

# Whatcom Community College: Helping Students in Distress

Faculty and Staff Resource

## General Protocol

For an emergency, call 9-1-1, then the campus operator at 360-383-3000. For non-emergency safety concerns, call Bellingham Police at 360-778-8800. If in doubt, call Bellingham Police. The counseling center and Office of Community Standards are available for consultation. The Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT), chaired by the Director of Community Standards, can facilitate campus efforts to assist the student and provide support for faculty and staff.

## 10 Second Triage

Dangerous student – Call 9-1-1

Safety is an immediate concern. Verbal or physical threats to harm self or others. Active threats of suicide and resists help.

Disruptive Student – Call Counseling center or Community Standards for consultation  
Safety is not an immediate concern. Threatens to harm self or others, but open to help. Bizarre behavior or communication. Obstructs the learning environment.

Distressed Student – Call Counseling Center or Community Standards for consultation  
Student is highly confused, sad, anxious or irritable. Lacks motivation or concentration. Has thoughts about not wanting to live. Difficulty interacting with others.

## Disruptive student Frequently Asked Questions

What are the warning signs of disruptive behavior?

- Extreme disregard
  - Verbal hostility, aggression, disregard for classroom decorum and expected conduct, failure to comply
- Inability to communicate clearly
  - Garbled or pressured speech. Disorganized, confused or rambling thoughts
- Loss of contact with reality
  - Seeing or hearing things which others cannot see or hear. Irrational beliefs or fears that others may be conspiring against them
- Inappropriate communications
  - Stalking behaviors, threatening letters email or messages, harassment
- Intent to harm
  - Suicidal thoughts and/or threats to harm others (may be vague or detailed. May have a plan, but not imminent.)

How can I manage a disruptive student?

- If immediate safety is not a concern, attempt to de-escalate the situation. Offer to find someone to assist in problem-solving.
- Consult with the Counseling Center, Office of Community Standards, or Bellingham Police.

How can I recognize and help a student with thoughts of suicide?

- Ask the direct question: “Are you thinking about suicide?”
- Be persistent. If after further conversation you are still concerned, ask again.
- Listen, offer hope, and promote getting help.
- Refer to mental health resources: Counseling Center at 360-383-3080, Crisis line at 1-800-584-3578. Offer to walk the student to the Counseling Center or to make the call together. Do not transport students in your personal vehicle.

## Distressed Student Frequently Asked Questions

What are some signs a student may be in distress?

- Sudden Changes in academic performance
  - Withdrawal and/or avoidance from participation, increased anxiety around exams or deadlines, difficulty working in teams
- Changes in emotional states
  - Sadness, lethargy, irritability, confusion, rapid speech, preoccupation, agitation (picks fights)
- Changes in physical well-being
  - Swollen eyes from crying, increased illness, poor self-hygiene, rapid weight change, lack of energy
- Repeated requests for special consideration
  - Deadline extensions, changes in requirements, grade changes
- Obstructs the learning environment
  - Domination of discussion, derailing of discourse, verbal or physical hostility towards classmates
- Thoughts of harm
  - Communication in either oral, written, or electronic formats that may suggest a threat to one’s self or others

How should I respond to a student in distress?

- Address the situation on an individual level. Provide corrective feedback and offer help.
- Consult with the Counseling Center and/or Community Standards
- Avoid offering confidentiality to the student
- Encourage student to use campus and community resources
- Inform and consult with your supervisor

How do I refer a student to support services?

- Remind the student that campus counseling services are confidential and free. Offer to accompany them or make the call together.
- Reassure the student that it is an act of strength to seek help.