

# Assisting Students in Distress

Compassion. Action. Change.



## Action.

Students exhibiting troubling behaviors in your presence are likely having difficulties in various settings including the classroom, with roommates, with family, and in even in social settings.

Trust your instincts and **SAY SOMETHING** if a student leaves you feeling worried, alarmed, or threatened!

**See Something. Say Something. Do Something.**



## Compassion.

UC faculty/staff and graduate teaching/research assistants are in a unique position to demonstrate compassion for UC students in distress.

Both undergraduate and graduate students may feel *alone, isolated*, and even *hopeless* when faced with academic and life challenges. These feelings can easily disrupt academic performance and may lead to dysfunctional coping and other serious consequences.

You may be the first person to **SEE SOMETHING** distressing in a student since you have frequent and prolonged contact with them. The University of California, in collaboration with the California Mental Health Services Authority (CalMHSA), requests that you act with compassion in your dealings with such students.

## Change.

Sometimes students cannot, or will not turn to family or friends. **DO SOMETHING!** Your expression of concern may be a critical factor in saving a student's academic career or even their life.

The purpose of this folder is to help you recognize symptoms of student distress and identify appropriate referrals to campus resources.

## The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) permits communication about a student of concern in connection with a health and safety emergency. **Observations of a student's conduct or statements made by a student are not FERPA protected.** Such information should be shared with appropriate consideration for student privacy.



