Managing Challenging Students

The following is a list of behaviors associated with a student in distress, guidelines on how instructors can respond to assist the student, and what to expect from Student Health Services.

A. Signs that a student may be facing personal problem or concerns

The following list highlights behaviors associated when a student is presenting with concerns, distress, or a mental health issue.

- Blurs out inappropriate comments or statements
- Socially withdraws, has depressed mood, crying, anxiety, hyperactivity, rapid or impaired speech, or thought processes
- Changes in appearance or odor
- Changes in academic performance
- Use of controlled substance
- Writing or discussion focused on death or dying, hurting others, getting revenge
- Sends message via phone or e-mail stating that life is not worth living, is planning on ending their life, and/or hurting others
- Displays disruptive behavior, outbursts of anger, violent or threats of violence

Immediately call Public Safety (909-594-5611 Ext 4555) if you believe the student poses an imminent risk to anyone.

B. Steps instructors can take to help a student presenting with concerning behavior

The following are guidelines to help you in connecting the student to available resources.

1. Query the student if anything has recently happened in their life. Make an attempt to speak to them in private. In a gentle approach inquire about their safety and your concerns for the changes you see in them. This shows students you are noticing the changes and care about their well-being. Normalize whatever concerns or issues they are facing with non-judgmental responses.

2. Provide an empathetic listening ear. Offer hope in your words and mannerism by highlighting resources available to help them deal with their problems.

3. While you can be an empathetic listener, know your professional boundaries. It is fine to express concern, listen, and help the student, but not to serve as their mental health counselor. If the student and/or you
feel that the discussion is not enough to calm the concerns, explore resources available to them.

4. Refer them for counseling services on campus to Student Health Services (Ext 4400). Inform them that the campus offers counseling services by licensed professionals. You can point out that sessions are confidential (except in the case where danger to self/others, or suspected child/elder abuse) and parents will not be notified.

5. Faculty and staff can have students contact SHS or walk them over to the Center to be seen.

6. Faculty, consult with your peers, student discipline, and mental health therapist regarding students of concern. This is highly true if the student has been disruptive in class or has written material that is threatening or expressing harm to others as this involves Student Life/Public Safety on campus.

It is important to realize that not all students will be open to counseling or receiving help by others, but your kind words may be the start of their recognition for help. Some students may be grateful for the words and assistance and may be their way back to feeling good about themselves and their situation.

C. What happens when a student is seen at SHS

Once the student is in our care, our qualified staff will assess the student’s level of functioning. The student will be seen for a Crisis Assessment and determine the appropriate level of care at that time. Every effort is made to manage and contain the crisis without outside assistance. However, when the crisis at hand requires a higher level of care, we take necessary steps to insure safety for all involved.

The response may be one of the following:

- A session to de-escalate and set up treatment goals to ameliorate situation.
- Referral for ongoing treatment elsewhere or re-connecting student to their current provider for treatment and medical evaluation.
- If the student is not a danger to self/others, but not feeling well enough to be on their own, a family member may be contacted to pick up the student.
- If student presents danger to self or others or has decompensated, a call is made to PMRT (Psychiatric Medical Response Team) to evaluate for possible hospitalization.

D. What to expect from Student Health Services

The following is what you can expect from Student Health Services involved with students who present as a crisis.

- Our licensed staff will respond to crisis and emergencies in a timely manner.
• We will address concerns and make every effort to secure assistance to students in need of further mental health needs.
• We will follow up on “high-risk” students even after they leave our Center to offer assistance and assure they are following up with recommendations from their treatment provider.
• We are available for consultation regarding students of concern.

Some notes to consider:

• If there are concerns regarding the safety of a student and we are unable to ascertain their safety, we are obligated by law to contact law enforcement for a safety check.
• When the safety of a student is an issue we are legally obligated to take necessary steps to insure their safety. This may include calling 911 or PMRT for an evaluation. Some instructors may fear getting their students in trouble and hesitate making the decision to bring the matter to SHS. Instructors need to be prudent when dealing with students who present with high risk behaviors.
• We cannot follow up with a “cold-call” to every student of concern. Legally and ethically, we need to exercise caution when calling a student ‘out of the blue’ regarding their well-being without any prior involvement. We are within our legal bounds when returning a call for a student who has requested services, but walk a fine line when calling a student to inquire about their well-being regarding concerns from a staff or instructor.