

Responding and Helping Students in Crisis, Where do I start?

Students who may be distressed or whose behavior may concern others can make us feel defensive, helpless or fearful. It is up to us to manage those emotions before we can be effective managers of others. For additional information, discuss situations with your supervisor, department chairperson and/or the Dean of Students.

This guide provides methods of addressing a student in distress with the primary goal(s) of:

- Addressing distress before it becomes a crisis, which can be disruptive to the student and university community members.
- Increasing the safety and productivity of our on-campus learning and working environment for students, faculty and staff.

What to Do

- Stay safe—your safety, the student’s safety and the well-being of the campus community are of the highest importance when a student exhibits threatening or potentially violent behavior.
- Move the student to a quiet and safe location.
- Listen attentively and respond candidly with compassion.
- Ask another colleague for assistance so you are not alone with the student.
- Be open about the limits on your ability to help the student.
- Contact campus resources in a timely manner. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) permits faculty and staff to report student health and safety concerns to relevant campus offices when there is a legitimate concern related to campus safety. When contacting the appropriate campus resource, be sure to provide the student’s name, physical description, your location, description of the situation and type of assistance needed.
- Follow-up with campus resources and take care of yourself. Helping a troubled student can be challenging so make sure you practice self-care and receive adequate support.
- Clarify expectations in the classroom. Remind students verbally and in writing (syllabus) of standards/expectations for conduct and possible consequences for disruptive behavior.

Common Factors

The common factor of student distress is pressure. A student demonstrating distress:

- Considers the situation very important.
- Has already tried to use perceived skills and resources to manage the situation. The student now perceives a lack of acceptable options. So, the pressure may be directed to others.
- Emotion under pressure is intense.
- Distressing emotions can include sadness, fear and anger; they can vary in degree and expression depending on the person and the situation. Factors, such as culture, can influence how a person shows emotion.

Compassion: recall your latest stressful situation

We also bring emotion and culture into the situation. It is important for us to consider our own emotional reactions and responses to student pressure.

Common Goal: student success, productive class

Consultation with others can help us prepare for and respond to students in distress. See the resources on the back cover for more detailed information.

Prepare your Approach

- Prepare to be authoritative yet approachable. Consider how you will present yourself so that students are aware that you expect certain behavior on campus, but that you are also a resource for them if they are experiencing a crisis.
- Practice responding to specific behavioral incidents that might occur by role-playing with colleagues or professionals from Counseling Services.
- Keep in mind that different actions on your part may be required depending on whether the distressed student is behaving in a way that affects others.

Prepare your Syllabus

- Consider including a statement in your syllabus that addresses expectations for student behavior. For example:

Communication and behavior among all individuals in this course, whether verbal or written, should be civil and respectful. Individuals who demonstrate a lack of civility towards or respect for the instructor or other students will be cautioned and may be asked to leave the class or escorted out of the class by a public safety officer.

- Include phone numbers in your syllabus for Counseling Services and the Center for Accessibility Resources, along with a brief statement regarding the services each of those offices provides.
- Discuss the syllabus statement and explain ground rules to your students.

Prepare for an Emergency

- Carry a cell phone with you, if possible, or know how to access the nearest phone in case of an emergency.

Make sure you have a list of emergency contacts (e.g., Public Safety at Saint Paul Campus, Desk 651-793-1717, Saint Paul Police, Fire, Ambulance, 911 or Police, General Information number 651-291-1111) that you can keep with you.

How do I respond to a student in a Group Learning Situation?

Your primary responsibility is to maintain a safe learning atmosphere for all your students. Here are some helpful tips that may deescalate the situation:

Listen to your student's words. Acknowledge the student's experience and ask to talk to the student later.

"I can see that you are distressed. I would like to meet with you at another time. Please schedule an appointment." For situations involving an online class discussion, "Let us talk about this offline. So, please let me know a time that will work for you."

If the situation continues in the classroom, separate the student from the rest of the group.

