods.

Distressed vs. Distressing Students

There is a difference between students who are in emotional distress from those whose behavior is distressing to others. Students who are in distress are experiencing emotional pain, which may be generated by internal or external factors. A distressed student may appear highly distracted, publicly tearful, withdrawn, anxious, irritable, and/or hypersensitive, and may be missing classes or may openly state they are having problems. Distressed students may be referred to the Advising and Counseling Center and generally find counseling helpful in addressing their concerns.

Students who are distressing, on the other hand, are those who cause distress for other people (e.g., instructors, classmates, administrators, roommates), due to their inappropriate behavior. Examples of such behaviors include disruptive outbursts in class, inappropriate expressions of anger, threats of harm to self or others, etc. It is appropriate for faculty and/or staff to alert their department chairs and/or program directors and/or the Vice President for Academic Affairs regarding these students, if approaching them directly and expressing concern does not seem possible.

The most complicated situations involve students who are both distressed and distressing. Sometimes they may not be fully aware of how they are being perceived by others or how their behavior impacts others. These students should also receive appropriate intervention through their department and/or the V.P. for Academic Affairs. The Advising and Counseling Center is available for consultations regarding the possible need for psychological intervention. These students should also be encouraged to seek clinical counseling. When working with these challenging students it is important to seek consultation and to know your own limits. The Advising and Counseling Center can help provide you with some helpful consultation.

Tips for Interacting with and Assisting the Distressed Student

There are no absolutely correct procedures for dealing with a distressed student. Each person has his/her own style of approaching and responding to others. Listed below are some suggestions for interacting with the distressed student.

- Talk with the student in private, if possible, to minimize the student's possible embarrassment
- Express your sincere concern about the student's welfare

- Listen carefully without providing advice or rushing in to help fix the problem
- Show concern and interest
- Reinforce the person for confiding in you
- Empathize and acknowledge their distress
- For clarification, paraphrase or summarize the student's statements
- Normalize by letting the student know that when we are confronted with stressful times, we may need to talk with someone who is seen as trustworthy and helpful
- Be accepting and non-judgmental
- Avoid criticizing or judging
- Consider the Student advising and Counseling Center as a resource and discuss referral with the student
- If the student resists help and you are worried, contact the Advising and Counseling Center to discuss your concerns with a counselor
- Involve yourself only to the extent that you feel comfortable; extending yourself can be a gratifying experience when kept within your range of comfort

Referrals

Your role as a possible helper is not only valuable, it could be crucial. In most cases, you will be able to respond effectively to student needs; however, there might be occasions when you would want to refer a student to someone else for assistance.

Advising and Counseling Center. If you have students who exhibit any signs of distress, provide support to the student and consider referring the student to our Advising and Counseling Center. The contact persons at the Center are Tyesha Wood, extension 6716 and David Zoppoli, extension 6768. You can call to set up an appointment for the student or call the Center while the student is in your office and hand the phone to the student to arrange the appointment. Write down the name and phone number for the student. Sometimes it is useful or necessary to walk a student to the Advising and Counseling Center. Ms. Wood and Mr. Zoppoli are also available to consult with faculty and staff on how to deal with emotionally distressed and/or distressing students.

Clinical Counseling. Our counselors are trained to counsel students on academic and personal issues as they relate to their status as a student. If a student requires additional clinical counseling, the student will be referred, by the counselor, to Dr. Hank Lerner, a licensed professional counselor, who is available for referral and consultation. Students who want to make an appointment with Dr. Lerner, without first visiting the Advising and Counseling Center may do so. Dr. Lerner can be reached directly at 860-236-4295.

In urgent situations, you can contact the Intercommunity Mental Health Center at 860-569-5900. This crisis line is manned 24 hours/day. If the counselors at Intercommunity deems it appropriate, they have the ability to send their Mobile Crisis Unit to campus to provide an immediate psychological assessment, to try to help to deescalate the crisis, and/or, if appropriate, facilitate psychiatric hospitalization. In emergency situations, always dial 911 first, and then dial 555 to

contact campus security before doing anything else. Clearly state your name and location and the reason for the call.

Again, if you perceive a student is in imminent danger, contact campus security at 555. If the student does not appear to be in immediate danger, it would be helpful if you would facilitate the student's connection with Dr. Hank Lerner or a counselor at the Intercommunity Mental Health Center at 860-569-5900. At the very least, encourage the student to talk to a counselor in the Advising and Counseling Center.

Follow-up and Confidentiality Procedures

Students, faculty and staff can be assured that counseling sessions are confidential. The advisors and counselors understand that you, as concerned faculty and staff, might be interested in the progress of a student you referred. The ability to share information is governed by confidentiality laws and ethics.

Counselors can

- Answer questions about steps in referring students to the Student Counseling Center
- Offer information about psychological concerns and problems in general
- Discuss strategies

Counselors cannot

- Discuss the content of sessions
- Say whether a student is being seen or has kept an appointment
- Discuss treatment plans or progress

In some cases, a student may find it is in his/her best interest for information to be shared with a faculty, staff, family member, or significant other. This is done with the student's written authorization that includes a clear explanation of the purpose and content of the disclosure.

An exception would be a counselor's determination of imminent danger to the student or others. In these cases, counselors are obliged to disclose this information to the V. P. for Academic Affairs or the V.P. in charge of campus security.

Reasons for Referral Failure

Upon occasion, despite good intentions and accurate knowledge of resources, a referral for counseling is not successful. Before you judge yourself, the student, or the referral source too harshly, consider the following possibilities.

- The student might not have been ready to receive the kind of help offered. Readiness is an essential component of receiving help.
- There might have been a disparity between the student's expectations and the actual nature and extent of help provided by the referral source.
- The referral source might not have been appropriate for the type of help needed.
- The referral source might not have been aware of the student's actual needs due to misunderstanding, misinformation, or poor communication.

Following up on an Unsuccessful Referral

- If a referral proves unsuccessful, you can take three steps: (1) Continue to be receptive to the student, (2) try to determine the reason for the referral failure, and once again, (3) explore options with the student.
- If disparity or inappropriateness is the problem, try to clarify the student's needs and expectations, and investigate more thoroughly the nature of the help offered by the referral source. Then try again!
- If lack of awareness on the part of the referral source is the problem, with the student's written permission, make direct contact with the referral source to correct or provide information about the student's needs.
- If incompatibility is the problem, encourage the student to try another person or agency. If you feel comfortable, provide a specific name of an individual for referral.
- If lack of readiness is the problem, accept the student's feelings, but communicate your limitations and encourage the student to consider other options for assistance. It is possible that later, or under different circumstances, the student will be more receptive.