

## HELPING STUDENTS IN DISTRESS

Any member of the Cal State East Bay community may come into contact with a distressed student. Being aware of distress signals, methods of intervention, and sources of help for the student can help you feel more in control of situations that may arise. The mental health professionals at Counseling and Psychological Services (CaPS) are available to faculty and staff for consultation regarding any CSUEB student in distress. Feel free to call us at 510-885-3690 if you would like to discuss these matters further.

## DISTRESS SIGNALS

While it is impossible to list all of the “red flag” behaviors that a student may exhibit, here is a list of some common ones. It is important to notice *any change* in the student’s behavior. These are behaviors or symptoms that are ***different*** from how s/he acted in the past. It is not as important to know why the behaviors have changed or what these new behaviors mean, as much as your noticing that something is different and out of the ordinary.

1. Withdrawn behavior - poor eye contact, isolation, leave-me-alone demeanor
2. Poor hygiene - unkempt, disheveled attire
3. Tearfulness in class
4. Increased restlessness or agitation- cannot sit still, leaving class frequently
5. Talking out of turn or making inappropriate, unrelated comments in class
6. Rambling and disconnected thoughts - not following one train of thought
7. Slurred or incoherent speech
8. Increased disruptive or attention getting behavior - asking too many questions, “look at me” behaviors.
9. Continued verbalizations or musings of helplessness or despairing content
10. Written material that appear bizarre or illogical

## INTERVENTION GUIDELINES

Rest assured that you are not expected to be a mental health clinician or know how to diagnosis a student’s situation. What is important is that you notice that there has been a significant change in the student’s behavior. You may be the first person to bring his/her attention to this, which can be helpful. A concerned listener is usually helpful when one is distressed.

Here are some things you can do when you address the student.

1. **Know your limits.** Approaching a student without knowing much about him/her can be stressful. It is very important that you not expect yourself to do everything. Sometimes simply acknowledging that you notice a change and making a suggestion to seek help is all that is needed. Some students may need more intervention than you can provide. If you feel too uncomfortable, feel free to call CaPS for consultation.
2. **Be safe.** Be aware of how you feel about approaching the student. If you feel fearful or unsafe, follow your instincts and maintain a safe distance and a route of escape should you need it. Always keep your safety in mind. You might also ask another professor or staff member to be within listening range if necessary. If you feel that danger is imminent, call 911 or the University Police Department at 510-885-3791. (Please note: Students with mental health concerns are no more likely to be violent than those in the general population.)
3. **Talk with the student.** Take a calm, respectful, and matter-of-fact approach. It is okay to ask students if they are in distress, under the influence of something, or feeling badly about themselves. Asking questions does not “put ideas in their heads” that they

do not have. If anything, it allows them to share with someone. Most distressed students are relieved to know that someone has noticed and is paying attention.

### **Examples:**

- “I noticed that you seem like you are having a hard time in class lately. Are you okay? Do you need someone to talk to?”
  - “I am concerned about your \_\_\_\_\_(behavior) and wonder whether you might need some assistance or support.”
  - “Have you been feeling like you want to harm yourself?”
4. **Avoid escalation.** Speak in a calm and respectful voice. Distressed students can easily interpret interventions as threatening. Do not take an authoritative stance. Avoid confrontation. You are here to listen, understand and help. Limits and expectations can come later, when trust and rapport is established.
  5. **Do not assume that you are being manipulated.** Unless you are absolutely sure, give the student the benefit of doubt for now. Disruptive students may be asking for your attention for a good reason. This may be the only way they know to ask for help.

**Your awareness and caring for a student in distress can make a significant difference in his/her life. We often hear stories at CaPS about professors, administrators and staff who assisted students in getting the help they needed and deserved. Thanks for your part in helping students to be successful.**

## OUR MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Counseling and Psychological Services (CaPS) is to provide:

- Brief time-limited personal counseling and psychological services to enrolled CSUH students including urgent walk-in, individual, couples, group counseling, assessment and referral
- Outreach services to students that emphasize preventative and developmental interventions that help students benefit from their educational experiences
- Consultation services to faculty, staff, students, and parents regarding student emotional health issues
- Training and supervision opportunities for post-masters pre-licensed counselors

### Confidentiality

Privacy is important to students. A CaPS counselor will not disclose any information about a student to others without his/her written permission except as required by law. That means that family, professors, administrators, or classmates do not have any access to what is discussed in counseling, or even that an appointment for counseling was made. CaPS does not write third party letters to individuals or departments on campus (e.g., professors, financial aid office, admissions). Counseling records are kept separate from all other university records. To assure the privacy of client information, our counselors do not use e-mail to communicate with clients.

### Counseling and Psychological Services (CaPS)

*Supporting Student Success through Wellness*

Located in the Student Health Services Building  
510-885-3690

Division of Student Affairs

## REFERRAL RESOURCES

Counseling & Psychological Services:  
510-885-3690

<http://wwwsa.csueastbay.edu/counseling/>

Student Health Services: 510-885-3735

<http://wwwsa.csueastbay.edu/~shsweb/>

Student Disability Resource Center:  
510-885-3868

<http://wwwsa.csueastbay.edu/~sdrweb/>

Student Judicial Affairs: 510-885-3763

<http://wwwsa.csueastbay.edu/~jaf/>

University Police Department: 510-885-3791

<http://wwwsa.csueastbay.edu/~dpsweb/>

Crisis Support Services of Alameda County:  
1-800-309-2131 (24 hour support hotline)

911 (police, fire and medical emergencies)

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## A Guide for Cal State East Bay Faculty and Staff

Prepared by Counseling and  
Psychological Services (CaPS)  
510-885-3690