



# ASSISTING STUDENTS IN DISTRESS

## QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE FOR FACULTY AND STAFF ON HOW TO RECOGNIZE, SUPPORT, AND REFER DISTRESSED STUDENTS

As college students navigate new responsibilities and experiences, they are typically challenged by a multitude of stressors (i.e., academic, personal, family, financial, future). While many students cope successfully with the demands of college life, the pressures may become overwhelming or lead to life-threatening distress for others.

Faculty and staff are in a unique position to recognize students in distress and refer them to appropriate resources. Your expression of interest and concern may be a critical factor in helping students obtain the support they need. The Counseling and Student Development Center (CSDC) is available to provide consultation on how to intervene and assist in these situations.

## CSDC CONSULTATION & EMERGENCY/CRISIS SERVICES

**IF YOU ENCOUNTER A DISTRESSED STUDENT,  
YOU MAY HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT HOW TO BEST HANDLE THE SITUATION.  
DO NOT HESITATE TO REACH OUT!**

CSDC counseling staff are able to help you:

- Assess the situation, its severity, and the potential for referral;
- Learn about resources (both on and off campus) so you may suggest the most appropriate course of action when speaking with the student;
- Find the best way to make the referral, if appropriate;
- Clarify your own feelings about the student and consider ways you can be most effective;
- Discuss follow-up concerns after the initial action or referral.

In addition, CSDC provides emergency/crisis services for students who urgently need to speak with a counselor (i.e., in significant distress) and cannot wait several days for an appointment. Students may call the CSDC front desk at 808-956-7927 during normal business hours (Monday through Friday, 8:30 am to 4:30 pm) to schedule an emergency/crisis appointment. You may also call and ask to speak with the on-call counselor about the distressed student and provide the counselor with a description of the situation that has led to your concern. (Please note that third parties are unable to schedule appointments for students.)

## PRIVACY CONCERNS

In an emergency, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) permits school officials to disclose without consent education records, including personally identifiable records, to protect the health or safety of students or other individuals. In a health or safety emergency, records and information may be released to appropriate parties such as law enforcement officials, public health officials, and trained medical personnel. See 34 CFR 99.31(a)(10) and 99.36. This exception is limited to the period of the emergency.

FERPA does not prohibit a school official from disclosing information about a student if the information is obtained through the school official's knowledge or observation, and not from the student's education records.

School officials are asked to balance the interests of safety and privacy for individual students.

NCES. (n.d.). Family educational rights and privacy act (FERPA). National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved March 2022, from <https://nces.ed.gov/forum/dataethicscourse/additional-materials/family-educational-rights.pdf>

Mental health professionals are required by law to maintain client confidentiality. While they will gladly accept any information you are able to provide regarding a student's well-being, they cannot share information with you without the student's written consent. Students may sometimes grant permission for a counselor to speak with a faculty/staff member, but this is not always the case. It is important that you follow up with the student about your concerns and check in directly.

## CRISIS

### UHM Counseling and Student Development Center

QLCSS 312  
808-956-7927  
<http://www.manoa.hawaii.edu/counseling>  
Monday through Friday, 8:30 am to 4:30 pm

### Hawai'i CARES (Coordinated Access Resource Entry System)

Call from any island: 808-832-3100  
Toll-free: 800-753-6879  
<https://hicares.hawaii.gov>  
Free, 24/7 coordination center for support

### National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1-800-273-8255  
<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org>  
24/7, free and confidential support

### Crisis Text Line

Text HOME to 741741 from anywhere in the United States  
<https://www.crisistextline.org>  
Free 24/7 support

## IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY

### UHM Department of Public Safety:

808-956-6911

Honolulu Police Department: 911



# RECOGNIZING A DISTRESSED STUDENT

**Distressed student** is a term used to refer to students who have become unable to adequately cope with the stressors in their life, and exhibit an inability to function as normal. They may find it difficult to succeed academically and complete activities of daily living. It is important to note that distressed students may not explicitly state or display their concerns; however, you may notice the appearance of various academic, physical, or emotional indicators, such as those listed below.

