



Assisting Students in Crisis

Student Counseling Services
2007

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Introduction

As members of the Metropolitan State University community, we all interact with students. At times, you will have contact with students whose behaviors cause you concern or discomfort, or may interfere with your work or the education of other students. On the college campus, distressed students may go unnoticed for a variety of reasons and even when noticed by faculty and staff, they can be challenging people with whom to cope.

When interacting with a student experiencing emotional stress, you may feel you are “in over your head,” or you may face competing concerns, such as the welfare of other students in your class or other students waiting to see you. However, it is important to know that it is unlikely a situation involving a distressed student will disappear unless there is an intervention. Without an intervention of some kind, you may well be faced with a persistent and recurring problem. An effective intervention requires knowing how to respond to these incidents and knowing what resources on which you can call.

This “tool kit” was created to help you when these difficult occasions arise. It offers straightforward advice, techniques and suggestions on how to cope with and assist distressed students. It is our hope that this publication and our professional staff at Student Counseling Services will be helpful to you as you continue your service to Metropolitan State students and the larger academic community.

Safety in the Classroom

Prior to the Beginning of the Semester

- Include a statement in syllabi indicating “Expectations of Student Behavior”
 - Sample: Communication and behavior among all individuals in this course, whether verbal or written, should be civil and respectful. Constructive criticism is appropriate, but should always be presented in a manner that promotes educational goals. Individuals who demonstrate a lack of civility will be cautioned, and if the behavior continues, will be asked to leave the class.
- Have a few business cards belonging to your department chair or dean among materials you take with you to class each week, so you can give one to a student you ask to leave your classroom.
- Take a phone with you to class or make yourself aware of student(s) who have phones which can be accessed in an emergency.
- Write down the pager number/cell phone number for security personnel for the specific campus housing your classroom and keep it within easy reach among materials you take with you to class each week. (These numbers can be found on our directory; the numbers are also on the university’s security card.) In addition, if you are not familiar with the campus, write down the name of the campus, the address and the room number in case you have to describe your location to anyone over the phone.
- Make yourself familiar with evacuation routes for your particular classroom. If individuals who are unable to use stairways are in your classroom, make yourself familiar with handicapped accessible evacuation routes as well. (This information should be posted near elevators; but if not, contact Building Services for the information.)

While in the Classroom

- Review the syllabus statement about expectations of behavior with students at the first class session. Explain to them that you have a responsibility to the entire class and that class time will not be wasted on managing inappropriate behavior. Students who demonstrate inappropriate behavior will be asked to leave the class and will not be allowed to return until a meeting outside of class has resulted in assurances that the behavior will not continue.
- If a student demonstrates inappropriate behavior in class and it can wait until break time, ask to speak to that student at break privately and caution the student about the behavior; making it clear that your next step will be to ask the student to leave the class.
- **Due Process:** If you have to ask a student to leave a class, state that the student will be allowed to return to class after a satisfactory meeting has taken place. That meeting may be with you alone, or with a department chair or conduct code officer present, if you prefer. Give the student a number to call to arrange for that meeting or to grieve your decision to remove him or her from the classroom.
- If a student refuses to leave a classroom or if you believe the student will not leave the premises peacefully, call security at the campus site (phone number on back inside cover or on the university's security card) to escort the student from the classroom and follow up with the campus safety officer and your department chair or dean after class. Offer students information about escort services to their cars after class, which are available on all campuses. Access escort services yourself if you are uncomfortable about leaving a classroom alone. If in doubt, call 911 and be clear about your location—campus name, address and room number. If using an internal phone system, dial 9-911.

Intervention, Consultation and Referral

Intervention

You are likely to interact with distressed students in two different contexts: in a classroom setting and in an individual meeting. Your goals for intervention will depend on these contexts and will affect your choice of intervention.