## Indicators of Distress

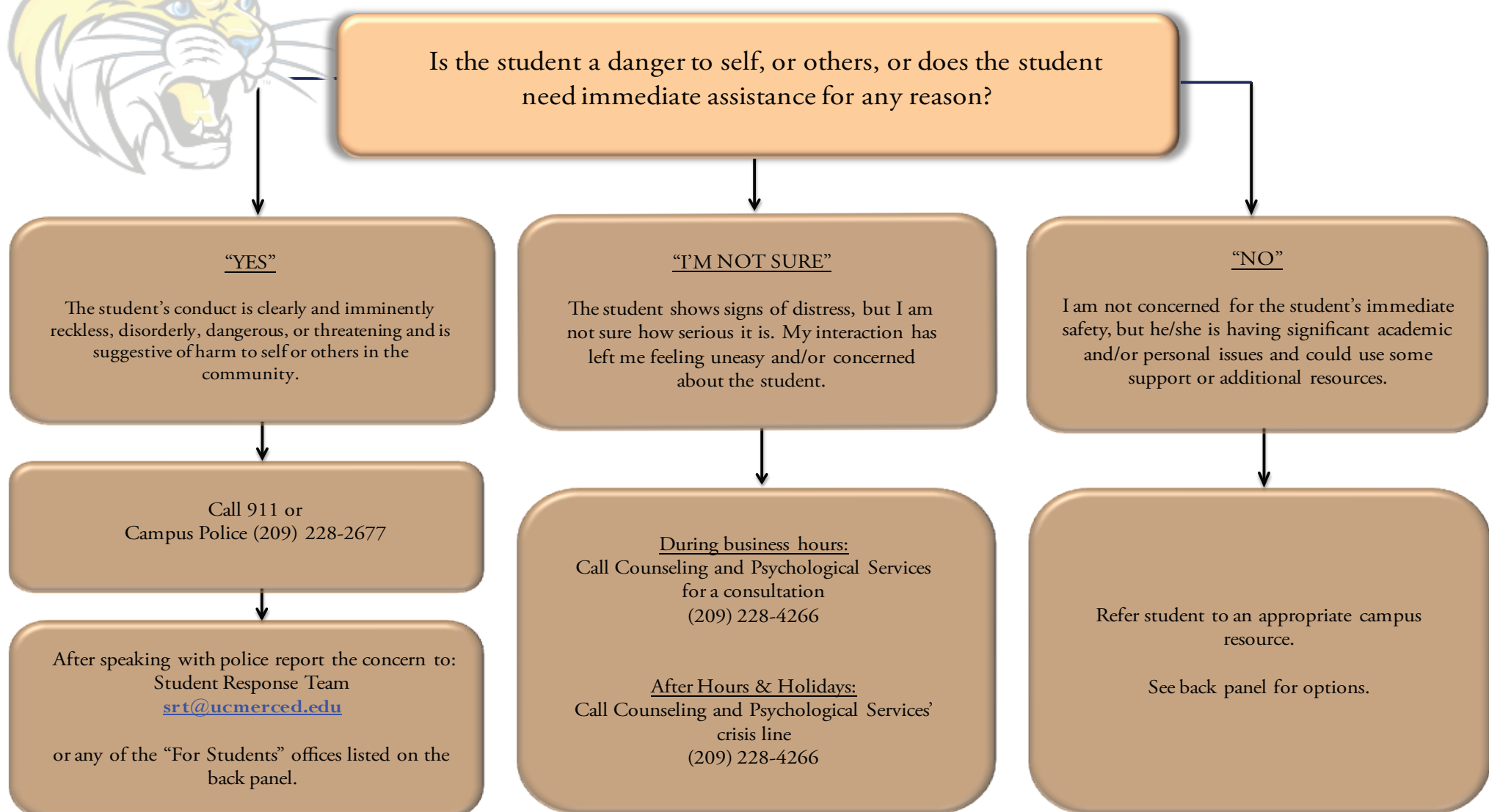


Be aware of the following indicators of distress. Look for groupings, frequency, duration and severity — not just isolated symptoms.

Academic Indicators	Physical Indicators	Psychological Indicators	Safety Risk Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Sudden decline in quality of work and grades</li> <li>✓ Repeated absences</li> <li>✓ Disorganized performance</li> <li>✓ Multiple requests for extensions</li> <li>✓ Overly demanding of faculty and staff time and attention</li> <li>✓ Bizarre content in writings or presentations</li> <li>✓ You find yourself doing more personal rather than academic counseling during office hours</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Marked changes in physical appearance including deterioration in grooming, hygiene, or weight loss/gain</li> <li>✓ Excessive fatigue/sleep disturbance</li> <li>✓ Intoxication, hangovers, or smelling of alcohol</li> <li>✓ Disoriented or “out of it”</li> <li>✓ Garbled, tangential, disconnected, or slurred speech</li> <li>✓ Behavior is out of context or bizarre</li> <li>✓ Delusions and paranoia</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Self-disclosure of personal distress such as family problems, financial difficulties, contemplating suicide, grief</li> <li>✓ Unusual/disproportional emotional response to events</li> <li>✓ Excessive tearfulness, panic reactions</li> <li>✓ Irritability or unusual apathy,</li> <li>✓ Verbal abuse (e.g., taunting, badgering, intimidation)</li> <li>✓ Expressions of concern about the student by his/her peers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Unprovoked anger or hostility</li> <li>✓ Physical violence (shoving, grabbing, assault, use of weapon)</li> <li>✓ Implying or making a direct threat to harm self or others</li> <li>✓ Academic assignments dominated by themes of extreme hopelessness, rage, worthlessness, isolation, despair, acting out, suicidal ideations/violent behaviors — a “cry for help”</li> <li>✓ Stalking or harassing</li> <li>✓ Communicating threats via email, correspondence, texting, or phone calls</li> </ul>



## Response Protocol: Follow the chart to determine who to contact when faced with a distressed or distressing student.



## Resources & Tips:

Use the tips below to help you refer the student to one of the recourses listed on the right.

- ✓ **Be Proactive:** Engage students early on, pay attention to signs of distress, and set limits on disruptive behavior.
- ✓ **Be Direct:** Don't be afraid to ask students directly if they are under the influence of drugs or alcohol, feeling confused, or having thoughts of harming themselves or others.
- ✓ **Listen Sensitively and Carefully:** Use a non-confrontational approach, and a calm voice. Avoid threatening, humiliating, and intimidating responses.
- ✓ **Safety First:** The welfare of the campus community is the top priority when a student displays threatening or potentially violent behavior. Do not hesitate to call for help.
- ✓ **Follow Through:** Direct the student to the physical location of the identified resource.
- ✓ **Consultation & Documentation:** Always document your interactions with distressed students and consult with your department chair/ supervisor after any incident.

For Students	
Dr. Charles Nies, Associate Vice Chancellor, Student Affairs	209.228.7620
Dr. Fuji Collins, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Student Wellness	209.228.4331
Dr. Geneva Abiko, Director, Counseling & Psychological Services	209.228.4266
Dr. Brandon Boggs, Medical Director, Health Services	209.228.2273
Dr. Holly Mayo, Director, Disability Services	209.228.6996
Le'Trice Curl, Director, Office of Judicial Affairs	209.228.7881
Vanessa Hauser, Associate Director, Housing and Residence Life	209.228.4663
In the Community	
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline	800.273.8255
Mercy Medical Center	209.564.5000
Marie Green Psychiatric Center	209.381.5879
Merced County Mental Health & Alcohol and Drug Services	209.381-6800
California Psychiatric Emergency Team	888.334.0163
Valley Crisis Center	209.722.4357