ASSISTING STUDENTS IN DISTRESS

The information below is designed to give you information that you might find helpful when confronted with a difficult student situation. You may have concerns about a student’s behavior or see signs of psychological distress that could affect the student’s academic and personal functioning and success. This folder provides information that can assist you in early recognition and effective referral. Contact info is provided along with relevant resources. Please don’t hesitate to obtain assistance and support.

RESOURCES

**Important Campus Phone Numbers:**
- Campus Assessment Response and Evaluation (CARE Team) 3181 or 240-895-3181
- Counseling & Psychological Services 4289 or 240-895-4289
- Health Services 4289 or 240-895-4289
- International Education 4202 or 240-895-4202
- Office of Residence Life 4207 or 240-895-4207
- Office of Student Support Services 4388 or 240-895-4388
- On-Call Professional 4911 or 240-895-4911
- Public Safety (emergencies) 4911 or 240-895-4911
- Title IX 4105 or 240-895-4105
- VP of Student Affairs/Dean of Students 4208 or 240-895-4208

**Important Off-Campus Phone Numbers**
- Ambulance/Fire/Police 911
- Walden Sierra 24/7 Hotline 301-863-6661

CHARACTERISTICS OF TROUBLED OR DISTRESSED STUDENTS

Where you may see them:
- In the classroom
- In advising sessions
- In living areas
- During informal interactions
- In assignments that students submit

What they look like:
- Extremely poor academic performance or a change from high to low grades.
- Excessive absences, especially if prior class attendance was good.
- Unusual or noticeably changed interaction patterns in the classroom or living areas.
- Depressed or apathetic mood, excessive activity or talkativeness, evidence of crying.
- Noticeable change in appearance and hygiene.
- Alcohol on breath/problem drinking patterns.
- Inability to stay awake in class.
- Repeated attempts to obtain deadline extensions or postpone tests.
- Dependency.
- New or continuous behavior which disrupts your class or student interactions.
- Inappropriate or exaggerated emotional reactions to situations, including a lack of emotional response to stressful events.
- Seeking help from multiple other parties instead of counseling professionals.
- Violent or other extremely disruptive behavior.
- Obvious loss of contact with reality.
- Disturbed speech or communication content.
- Suicidal or other self-destructive thoughts or actions.
- Homicidal threats
Disruptive behaviors are words or actions that may be inappropriate, aggressive, disrespectful, disorderly, rebellious and/or emotional. They can occur in and out of the classroom.

What it looks like:
- Disrupting the flow or movement of others on campus or at College-sponsored events.
- Trespassing or unauthorized entry.
- Interfering with the freedom of speech of any member or guest of the College.
- Intentionally disrupting a class session and/or academic activities.
- Engaging in disorderly conduct, including, but not limited to, direct involvement in a verbal and/or physical altercation or acting as a bystander.
- Conducting an activity or acting in such a manner as tends to disturb the peace and order of the campus, the classroom environment, the community or the general public (i.e., parties, loud music, excessive noise, etc.).
- Behaving obscenely or indecent exposure in public places.
- Pranks that cause or have the potential for causing damage to the College or personal or public property.
- Hosting or attending a party or social event on- or off-campus that causes a disruption to the community or that violates local, state or federal laws or ordinances.

How to intervene:
- If there is a threat to safety and welfare of the student or others, call 911 or Public Safety at 4911 or 240-895-4911.
- Communicate immediately, calmly, and directly about the behavior.
- Describe the problematic behavior to the student and explain how it is problematic.
- Set limits and clarify expectations for acceptable behavior and consequences if not followed.
- Refer the student to the Wellness Center.

Symptoms of some specific psychological problems:

**Depression**
- Feelings of sadness, helplessness, hopelessness.
- Sleeping too much or too little.
- Significant weight gain or loss.
- Overeating or loss of appetite.
- Loss of interest in sex.
- Tearfulness.
- Withdrawal from others.
- Loss of interest in activities previously enjoyed.
- Decreased motivation.
- Alcohol or other drug abuse.
- Pessimism.
- Problems with concentration or memory.
- Thoughts of death.

**Anxiety**
- Constantly moving around or being fidgety.
- Not being able to relax.
- Nervousness.
- Physical sensations like heart pounding, dizziness, can’t catch breath or trembling.
- Feeling pressured.
- Excessive worry.
- Unable to make decisions.
- Problems sleeping.
- Difficulty concentrating.

**Thought Disorders**
- Delusions (e.g. paranoia, thinking they or others are someone they are not).
- Hallucinations (e.g. hearing or seeing things that others do not).
- Disorganized speech (e.g. incoherent, tangential).
- Disorganized or catatonic behavior.
**TITLE IX INFORMATION**

Except for individuals who have legally protected confidentially, all "responsible employees" of the College – including faculty, coaches, administrators, and Public Safety employees – are required to share with the Title IX Coordinator any report of sexual harassment, sexual violence, stalking, or relationship violence they receive or of which they become aware.

How to file a report:

- Contact Title IX Coordinator: titleix@smcm.edu, 240-895-4105, Lucille Clifton House
  www.smcm.edu/campus-rights
- Contact Public Safety: 240-895-4911, www.smcm.edu/publicsafety

When talking with someone who experienced sexual misconduct, listen to them; don’t be judgmental; let the person make their own decisions; respect their privacy to the extent possible; encourage the person to get help; and be present in the conversation.