In the Classroom

The relationship between teacher and student is a very powerful one, perhaps after our relationship with parents, the most powerful relationship between child and adult that most of us will experience. It can be helpful to remember that students bring their childhood and adolescent experiences with teachers into their relationship with you. However mature and responsible your students, they will still tend to react to instruction, evaluation and judgment from their childhood experiences. The relationship you have with your students is not one of adult to adult, but of professional teacher to student. In considering this, the most important implications for you in intervening with distressed students in the classroom are as follows:

- Don't take student distress or anger personally.
- Remain the professional teacher—in the classroom, your prime responsibility is to maintain a safe learning atmosphere for all your students. To react with anger, distress or helplessness directly affects your relationship with all of your students and their experience in the classroom. Students need you to be in charge.
- Acknowledge your individual student's experience and request to see the student in private: "I can see you are distressed—we can talk more about it after class."
- If your student is unable to continue in class, ask if they would like to take a break or if they would like to skip class today. Make sure you arrange when you will meet with them privately.

Individual Meetings

Openly acknowledging to students that you are aware of their distress, sincerely concerned about their welfare, and willing to help them explore alternative responses, can have a profound and positive effect. We encourage you, whenever possible, to speak directly and honestly with a student when you sense that he or she is in emotional distress. When you are directly involved with a student experiencing distress we recommend the following:

- Request to see that student in private. This may help minimize embarrassment and defensiveness.
- Briefly acknowledge your observations and perceptions of their situation. Express your concerns directly and honestly.
- Listen carefully and try to see the issues from the student's point of view without necessarily agreeing or disagreeing.
- Attempt to identify the problem. You can help by exploring with the student alternative responses to their present distress.
- Inappropriate and strange behavior should not be ignored. Comment on what you have observed, but not in a judgmental way.
- Being flexible with strict procedures may allow a distressed student to respond more effectively.
- Involve yourself only as far as you feel comfortable and competent. The Student Counseling Services staff and other professionals on the campus are available to assist you.

Consultation

If you are unsure of how to work with a specific distressed student, we encourage you to consult with one of the counselors on our staff. A brief consultation with a counselor may help you sort out the relevant issues and explore alternative approaches.

Referral

When you discuss a referral to Student Counseling Services with a student, it would be helpful to express your concerns in a clear and concise manner, while noting why you think counseling would be helpful. The list of Student Counseling Services on page 28 may be of help in your decision to refer a student.

When Should I Refer a Student?

The decision to refer a student to Student Counseling Services is first based upon your own observations. For example, does the student show signs and symptoms of emotional distress? While each student experiences emotional distress in a different way, some common indicators you might observe include:

- Student performance is below usual or expected level.
- High levels of irritability including undue aggressive or abrasive behavior are expressed towards you or others.
- Lack of energy
- Marked change in personal hygiene
- Bizarre or strange behavior
- Sadness, tearfulness
- Sleeplessness
- Frequent binge eating episodes or extreme loss of appetite
- Dependency, such as, the student who hangs around your office or makes excessive appointments to see you
- Infrequent class attendance and inadequate effort on assignments
- Falling asleep in class
- Lack of enthusiasm about various aspects of student life
- Unusual bruises on face and/or body
- Expressed suicidal thoughts or attempts

How Do I Refer a Student to Counseling Services?

You can make a referral in any of these ways:

1. Simply suggest that the student call 651-793-1558 or go to the Gateway Student Services Center to make an appointment;
2. Volunteer to call Student Counseling Services (651-793-1558) while the student is with you in order to ensure that contact is made; or
3. Offer to walk with the student to the Gateway Student Services Center.

Counseling is confidential except when the student presents a danger to himself or herself or others, or when abuse of a child or vulnerable adult is involved. Our services consist of individual counseling, couples counseling, group counseling or a combination of these services.

There is no fee for services to students. If longer-term or more specialized therapy is indicated, the student may be referred to an appropriate off-campus resource.

If it is after hours for Student Counseling Services, but you feel the student needs immediate assistance or you are uncertain they will follow up with counseling services and this concerns you, call Ramsey County Adult Mental Health Services (651-266-7890), or the Hennepin County Crisis Intervention Center Crisis Line (612-347-3161).

How Should I Respond if a Student Appears to be...

...Acting in a Bizarre or Dangerous Manner?

