A Faculty Guide to

Working with Distressed Students

Your Role
As a faculty member you are in a position to interact with students on a daily basis and often times form close relationships with students working in your major area of study. Given your on-going contact with students you are often the first to notice behavior changes or signs of distress. Your willingness to address a situation is often the encouragement a student needs to seek resources and assistance. In many cases a student’s success may depend on early detection and intervention. Some behaviors you might observe must be reported to University Police, per the University of Colorado Denver / Anschutz Threatening Behavior Policy and these behaviors are marked with an asterisk *.

Guidelines for Interacting with Distressed Students
When you are dealing with students in crisis, actively listen and convey your concern and willingness to help. When you communicate with a student in distress be direct, honest, clear and concise. Also:

• Know your limits and the limitations of your role, you are not expected to act as a counselor or mental health professional
• Give the student time to talk about their situation, just listen
• If you are concerned about your safety in a 1:1 setting with the student, invite an appropriate person to meet with you and the student (such as a department chair, associate dean, case manager, or other individual)
• Use a calm voice when talking with the student, even if their voice is raised or excitable
• When meeting with the student briefly acknowledge your observations and perceptions of their situation and express your concerns directly and honestly
• Strange and inappropriate behavior should not be ignored, comment directly on what you have observed and share your concerns with the CARE team by submitting them on-line at ucdenver.edu/CARE

Signs of Distress (including but not limited to)

- Threatening words or actions*
- Verbal or written threats to harm self or others*
- Substance abuse
- Noticeable depression/anxiety
- Drop in grades / deterioration in quality of work
- Dangerous or risky behavior
- Increased or noticeable restlessness
- Deterioration in personal hygiene / appearance
- Frequent or excessive missed classes or assignments
- Erratic behavior
- Bizarre behavior
- Social Isolation
- Paranoia
- Increased irritability
- Confusion

Some situations clearly call for a basic safety intervention first:

- Imminent physical threat*
- Loss of consciousness
- Obvious intoxication
- Significantly disruptive behavior
- Evidence of acute self-injury

Do: Call 911 from a campus phone or 303-556-5000 from your cell phone to access AHEC Police (Downtown) and 303-724-2000 for CU Denver Police (Anschutz). Follow up all referrals to police with a CARE team report at ucdenver.edu/CARE.

Indicators for Urgent Professional Assessment

- Fear of losing control and possibly harming someone
- Fear for her/ his life or the life of someone they know
- Sexual assault (must be reported per Title IX)
- Physical Assault
- Suicidal thoughts, gestures or attempts
- Frequent panic attacks
- Bingeing or purging frequently
- Extreme self-injurious behavior (i.e. cutting, burning)
- Thinking that is disorganized and incomprehensible

Do: Call the Counseling Center at 303-556-4372 (Downtown) or Student Mental Health Services 303-724-4716 (Anschutz) for consultation and follow up with a CARE team report at ucdenver.edu/CARE.

Report all concerning behaviors to the CARE team at ucdenver.edu/CARE
To request a presentation or additional information, please email: shareaconcern@ucdenver.edu or call 303-352-3579