



**Do you know a student who seems  
to be distressed?  
distressing to others?**

**Take three steps  
to help determine an appropriate  
course of action.**

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If you know a student who seems to be distressed or distressing to others, take these three steps.

# 1 Gather information.

If a student tells you he or she is personally troubled or is troubled about another student, or if you are troubled about a student, and one or more of the following warning signs are present...

*Psychological or physical signs*, such as

- extreme emotionality, high levels of irritability or hostility, indirect or overt expressions of intent to harm or kill oneself or other(s)
- withdrawal, social isolation, or absence of emotion
- written assignments with themes of despair, hopelessness, isolation, or intense anger
- confusion or inability to make decisions
- odd or bizarre speech or behavior
- change in (or lack of) concentration or motivation
- excessive fatigue, lack of energy, or frequent falling asleep in class
- deterioration in personal hygiene or physical appearance, or noticeable change in weight

- evidence of injury, such as cuts, bruises, black eyes, missing patches of hair, etc.
- evidence of alcohol or drug intoxication (e.g., slurred or incoherent speech; slow verbal responses; gross and fine motor coordination difficulties; bloodshot eyes or abnormal pupil size; use of sunglasses or long-sleeves when not appropriate), or

*Academic signs*, such as

- inappropriate classroom or online behavior
- deterioration in the quality of work submitted
- missed or late assignments, including repeated requests for extensions
- missed appointments
- repeated absences from class
- decrease in or lack of engagement in group- or participation-oriented classes

Go to step 2.

# 2 Assess the level of distress.

If the situation is urgent, call Public Safety immediately at 911 (campus phone) or 617.287.1212 (cell phone). The situation is urgent if the student is at immediate risk of harming self or others, is incoherent or unresponsive, or is in extreme distress or causing extreme distress to others.

Stay with the student to provide support for the student and information for the officers, unless you fear that your safety might be in jeopardy.

If the situation is important but not urgent—that is, if the student does not appear to be in acute and current distress, but has been showing signs of difficulty such as those listed to the left—

Go to step 3.

# 3 Assess your relationship to the student.

**If you don't know the student or you don't feel able to deal with the student directly**, on the same day (or the next business day, if the concern arose after hours), contact the Office of the Dean of Students Call 617.287.5800, or email dean.students@umb.edu.

**If you know the student and feel you have the experience, ability, and time to deal with the student directly and determine what assistance may be needed,**

## *Before the conversation,*

- Ask the student to meet privately.
- Let someone else know about the meeting (best scheduled during the regular business day) so he or she can be available to help you if necessary.

## *During the conversation,*

- Let the student know what you have noticed about his or her behavior that has caused you to be worried, and express your concern. ("I have noticed that you seem very tired the past two weeks." "I've noticed you've missed class three times in the past two weeks.")
- Do *not* promise to keep information confidential.
- Ask open-ended questions. ("How are things going for you this semester? What's been difficult for you this semester?")

- Listen to the student's response. You need not be scared off by an emotional response. Talking about a problem, or labeling a crisis, does not make it worse—it is the first step toward resolving it. Be patient. Don't give up if the student doesn't talk easily.
- Suggest a visit to the University Advising Center if you have noticed academic signs (617.287.5500), the UHS Counseling Center if you have noticed psychological signs (617.287.5690), or UHS General Medicine if you have noticed physical signs (617.287.5660).
- If the student agrees to go, accompany him or her to the appropriate office or call the campus resource to let them know to expect the student and indicate whether the student should make an appointment or be seen right away.

## *After the conversation:*

- Inform the person in charge of your area or department of the situation and your actions.
- That day (or the next business day if the concern arose after hours), contact the Office of the Dean of Students. Call 617.287.5800, or email dean.students@umb.edu to express your concern and provide information about your actions.

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The guidelines in this brochure, which were developed by a multidisciplinary task force of the University-wide Safety Planning Committee, are intended to help all members of the UMass Boston community respond wisely and consistently in situations where there is cause for concern about the well-being of students. If you have questions about the guidelines, please contact the Office of the Dean of Students (617.287.5800 or dean.students@umb.edu).

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Office of the Dean of Students  
University of Massachusetts Boston  
100 Morrissey Boulevard  
Boston, MA 02125-3393

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