## ACADEMIC

- Frequent absences and/or missed appointments
- Sudden decline in quality of work or classroom performance and grades
- Repeated requests for extensions, grades of incomplete, or special consideration (especially when this represents a change from previous functioning)
- Repeated course warnings or inability to adhere to coursework standards/guidelines
- Inappropriate or disruptive classroom behavior
- Writing or creative work that includes disturbing content and/or themes of despair, hopelessness, aggression, violence, death, or suicide

## PHYSICAL

- Appearing ill, excessively fatigued, or lethargic
- Marked changes in physical appearance (e.g., grooming or hygiene deterioration, weight loss/gain)
- Excessive cuts, bruises, or other injuries
- Recurring physical complaints
- Appearing disoriented or tangential
- Presenting with slurred speech or hyperactive, rambling, or rapid speech
- Strange or bizarre behavior indicating loss of contact with reality (e.g., student seems "out of it," is forgetful or losing things)

## EMOTIONAL

- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities
- Drastic change in interactions with others (e.g., withdrawing from social groups/support, isolation)
- Sad, anxious, or empty mood; increased feelings of overwhelm, helplessness, and hopelessness; signs/expressions of guilt, shame, or worthlessness
- Extreme changes in personality or mood swings (e.g., irritability or unusual apathy, unprovoked anger or hostility, excessive tearfulness, panic reactions)
- Self-disclosure of personal distress (e.g., family or financial problems, grief, suicidal thoughts)
- Expressions of concern by peers
- Self-injurious, destructive, or reckless behavior
- Implied or direct threats of harm to self or others

### IN SOME SITUATIONS, YOU MAY BE ABLE TO IDENTIFY A DISTRESSED STUDENT BY THE REACTIONS YOU HAVE TO THEM, SUCH AS IF YOU FIND YOURSELF FEELING:

- The need to provide the student with more emotional support than academic support
- Uncomfortable or worried about the student's comments or behavior
- Concerned about the student's ability to function
- Alarmed, frightened, or threatened

## SAFETY FIRST

*The welfare of all, including the distressed student, you, and the campus community, is the highest priority. If you feel the student displays threatening or potentially violent behavior, or they present an imminent threat of harm to self or others, do not hesitate to call the UHM Department of Public Safety or the Honolulu Police Department for help.*

## SELF-CARE

Supporting a distressed student may take a toll on your own well-being. If this occurs, please reach out to appropriate resources to ensure that you receive support and care as well.

**Employee Assistance of the Pacific**  
808-597-8222  
Toll-free: 877-597-8222  
info@EAPacific.com  
<https://www.eapacific.com>

## POTENTIAL STUDENT MISCONDUCT

For students who may be in violation of the University Systemwide Student Conduct Code, please consult with the Office of Student Conduct.

**Office of Student Conduct**  
QLCSS 207  
808-956-4416  
osc@hawaii.edu  
[http://studentaffairs.manoa.hawaii.edu/departments/student\\_conduct.php](http://studentaffairs.manoa.hawaii.edu/departments/student_conduct.php)



# SUPPORTING A DISTRESSED STUDENT

## TALK TO THE STUDENT IN PRIVATE

when both of you have the time and are not rushed or preoccupied. Give the student your undivided attention. Use a non-confrontational approach and a calm voice, and listen carefully and sensitively. Create a space where the student can feel comfortable and safe.

## EXPRESS YOUR CONCERN

in behavioral, non-judgmental terms. Be direct, and state facts, not opinions. For example, "I've noticed you've been absent from class lately and I'm concerned," rather than "Where have you been lately? You should be more concerned about your grades."

## GIVE HOPE

by assuring the student that things can get better. It is important to help the student realize there are options, and that things will not always seem hopeless. Suggest sources of support, such as friends, family, clergy, or professionals. (Recognize that your purpose is to enable the student to consult appropriate resources, not to solve the student's problem.)

## AVOID ASSUMPTIONS AND JUDGMENT

about the student's circumstances and/or behavior. Resist evaluating or criticizing, even if the student asks for your opinion. It is important to respect the student's value system, even if you disagree.

## MAINTAIN CLEAR AND CONSISTENT BOUNDARIES AND EXPECTATIONS

while supporting the student. Continue the professional nature of the faculty/student or staff/student relationship and the consistency of academic and behavioral expectations.

## REFER THE STUDENT TO CSDC

and/or other appropriate resources. Let the student know that help is available. It may also be helpful to point out that seeking professional help for other problems (medical, legal, etc.) is considered good judgment and an appropriate use of resources. If possible, share with the student what you know about CSDC and prepare them for what to expect if your advice is taken.

## FOLLOW UP

with the student to express ongoing care and to ensure that they have successfully connected with resources. Arrange a follow-up meeting with the student to see if the referral appointment was kept and to hear about the experience. Continue to provide support while the student takes the appropriate actions.

## ALWAYS DOCUMENT YOUR INTERACTIONS

with the student, and consult with your department chair/supervisor and/or CSDC at any time.