If a student is acting in a bizarre manner, dangerous manner or seems to be losing control, there are several points to keep in mind:

- Remain calm. This may help the student to control his or her emotions.
- Be simple and direct. Try to convey your understanding of the problem and respond honestly about whether you can help.
- Be firm. Sometimes there is a manipulative quality to unusual behavior and it is important to set clear limits.
- Refer the student to counseling services if you feel it is appropriate. Same day appointments are available in urgent situations.
- Consult with counseling services if you need assistance.
- Always maintain an exit plan or route.
- If you feel the student presents a direct or immediate danger to self or others, do not hesitate to contact Campus Security (phone number on back inside cover and on the university's security card).

...Anxious?

Anxiety is a normal response to a perceived danger or threat to one's well being or self-esteem. For some students, the cause of the anxiety will be clear, but for others it may be difficult to determine. It is our experience that anxiety is very often a result of the intense academic competition among students, a fear of inadequacy regarding some academic challenge or personal relationships. Often, students may experience anxiety in a particular situation in the classroom—test taking anxiety and performance anxiety are common. It can be helpful to acknowledge that many students experience such anxiety and to encourage students to talk to you about their worries. If a student's anxiety seems really debilitating, consider referring to counseling services to help them develop strategies to manage their anxiety.

Regardless of the cause, one or more of the following symptoms may be experienced:

- Rapid heart beat
- Chest pains or discomfort
- Dizziness
- Sweating
- Trembling or shaking
- Cold clammy hands
- Hyperventilation

The student may also complain of:

- Difficulty concentrating
- Always being “on edge”
- Having difficulty making decisions
- Sleeping problems
- Being too fearful to take action

In rare cases, a student may experience a panic attack in which physical symptoms occur spontaneously and intensely in such a way that the student may fear she or he is dying.

The following guidelines are appropriate actions in most cases involving anxiety or panic symptoms:

It is helpful to...

- Let the student discuss his/her feelings and thoughts. Often this alone relieves some of the pressure.
- If possible, provide a safe and quiet environment until symptoms subside.
- Be clear and direct.
- Provide reassurance.
- Remain calm and talk slowly.

...Depressed?

Depression, and the variety of ways in which it manifests itself, is part of the natural emotional and physical response to life's ups and downs. With the busy and demanding life of a college student, it is safe to assume that most students will experience periods of reactive (or situational) depression in their college careers.

Major depression, however, is a "whole-person" concern, involving a person's body, mood, thoughts and behavior. People with major depression cannot merely "pull themselves together" and get better. It will interfere with a student's ability to function in school and/or in their social environment. In particular, students may experience loss of concentration and motivation, to the point where assignments are late or incomplete, or students fail to attend class. Without treatment, symptoms can last for weeks, months, or years. Appropriate treatment, however, can help more than 80 percent of those who suffer from depression.

Because faculty and staff have opportunities for observation and interaction with students, they often are the first to recognize that a student is depressed. Look for a pattern of the following indicators, but understand that not everyone who is depressed experiences every symptom. Some people experience a few symptoms, some many. Also, severity of symptoms varies with individuals.

Symptoms of Depression

- Persistent sad, anxious or "empty" mood
- Feelings of hopelessness, pessimism
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities that a person once enjoyed
- Insomnia, early morning awakening or oversleeping
- Appetite and/or weight loss or overeating and weight gain
- Decreased energy, fatigue, being "slowed down"
- Thoughts of death or suicide, suicide attempts
- Persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment, such as headaches, digestive disorders and chronic pain
- Inconsistent class attendance
- Decline in personal hygiene

It is helpful to...

- Let the student know you are aware that she or he is feeling down and you would like to help.
- Reach out more than halfway and encourage the student to discuss how she or he is feeling.
- Offer options to further investigate/manage the symptoms of depression.
- Encourage them to seek help, possibly suggesting Student Counseling Services.

It is not helpful to...

- Minimize the student's feelings (for example, everything will be better tomorrow).
- Bombard the student with "fix it" solutions or advice.
- Be afraid to ask whether the student is suicidal, if you think she or he may be.
- Ignore remarks about suicide.

...in Poor Contact with Reality?