“Okay, we can talk in the hallway about what to do next.”

Be firm. Make it clear that inappropriate behavior and language are not allowed in the learning environment.

“The behavior I am observing is not appropriate and interfering with our learning. I want to resolve the situation so that we can get back to learning together.”

If you choose to ask the student to leave, make arrangements as soon as possible for a meeting with you and your supervisor and or department chairperson to discuss how the student can come back to the group or class.

“We will need to meet again before you can come back to the class, or you can meet with (supervisor, department chairperson, and/or the dean of the college). If you like, we can talk on the phone.”

Give the student information regarding department chairperson, Ombudsperson in Student Affairs, and/or Judicial Affairs Officer if applicable. Refer the student to Counseling Services, the Center for Accessibility Resources, or other services as appropriate.

“Other students have benefited from working with _____ (e.g., Student Counseling Services). Here is their card.”

How do I respond to a student in a One-On-One Situation?

Recognize your response to the pressure the student is putting on you. If you anticipate having reactions that could hinder the meeting, identify strategies for managing the situation beforehand.

1. Listen to the student first, to learn what is really affecting the student.
2. Acknowledge the emotion that the student is expressing and the perceived cause.

Emotional distress is based on the student’s perception of the situation, which may be different from yours. Acknowledging the student’s emotion and accurately summing up the student’s perceived experience shows respect and interest in resolving the situation. You also model respectful disagreement if you decide to share your perception of the situation.

“Tell me more about what is going on? It sounds like you are _____ (frustrated, worried, etc.) because _____ (cause of emotion).”

3. If the student initiated the meeting, ask the student what the student is hoping you will do to help.

“What is it that you are hoping I can do to help you with this?”

4. Help the student identify several options and solutions while letting the student know what you are, and are not, able to do to help.
5. Identify other resources that may be helpful to the student and make referral.

No one likes a cold “No.” It makes people feel helpless and increases distress. Instead, *help the student to identify a few possible solutions*, even if they are not ideal. Be honest and direct about what you can and cannot do. By being honest now, you reduce problems later.

“I can try to help you to get _____ (information, extra time, etc.), but I cannot _____ (if relevant). You should also go to _____ (person, office) for help with _____ (need).”

6. If the student becomes verbally aggressive or physically intimidating, remind the student of rules for acceptable behavior

Example: “What you just said was very disrespectful. If you continue to act this way, I will end this meeting and contact the Judicial Affairs Officer.”

For documentation or follow-up with a supervisor or the Judicial Affairs Officer, note:

The 5 W's

Who was involved in the incident and

Who witnessed the event(s)?

What happened?

Where did it happen?

When did it happen?

Why did it happen?

Consider the possibility that behavioral health may be a contributing factor to the student's distress. The student could benefit from Counseling Services. Be mindful of the following behaviors:

- Inability to concentrate
- Repeated failure to hand in assignments and/or show up for class
- Repeated instances of public tearfulness
- Hyperventilation and profuse sweating
- Rapid, pressured speech
- Drastic change in personality or behavior
- Comments indicating self-perception of worthlessness and/or hopelessness*
- Repeated instances of verbal aggression (e.g., shouting, personalizing)*

If students make comments indicating that they are considering suicide or hurting others, call Public Safety, 911, and one of the crisis numbers noted in the guide immediately.

Crisis resources and follow-up guidelines

After an incident occurs, you can take steps to minimize the negative impact of the incident on yourself and others. Please consider all of the following:

- 1) Inform** your immediate supervisor of the incident. The two of you can work together to figure out appropriate next steps.
- 2) Document** what occurred while it is fresh. (Remember the 5 W's to note.)
- 3) Determine** who can help to resolve the issue short-term and long-term. Knowing and then using the resources that are available to help you resolve issues is a good step forward. Depending on the situation, consider the following resources listed below which are available to you.

Compliance with State, Federal and University Policies

Academic Integrity

Any behavior or activity that seeks or achieves misrepresentation of the originality of a student's work, or damage to another student's work, constitutes a violation of academic integrity.

