

# Recognizing and Helping Students in Distress

A guide for faculty and staff



THE ASSESSMENT AND CARE TEAM  
University of Massachusetts Amherst

## The Assessment and Care Team

The University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to maintaining a safe working, learning and living environment for all members of the campus community.

The rise in levels of violence has become increasingly a national and local concern. The Assessment and Care Team (ACT) focuses on students who may pose a threat to themselves or others, taking action to help the individual and protect campus safety.

Representatives from Student Affairs and Academic Affairs meet weekly to share information and develop action plans. ACT also consults with faculty and staff in identifying problematic behaviors.

Members of the campus community concerned about a student are encouraged to involve the ACT by calling the:

- Dean of Students Office, (413) 545-2684; or
- Dean of the Graduate School, (413) 545-5271.

***In an emergency, call 911 for the UMass Amherst Police Department (UMPD).***

## Recognizing and Helping Students in Distress

**A**re you concerned about a student's physical or mental health? Has a student's behavior disrupted your class or caused you to worry about his or her future actions? You may have the opportunity to help a student avoid dangerous situations and obtain help. The ACT has compiled this guide as an aid to identifying signs of possible distress and making appropriate referrals.

### Where do I start?

**A**situation, observation or instinct tells you to be concerned about a student. But, you're not sure what to do or where to start, and worry that you'll make things worse. Don't let that stop you from taking action. Use this resource guide, talk to your supervisor or department chair, or call the ACT. Help is available – for your student, and for you!

## Helping a student who is:

### Anxious

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| <b>SIGNS</b><br>Stress, panic, avoidance, excessive worry, sleeping or eating problems | <b>CONSULTATION AND REFERRAL</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mental Health Services</li><li>• Dean of Students Office</li></ul> |
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### Demanding

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| <b>SIGNS</b><br>Sense of entitlement, need for control, difficulty with structure and limits, perfectionism, disruptive behavior | <b>CONSULTATION AND REFERRAL</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Code of Student Conduct: "Guidelines For Classroom Civility and Respect"</li><li>• Dean of Students Office</li><li>• Mental Health Services</li></ul> |
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## Depressed, suicidal, disoriented

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| <p><b>SIGNS</b><br/>Deep sense of sadness, fatigue and social withdrawal, difficulty with concentration, memory and decision-making, feelings of helplessness, hopelessness or worthlessness</p> | <p><b>CONSULTATION AND REFERRAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental Health Services</li> <li>• FSAP</li> </ul> |
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## Abusing substances

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| <p><b>SIGNS</b><br/>Coming to class high or smelling of alcohol, excessive absence, neglecting work, inappropriate behavior</p> | <p><b>CONSULTATION AND REFERRAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Center for Alcohol and other Drug Abuse Prevention</li> <li>• Mental Health Services</li> <li>• Dean of Students Office</li> </ul> |
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## Aggressive or potentially violent

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| <p><b>SIGNS</b><br/>Paranoia, distrust, fascination with weapons, violence evident in communication or writings, direct or indirect threats</p> | <p><b>CONSULTATION AND REFERRAL</b></p> <p><b>Immediate safety concern:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call 911, UMPD</li> </ul> <p><b>Assessment:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dean of Students Office</li> <li>• Mental Health Services</li> </ul> |
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## A victim of assault or abuse

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| <p><b>SIGNS</b><br/>Self-reporting, appears with bruises</p> | <p><b>CONSULTATION AND REFERRAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UMPD</li> <li>• Dean of Students Office</li> <li>• Everywoman's Center</li> <li>• University Health Services</li> <li>• Mental Health Services</li> </ul> |
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## Resources

### Dean of Students Office . . . . . 545-2684

- resources for undergraduate students
- challenging classroom situations
- appropriate responses to disruptive or intimidating behavior

### Graduate School . . . . . 545-0722

- Services similar to Dean of Students Office, geared to graduate students

### Center for Alcohol and other Drug Abuse Prevention . . . . . 577-5181

- confidential alcohol screening and brief intervention through the BASICS program
- training on identifying high-risk use of alcohol and other drugs
- support services for individuals in recovery, including Fresh and Sober program

## Resources (continued)

### Faculty and Staff

#### Assistance Program . . . . . 545-0350

- strategies for dealing with problematic students
- support and feedback when issues are difficult to resolve
- resources for managing stress and other reactions to challenging situations

#### Mental Health Services . . . . . 545-2337 After-hours emergencies . . . . . 577-5000

- brief psychotherapies, crisis intervention and 24/7 emergency services
- situation assessment consultation
- student referral assistance

#### Ombuds Office . . . . . 545-0867

- appropriate responses to disruptive or intimidating behavior
- third-party facilitation and mediation services
- resolving conflicts between students and faculty/staff

#### UMass Amherst Police . . . . . 545-2121 Emergency . . . . . 911

- immediate emergency services for threatening or dangerous behavior