Students in poor contact with reality have difficulty distinguishing fantasy from real life. Their thinking is typically illogical, confused or irrational (for example, speech patterns that jump from one topic to another with no meaningful connection); their emotional responses may be incongruent or inappropriate; and their behaviors may be bizarre and disturbing. A student with poor contact with reality may experience hallucinations, often auditory, and may report hearing voices. For example, these students may believe that they are hearing the voice of someone who is trying to harm them or control them. While this student may elicit alarm or fear from others they are generally no more violent than anybody else.

When working with students who are in poor contact with reality:

It is helpful to...

- Acknowledge their feelings or fears without supporting the misperceptions (such as, “I understand you think someone is following you, right now I don’t see anyone and I believe you are safe.”)
- Remove extra stimulation from environment (turn off radio outside a noisy classroom).
- Talk in a calm and soft voice while stating your concern and verbalizing that they need some help.
- Acknowledge your difficulty understanding them and ask for clarification.
- Respond with warmth and kindness.
- Use firm reasoning.
- Focus on what you observe in the “here and now.”
- Consult with or refer them to Student Counseling Services **as soon as possible** if you cannot make sense of their conversation or are concerned about their behavior. Accompany them to counseling services.

It is not helpful to...

- Argue or try and convince them of the irrationality of their thinking, as this commonly produces a stronger defense of the false perception.
- Play along, “Oh, yes, I hear the voices.”
- Encourage further discussion of the delusional process— for instance, ask lots of questions.
- Demand or order them to do something to change their perceptions.
- Expect customary emotional responses.
- Leave the student unattended or alone.

...Suicidal?

It is not uncommon for students to engage in some degree of suicidal thinking. As a member of the faculty or staff, you may be in contact with students who have expressed these thoughts to you. It is important that you do not simply overlook these comments, because the student may be reaching out to you. Suicidal risk is based on a constellation of clues, not just observing any one clue. These clues seem to fall into the following categories:

Situational clues: One or more significant losses may have occurred

Overwhelming loss(es):

- Death of a loved one, break-up with a partner, and so on.
- Loss of highly valued entities: support system, social institutions.
- Loss of status or opportunity: rejection from graduate school, not being accepted into major of choice, loss of status on the job.

Emotional clues: Several depressive symptoms often are present.

- Sleeping too little or too much
- Difficulty concentrating
- Eating much more or much less than usual
- Low energy
- No longer interested in previously pleasurable activities
- Poor self care (not showering/dirty clothing)
- Crying Spells
- Feeling of worthlessness
- Increased social isolation
- Low self-esteem
- Preoccupation with death
- Hopelessness about the future or apathy
- Irritability and mood swings

Verbal/oral clues: Something a person says, overtly or covertly, may communicate suicidal ideation and intent.

- “I’m going to kill myself.”
- “I wish I were dead.”
- “How do I donate my body to science?”
- “I’m not the man/woman I used to be.”
- “I don’t see any way out.”
- “My family or everyone would be better off without me.”
- “I can’t take it any longer.”
- “I just feel like I am in the way all the time.”
- “Life has lost its meaning for me.”
- “Nobody needs me anymore.”
- “If (such and such) happens I am going to kill myself.”
- “If (such and such) doesn’t happen I’ll kill myself.”
- “I am getting out.”

Behavioral clues: Something the person does may communicate a self-destructive motive.

- A previous suicide attempt, particularly a recent or highly lethal attempt
- Giving away valued possessions
- Procuring means: buying a gun, asking for sedatives, and so on
- Composing a suicide note
- Putting personal affairs in order
- Poor adjustment to recent loss of loved one
- Sudden, unexplained recovery from a severe depression
- Resigning from social groups or activities, not attending classes
- Bizarre or inappropriate behaviors
- Crying spells without external triggers
- Becoming disorganized, loss of contact with reality
- Change in eating behaviors: overeating or loss of appetite
- Unexplained changes in typical behavior (change in grades, increased aggression, drug use, mood changes, social withdrawal)
- Visiting a physician for unexplained or vague symptoms
- Substance abuse: alcohol and/or other drugs

When working with a student, whom you think may be suicidal; the following guidelines should be kept in mind:

It is helpful to...