The university's Academic Integrity Policy

2190 and Procedure 219 applies to all students. More information can be found at:

www.metrostate.edu/academic-integrity-policy

Drug and Alcohol Policies

Metropolitan State University is committed to the health, wellness and safety of all members of the university community. Students, faculty, and staff are responsible for adhering to university policy 1060. The policy and procedure can be found at: www.metrostate.edu/alcohol-drug-abuse-prevention

Policy on Non-Discrimination — Equal Employment and Diversity

Metropolitan State University is committed to fostering a positive learning, working and living environment. Our role is to assist in the creation of an environment in which every member of the university community is valued and everyone has the opportunity to succeed.
www.metrostate.edu/equal-opportunity

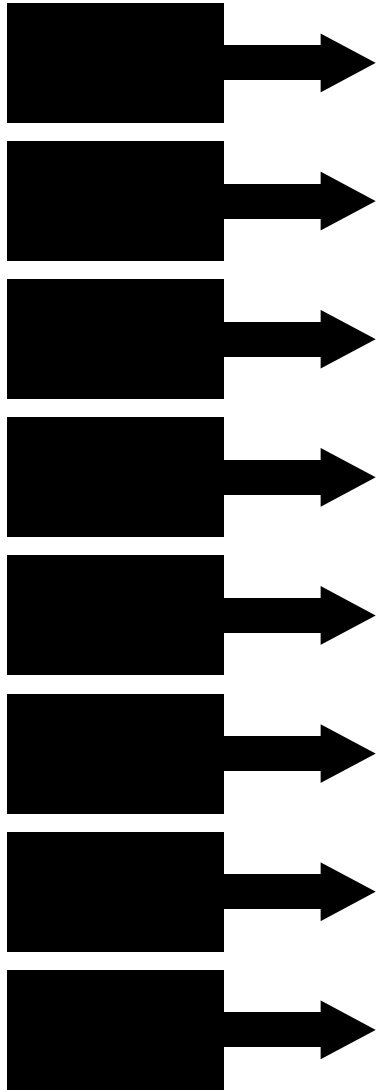
Student Conduct Code

This code supports the university efforts to provide an environment that promotes learning and protects the safety and well-being of the university community. Policy 1020 and Procedure 112 can be found at: www.metrostate.edu/judicial-affairs

Title IX

Should you need to report an incident, it is important to know the university has a formal reporting structure and process which includes confidential and mandatory reporters. Promptly report to either the Title IX Coordinator (Dean of Students Office), Public Safety, Equal Employment and Diversity Office, or Judicial Affairs Office. More information can be found at: www.metrostate.edu/assault-violence-prevention

Situation



Contact

Campus Safety and Security
651-793-1725
or 911

Judicial Affairs
651-793-1535

Dean of Students
651-793-1508

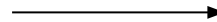
Ombudsperson
651-793-1560

Equal Opportunity
and Diversity Office
651-793-1272

Metropolitan State University
Student Counseling Services
651-793-1568

Center for Accessibility
Resources (CAR)
651-793-1549

Behavioral Intervention Team
(BIT)
[www.metrostate.edu/
behavioral-intervention](http://www.metrostate.edu/behavioral-intervention)



Campus Safety and Security:
Brooklyn Park: 763-488-2655
Midway: 651-775-6122 (after 4:30 p.m.)
911 (before 4:30 p.m.)
Minneapolis:
612-659-6900 (emergency)
612-659-6910 (non-emergency)
Saint Paul:
Campus Cell 651-775-0444
Library Cell 651-775-0715

**Metropolitan State University
Counseling Services:**
651-793-1568
**Metropolitan State University
Domestic and Sexual Violence
Crisis Line**
651-793-1500

The Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT) is a campus resource established to act as a multidisciplinary, central network to receive, collect, assess, and when it deems appropriate, act upon information on behavior of concern exhibited by a student or group of students.