When you make a report, please do your best to make sure the person understands the following:

- That you are obligated to report the facts of the incident, including the identities of the parties, to the Title IX Coordinator or other appropriate College officials.
- That the person may request that the College not share their name or other identifiable information or that no formal action be taken. The Title IX Coordinator will evaluate these requests.
- That there are confidential resources available.
- That the person has the right to file a Title IX complaint with the College and to report a crime to law enforcement.
- Even if the person wishes to remain anonymous, you are still required to make a report if any information has been revealed to indicate that the College’s policy against sexual misconduct may have been violated.

For more information go to www.smcm.edu/campus-rights.

**WARNING SIGNS FOR SUICIDE**

Some behaviors may indicate that a person is at immediate risk for suicide. The following three should prompt you to immediately call the Wellness Center (4289 or 240-895-4289), another mental health professional, or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

- Talking about wanting to die or to kill oneself.
- Looking for a way to kill oneself, such as searching online or obtaining a gun or other deadly weapon.
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live.

Other behaviors may also indicate a serious risk, especially if the behavior is new; has increased; and/or seems related to a painful event, loss, or change:

- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain.
- Talking about being a burden to others.
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs.
- Acting anxious or agitated; behaving recklessly.
- Sleeping too little or too much.
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated.
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge.
- Displaying extreme mood swings.

Suicide is a complex human behavior, with no single determining cause. The factors that affect the likelihood of a person attempting or dying by suicide are known as risk or protective factors, depending on whether they raise or lower the likelihood of suicidal behavior.

**Major risk factors for suicide include:**

- Prior suicide attempt(s).
- Mood disorders.
- Substance abuse.
- Access to lethal means.

**Major protective factors include:**

- Effective mental health care.
- Connectedness
- Problem-solving skills
HOW TO INTERVENE

Whenever any of the signs of distress are present and a student is not functioning at optimum level, a referral to the Wellness Center could be warranted. Faculty and staff will hear from students about their personal difficulties. Often an empathetic listener or a trusted mentor can provide the support, guidance, or perspective to sufficiently help a student through a difficult situation or time in life. There are times, however, when the help of professionals trained to deal with psychological issues and problems is warranted and when your involvement with the student should be redefined in order to be most helpful.

When to Refer:
• A student asks for help with a problem outside your realm of expertise.
• You believe the student has crossed a line in communicating about things that are too personal.
• The student feels uncomfortable talking to you about the problems.
• What you have done so far has not sufficiently helped reduce the problem.
• The student’s behavior is disrupting others.
• Helping the student could represent a conflict of interest or dual relationship and compromise your objectivity.
• You are having a strong emotional reaction to the student’s situation, e.g. feeling overwhelmed, overly responsible, afraid, or tired.
• You are extremely busy or stressed, or unwilling or unable to offer the necessary help.

How to Refer:
• Talk to the student in private.
• Express concern, while being specific about troubling behaviors.
• Listen empathically.
• Remain neutral.
• Suggest to the student that it would be helpful to talk to someone at the Wellness Center who is trained to address the concerns. Have the student call to schedule an appointment from your office, if willing to do so.
• Demystify and de-stigmatize counseling as necessary.
• Call a counselor yourself to consult about the student.
• Obtain emergency help through Public Safety if necessary.
• Follow up with the student to find out if the appointment was kept. Do not inquire about the details of the session; rather, show interest in knowing that the student is getting needed help and support.
• Submit a Beacon alert or notify a member of the Students of Concern Team regarding any students about whom you are concerned.

OTHER REPORTING MANDATES

The policy on reporting child abuse and neglect can be found at: http://www.smcm.edu/hr/wp-content/uploads/sites/43/2014/12/child_abuse_policy.pdf

PRIVACY ISSUES

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is a federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. The law applies to all schools that receive funds under an applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education. It is a misperception that faculty and staff cannot communicate with others about students of concern.

Under FERPA, you may disclose records without consent:
• To school officials with legitimate educational interest, i.e. a need to know
• Appropriate officials in cases of health and safety emergencies.

Student behaviors that you observe that may be disruptive or concerning, are not part of an educational records, and therefore are not governed by FERPA. You can and should communicate with appropriate professionals and enlist the help of resources regarding the student of concern. Sensitivity for privacy and relevance of the information shared when doing so is also good practice.

CAMPUS ASSESSMENT RESPONSE AND EVALUATION (CARE) TEAM

The CARE Team is a multidisciplinary campus threat assessment and behavioral intervention team. The mission of the team is to improve campus safety through a coordinated approach to prevention, identification, assessment, intervention, and management of situations that may pose a threat to the safety and well-being of individuals and the college community.

Anyone can report concerning, disruptive, alarming, or threatening behaviors to the CARE Team by speaking directly to a team member or submitting a report through Beacon. The CARE Team’s core members are the Director of Public Safety, the Assistant Dean of Students, and the Executive Director of Student Life.

Additional information about the CARE Team can be found at www.smcm.edu/wellness/care.

Acknowledgment: This folder has been adapted from Salisbury University.