- Talk about suicide openly and directly, remain calm and understanding.
- Be confident and caring and know the resources available.
- Ascertain whether the student is isolated, alone, estranged from support and, if so, accompany the student to Student Counseling Services.
- Take charge and call or walk the student to counseling services.
- If it is after hours for the counseling service, call the Ramsey County Adult Mental Health Services, 651-266-7900, or the Hennepin County Crisis Intervention Center Crisis Line, 612-347-3161.

It is not helpful to...

- Sound shocked by anything the person tells you.
- Emphasize the shock and embarrassment the suicide would be to his or her family, before you're certain that's not what he or she hopes to accomplish.
- Ignore comments such as "The world would be better off without me."
- Engage in a philosophical debate on the moral aspects of suicide. You may not only lose the debate, but also the suicidal person.
- Get too personally involved with the student.
- Leave the student alone or unattended.

...Suspicious (Paranoid)?

Usually suspicious students complain about something other than their psychological difficulties. They may present themselves to you as:

- Tense
- Cautious
- Mistrustful
- Having few friends

Suspicious students tend to interpret a minor oversight as significant personal rejection and often overreact to insignificant occurrences. They see themselves as the focal point of everyone's behavior and everything that happens has a special meaning. Usually they are overly concerned with fairness and being treated equally. They may blame others and express anger. Many times they feel worthless and inadequate. When you are working with a suspicious student, the following guidelines may be appropriate:

It is helpful to...

- Send clear, consistent messages regarding what you are willing to do and what you expect.
- Express compassion without being overly friendly or familiar.
- Be aware of personal boundaries and personal space when interacting, and keep a comfortable distance.
- Assure him or her that you will be fair.
- Encourage them to seek help, possibly suggesting Student Counseling Services.

...Under the Influence?

We are all aware of the toll that abuse of alcohol and other drugs can take on individuals, families, friends and colleagues. In a recent survey, college presidents identified alcohol abuse as the campus life issue of greatest concern. The costs are staggering-in terms of academic failure, vandalism, sexual assault and other consequences.

Warning Signals of Alcohol and Drug Abuse

There are many signs of alcohol and/or other drug use, abuse and addiction. None of these signs alone are conclusive proof of an alcohol or other drug problem. Other conditions could be responsible for unusual behavior, such as an illness or a reaction to a legally prescribed drug. Any one sign, or a combination of them, could be cause for alarm and could signal problems in general as well as a substance abuse problem.

Impairment, Alcohol and Drug Abuse

Alcohol and/or drug abuse can impair a student in several ways:

Impairment of Mental Alertness

- Depression
- Extreme mood swings
- Flat or unresponsive behavior
- Hyperactivity
- Loss of interest in one's work/school results
- Nervousness

Impairment of Motor Behavior

- Hand tremors
- Loss of balance
- Loss of coordination
- Excessive movement (fidgets all the time)

Impairment of Interpersonal Relationships

- Detachment from or drastic changes in social relationships/friends
- Becoming a loner or becoming secretive
- Loss of interest in appearance
- Extreme change in interests
- Tendency to lose temper or become argumentative
- Borrowing money and not repaying

Impairment of Academic or Work Performance

- Inability to perform assignments at usual level of competence
- Missed deadlines, classes or meetings
- Increased absenteeism or lateness
- Accidents in the lab
- Complaining of feeling ill as an excuse for poor performance
- Coming to class, practice or work intoxicated or high
- Legal problems associated with alcohol use

It is helpful to...

- Accept and acknowledge feelings of student.
- Focus on the specific behavior that is of concern.
- Permit the student to say how they regard the problem.
- Find source of emotional support that the student trusts. Encourage involvement of friends, doctor, minister or employer.
- Be willing to admit limitation of your assistance and refer to specialists and/or Student Counseling Services.

It is not helpful to...

- Convey judgment or be critical of student's substance use.
- Make allowances for the student's irresponsible behavior.
- Ignore signs of intoxication.
- Discuss your own college experiences with alcohol or drugs.

...Violent or Verbally Aggressive?

Verbal aggression and violent behaviors have increased on university campuses nationwide. It is very important to be prepared to act strategically in response to such behaviors.