# REFERRING A RELUCTANT AND DISTRESSED STUDENT

For various reasons, students are sometimes reluctant to meet with a counselor. To help ease some of the anxiety a student might feel about counseling, consider taking the following steps:

- Assure the student that counseling is confidential and is NOT noted on their academic record in any manner.
- Assure the student that asking for help is a sign of strength rather than weakness.
- Sometimes students feel that their problem is too small to bother a counselor. Assure the student that counselors meet with students regarding all kinds of concerns---large and small.
- Reluctant students may be relieved to know that they can meet with a counselor on a one-time basis. There may not be a need to meet with a counselor over an extended period of time OR the student may CHOOSE to meet with a counselor only once. For students who seem interested but reluctant to seek counseling, a helpful strategy might be to suggest that they try it one time to see how it goes.

While it is important to be helpful to others, we cannot make a student's decisions for them. Counseling should always be a personal choice. Occasionally, even your best efforts to encourage a student to seek counseling will be unsuccessful. If the student resists referral and you remain uncomfortable with the situation, contact your department chair/supervisor and/or CSDC.

# RESOURCES

## ON-CAMPUS

### **Alcohol & Other Drug Education Program (ADEP)**

808-956-3574

[https://www.hawaii.edu/shs/health\\_promotion/adepphp](https://www.hawaii.edu/shs/health_promotion/adepphp)

### **Department of Public Safety - Safety Escort Service**

808-956-SAFE (7233)

<https://manoa.hawaii.edu/dps/safety-escort-service>

### **Food Vault Hawai'i**

Hemenway Hall 111

808-956-8178

<https://www.facebook.com/foodvaulthawaii>

### **International Student Services**

QLCSS 206

808-956-8613

[issmanoa@hawaii.edu](mailto:issmanoa@hawaii.edu)

<https://www.hawaii.edu/issmanoa>

### **KOKUA Program**

QLCSS 013

808-956-7511 (voice or TTY)

808-956-7612 (voice or TTY)

[kokua@hawaii.edu](mailto:kokua@hawaii.edu)

<https://hawaii.edu/kokua>

### **LGBTQ+ Center**

QLCSS 211

808-956-9250

[lgbtq@hawaii.edu](mailto:lgbtq@hawaii.edu)

<https://manoa.hawaii.edu/lgbtq>

### **Mānoa Advocate**

QLCSS 210

808-956-9499

[manoaadv@hawaii.edu](mailto:manoaadv@hawaii.edu)

<https://blog.hawaii.edu/manoaadvocate>

### **Native Hawaiian Student Services**

QLCSS 113

808-956-4288

<https://manoa.hawaii.edu/nhss>

### **Office of Title IX**

Hawai'i Hall 112

808-956-2299

[t9uhm@hawaii.edu](mailto:t9uhm@hawaii.edu)

<https://manoa.hawaii.edu/titleix>

### **Office of Veteran Student Services**

QLCSS 310

808-956-2192

[ovss@hawaii.edu](mailto:ovss@hawaii.edu)

<https://manoa.hawaii.edu/veterans>

### **PAU (Prevention, Awareness & Understanding) Violence Program**

QLCSS 211

808-956-4392

[uhmpau@hawaii.edu](mailto:uhmpau@hawaii.edu)

<http://manoa.hawaii.edu/pauviolence>

### **Student Parents at Mānoa**

QLCSS 211

808-956-8059

[gotkids@hawaii.edu](mailto:gotkids@hawaii.edu)

<https://manoa.hawaii.edu/studentparents>

### **University Health Services Mānoa**

1710 East West Road

Receptionist: 808-956-8965

Pharmacy: 808-956-3576

[uhsm@hawaii.edu](mailto:uhsm@hawaii.edu)

<https://www.hawaii.edu/shs>

## IN THE COMMUNITY

### **Domestic Violence Action Center (DVAC)**

Oahu helpline: 808-531-3771

Toll-free helpline: 800-690-6200

New text line: 605-956-5680

<https://domesticviolenceactioncenter.org>

### **Sex Abuse Treatment Center (SATC)**

24 hour hotline: 808-524-7273

<https://satchawaii.org>

### **The Lavender Clinic**

808-744-2543

<https://www.lavenderclinic.org>

### **The Queen's Medical Center**

808-691-1000

<https://www.queens.org/locations/hospitals/qmc>

## OTHER

### **Student Basic Needs**

<https://www.hawaii.edu/student-basic-needs>

### **Set to Go - A Jed Program**

<https://www.jedfoundation.org/set-to-go>

### **The Jed Foundation**

<https://jedfoundation.org/higher-education-resources>

### **ULifeline**

<http://www.ulifeline.org>

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