Students usually become verbally abusive in frustrating situations they perceive as being beyond their control. Anger and upset become displaced from those situations onto the nearest target (you). Explosive outbursts or ongoing belligerent hostile behavior become the student's way of gaining power and control. It is important to remember that for the most part the student is not angry with you personally but at his/her world and that you are an object of pent-up frustrations.

Violence because of emotional distress is rare and typically occurs when the student's level of frustration has been so intense or of such an enduring nature as to erode the entire student's emotional controls. This behavior is often associated with the use of alcohol and other drugs.

Pre-incident

It is helpful to...

- Be familiar with your departmental and/or office safety plan (see page 26).
- Ensure that you have a way to communicate for help.
- Be observant of student's behaviors and your surroundings.
- Consult, consult and consult.
- Campus Security (phone number on back inside cover and on the university's security card), and counseling services (651-793-1558) are available to assist you.

At the Time of the Incident: In the Classroom

It is helpful to...

- Remain calm; get help if needed; take some deep breaths. Model the behavior you wish to see in the student.
- Stay **safe**, have access to a door; keep large furniture such as a desk between you and the student.
- Maintain a posture that is posed, ready to move quickly, but not fearful. Be aware of everything in the room.

It is not helpful to...

- Ignore warning signs (body language, clenched fists).
- Get into an argument or shouting match.
- Become hostile or punitive yourself (such as, “You can’t talk to me that way.”).
- Press for explanations for their behavior.
- Corner or touch the student.

It is helpful to...

- Acknowledge their anger and frustration (such as, “I can hear how upset you are and how frustrated you are that nobody will listen.”)
- If in the classroom, repeat that the classroom is not the place to discuss this, that you can talk with them later.
- If necessary, invite the student to take a break from the classroom to calm down, or to leave the class for the day. Reassure the student they will not be academically penalized for doing so.
- Be directive and firm about behaviors you will accept. Use a calm voice (such as, “I need for you to step back.” or “I’m having a hard time understanding you when you yell.”)
- Allow them to vent, get the feelings out, and tell you what is upsetting them.
- If possible, leave an unobstructed pathway to the door of your office or classroom.

Post Violent or Aggressive Incident

It is helpful to...

- Follow departmental and/or safety plan.
- Debrief with department chair.
- Debrief with a counselor at counseling services (651-793-1558).
- Contact the Metropolitan State University Campus Security (phone number on back inside cover and on the university's security card) and/or call 9-911.

Common Responses to a Crisis Situation

Although critical incidents (such as personal tragedy, terrorism and natural disaster) affect people differently, there are some common reactions that people may experience. These signs and symptoms may begin immediately, or people may feel fine for a couple of days or even weeks and then suddenly be hit with a reaction.

The important thing to remember is that these reactions are quite normal; although people may feel some distress, they are probably experiencing a normal reaction to an abnormal situation.

Some common responses to critical incidents are listed below:

Physical Reactions

- Insomnia/Nightmares
- Fatigue
- Hyperactivity or “nervous energy”
- Appetite Changes
- Pain in the neck or back
- Headaches
- Dizzy spells

Emotional Reactions

- Excessive jumpiness or tendency to be startled
- Irritability
- Anger
- Feelings of anxiety or helplessness
- Combinations of strong conflicting feelings—anger, sadness, fear, and so on.

Effect on Productivity

- Inability to concentrate
- Increased incidence of errors
- Lapses in memory
- Increases in absenteeism
- Tendency to overwork

For each symptom, note the following:

1. Duration: Normally reactions will grow less intense and disappear within a few weeks.
2. Intensity: If the reaction interferes with the ability to carry on life normally, seek help.

Recommendations

- Talk to people—talk is healing medicine. Share your feelings openly and honestly. Consider spending some of your classroom time to facilitate discussion of the incident, or requesting a counselor to help you facilitate such a discussion.
- Limit your exposure to news and media reports of the event. Realize that over saturation of images increase stress and fear.
- Reach out and help others—donate blood, time, expertise, money, food or clothing toward relief efforts. Contact your Red Cross or Salvation Army to see what is needed—and remember that needs will change over time.
- Know that periods of appropriate physical exercise, alternated with relaxation, can alleviate some of the physical reactions.
- Structure your time—keep busy.
- Be aware of overusing alcohol and other medications.
- Maintain as normal a schedule as possible.
- Do things that feel good to **you**.
- Realize those around you are also under stress. Be patient with each other.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Eat well-balanced, regular meals.
- Know that reoccurring thoughts or nightmares are normal. They will decrease over time.
- Avoid dwelling on what may or may not happen or what might have happened.

Helping Yourself and Others

Take Care of Yourself First

If you need additional assistance is recovering from a crisis situation, you are encouraged to:

- Contact Student Counseling Services for support, and/or
- Contact the Employee Assistance Program (see below).

Employee Assistance Program

An important benefit available to Minnesota state employees is the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). State employees and their family members can receive free confidential counseling and referrals for personal issues by calling the EAP at 651-259-3840.

Services of the EAP Include

- Voluntary assessment and brief counseling (up to three sessions, annually, per problem) for employees and family members experiencing personal problems of any kind. These counseling services can be accessed in dozens of locations around the state.
- Short-term counseling for employees regarding serious work-related problems.
- Informed referral to appropriate services.
- Management consultation regarding challenging worksite problems.

Additional information on EAP can be found at:

<http://www.doer.state.mn.us/eap/eap.htm>

You Can Help Others

There are simple things you can do to help colleagues and friends who have been affected by a crisis.

Listening

- Listen carefully.
- Acknowledge feelings as normal.
- Be sensitive to individual circumstances and points of view.
- Do not respond with “You’re lucky it wasn’t worse.” Instead, say that you are sorry such an event has occurred and you want to help.
- Do not take emotional responses like anger personally.
- Respect an individual’s needs to privacy. If someone does not want to talk about the incident or their feelings, do not insist that they do.

Reaching Out at Work

- Organize support groups at work to help one another.
- Offer a “listening ear” to someone who has not asked for help but may need it.
- Give encouragement, support and understanding with on-the-job issues.
- Identify resources for additional help (EAP, mental health benefit, human resources office—see inside back cover for phone numbers).

Helping Family and Friends

- Offer to spend time with the traumatized person. Reassure them that they are safe now.
- Offer help with everyday tasks like cleaning, cooking and childcare.
- Respect their need for privacy and time alone.
- Suggest available help. (EAP, community resources, church and so on.)
- Keep communications open—be available and accessible.

Safety Plan

It is a good idea to set up a departmental or office safety plan. For example, if a student was threatening to you in the past and she or he shows up at your office, you may need help in dealing with the student. Quite often it is the people with whom you work and who are in closest physical proximity that can provide the help you need. This section will help you to define a security plan for your department or office.

First and foremost, call campus security (phone number on back inside cover and on the university security card) to help with setting up a plan. The following are the kinds of behavior you should be concerned with:

- Unwilling to leave the building
- Interrupting the business of the department or office
- Bizarre statements/actions
- Angry/verbally abusive/yelling
- Behaving suspiciously
- Threatening
- Violent

There are at least three types of responses open to you:

1. Individual responses

- Do what you can to get the person to stop the behavior; try to handle it yourself.
- If the person is there and violent or potentially violent, call security (phone number on back inside cover and on the university security card).

2. Get assistance from others within your department, office, or elsewhere in the building.

- Have someone come and stand near you for support.
- Have someone come to help you deal with the person.
- Call or speed-dial a designated person for help.
- Have someone find a designated person for help.

3. Get assistance from Campus Security or 911 in case of violent or potentially violent behavior.

- Have another person contact Campus Security (phone number on back inside cover and on the university security card) or 911.
- Retreat to a locked office or another safe space while waiting for security.

Questions Departments and Office Should Consider as You Develop Your Safety Plan

Within the Department/Office

- What specific areas do we need to prepare in our department or office? Reception? Individual offices?
- How can we in the department help each other when faced with difficult situations?
- What will the procedures be for getting help from others within our area?
- What do we expect of the person when she or he comes to a colleague's assistance?

Outside the Department/Office

- When do we need another level of assistance—more than can be provided from within our department?
- Who will be our designated “helpers,” and are they readily available?
- How will we reach them?
- What should someone do while waiting for help?
- What should the protocol be if someone observes an individual disturbing other people by yelling or acting bizarrely?
- How will we coordinate planning and support with nearby departments?
- What does our department need to carry out these plans?
What kinds of training do we need, what do we think would help?

An Example of a Possible Scenario

You are a department secretary. Yesterday, a student came in demanding to see Professor X. When you told him that X was unavailable, he began to shout at you and call X names. The student then stormed out of the office. Today, the same student walks into your office again.

How could you have prepared for this? What do you do?

This scenario (or one that may be more appropriate for your specific department) discussed in your group setting can help you prepare and implement a safety plan. Staff members from the Safety and Security

Office and Student Counseling Services can serve as facilitators for one of your department meetings.

Student Counseling Services

Academic Consultation and Counseling

Students may access services to help them deal with academic concerns. They may consult with counselors on issues such as time management, procrastination, motivation, stress management and managing test anxiety or performance anxiety. Students often feel more comfortable in thinking of counseling services as an academic support service.

Individual or Couples Therapy

Individual or couples therapy is available to assist students with their personal, educational, interpersonal and social concerns. Acute psychological and emotional distress, even when temporary, can seriously impair the academic performance of students and interfere with the realization of their potential. The ultimate goal of counseling is to increase the ability of individuals to resolve their own concerns as they arise.

Group Therapy

In group therapy, people meet face-to-face with one or more trained group therapists and a number of peers to talk about what's troubling them. Members give feedback to each other by expressing their own feelings about what someone says or does. This interaction gives group members an opportunity to try out new ways of behaving and to learn more about the way they interact with others. Both general and specialized groups may be offered.

Crisis Intervention

The Student Counseling Services staff members provide referrals for immediate services to individuals in crisis, use knowledge of campus and community resources to make appropriate referrals, and when necessary, facilitate the hospitalization of students. In addition, counseling services has the responsibility of assisting the campus with the psychological needs stemming from any significant disaster or traumatic event.

Consultation

Counseling services staff members provide telephone and in-person consultation to faculty, staff, students and parents who are concerned about the welfare of students, who wish information about how to make a referral, or who would like to discuss or learn about psychologically-related situations or material.

Developmental and Outreach Programs

Programming is offered throughout the year to enhance the personal development of students, to increase knowledge about individual and campus well being and to promote a healthy campus environment.

Training of Students

Counseling services is a training site for graduate-level counselors from related professional fields.

Related Policies and Procedures

There are a number of Metropolitan State policies and procedures that may be applicable in crisis situations. These policies are available via the university's Web site at:

<http://www.metrostate.edu/policies/index.html>

Of particular interest may be:

#1020 – Student Conduct Code

#1060 – Drug Abuse Prevention

#1090 – Emergency Situations

#1120 – Zero Tolerance of Workplace Violence

Useful Telephone Numbers

Fire/Medical/Police **911**
When on campus, use **9-911**

Saint Paul Safety Officer

Cell (if Emergency) 651-775-0444
Security Officer’s Desk..... 651-793-1717
Library Safety Officer Cell..... 651-793-0715

Minneapolis MCTC Safety Officer

Nonemergency..... 612-659-6910
Emergency..... 612-659-6900

Midway Center Safety Officer

Cell..... 651-775-6122
Pager..... 952-601-4865

Other Metropolitan State Safety Numbers

Safety and Security Office..... 651-793-1725
24-hour Answering Service..... 651-793-1700
TTY 651-772-7687

Student Counseling Services 651-793-1558

Crisis Connection 612-379-6363

State Employee Assistance Program(EAP) 651-259-3840

Ramsey County Adult Mental Health Services 651-266-7800

Hennepin County Crisis Intervention Center

Crisis Line..... 612-347-3161

Metropolitan State University



Saint Paul Campus
700 East Seventh Street
Saint Paul, MN 55106-5000

Minneapolis Campus
1501 Hennepin Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55403-1897

Midway Center
1450 Energy Park Drive
Saint Paul, MN 55108-5218

Midway Center – Energy Park Place
1380 Energy Park Lane, Suite 205
Saint Paul, MN 55108


Web Site
www.metrostate.edu



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