

Identifying and Helping Students in Distress

Guidelines for Bates Technical College employees

The safety of our students, employees and college property is the chief priority of Bates Technical College Campus Public Safety Department. If any employee, whether faculty or staff encounters a person that displays violent or threatening behavior, or expresses a desire to harm him/herself, then that employee must notify a Bates Public Safety Officer at 253.680 7111/7411 or, via cell phone at 253.377.3805.

Upon arrival the officer will assess the situation and will attempt to resolve it. If the campus safety officer is unable to resolve the problem and there is an indication of danger to the student or others, then an officer from the Tacoma Police Department will be requested.

If the student is despondent and threatens to harm him/herself or others, the campus safety officer will notify Student Services to request assistance.

CONTENTS

SECTION	PAGE
Helping Students in Distress	2
Warning Signs	3
Addressing Problem Behaviors.....	5
Making Referrals for Assistance	7
Student Conduct/Disciplinary Action.....	7
Referral Resources	9

This document was prepared by the individuals listed below. Please contact one of them if you have specific questions or need assistance.

- Ivan Gorne | Vice President, Student Services | 253.680.7025
- Dion Teague | Dean of Students | 253.680.7023
- Rhonda Sample | Special Needs /Disability Office | 253.680.7013
- Campus Safety | 253.680.7111 or 253.377.6180 (cell)

Helping Students in Distress

It can be difficult to determine the difference between a student behaving poorly as an isolated incident, and a student in need of professional help.

- How do you know when you should be worried about a student?
- What is your appropriate role?
- How involved should you be?
- What is the risk that you may make the problem worse?
- When appropriate, how should you transfer the responsibility for helping a student to a counselor, judicial officer or campus safety staff?

The best way to deal with a disruptive or potentially threatening situation is to avoid it altogether. Below are a few simple steps that might help diffuse an incident before it escalates into a problem:

- Remain calm. Do not allow the emotion of the situation to escalate.
- Maintain a moderate, but firm, voice level regardless of what the other person is saying.
- Do not touch the person or invade their personal space. If you feel threatened in any way, back off.
- If you are meeting with a student you anticipate may be disruptive, let someone know that the meeting is happening. Have them check on you and have the meeting in a place from which you can easily leave. Keep your office blinds open.
- Clearly outline classroom expectations, rules, policies, etc., and provide students with a general understanding of the Student Rights and Responsibilities Code (WAC 495A-121-029).
- Address the poor behavior in question – don't focus on the person in specific.

Call Campus Public Safety at 7111/7411 if you feel that you need assistance.

While many students in need of help come to Student Services office on their own, faculty and staff are often the first to recognize behavioral, emotional or performance changes in a student that might signal trouble. Students may first turn to you because of your position, and the respect that they hold for you as a faculty or staff member.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among college students and many of the students who ultimately attempt suicide have *not* been under the care of a mental health professional. Do not assume that a troubled student is being taken care of someplace else. Our goal is to help identify student problems before they become serious or have serious consequences. You can help by recognizing common distress signals and making referrals when appropriate.

Warning Signs

Often, though not always, students may manifest behavior that can be a warning sign of a deeper problem. Some of these warning signs include:

Unusual Behavior

1. Dependency. Student wants to be around you all the time or makes an excessive number of appointments to see you.
2. Loss of interest in normal activities; withdrawal from usual social interactions; seclusion, unwillingness to communicate.
3. Significantly increased activity, for instance restlessness or non-stop talking.
4. Suspiciousness, or feelings of being persecuted that do not seem warranted.
5. Inappropriate or bizarre conversation.
6. Unusual irritability; outbursts of anger, unexplained crying, aggressiveness, excessive anxiety.
7. Significant decline in personal hygiene, grooming and/or standard of dress.
8. A noticeable change from socially appropriate behavior
9. Signs of eating disorders including significant rapid weight loss or gain, secretive eating habits, suspected purging.
10. Alcohol or drug abuse or other self-destructive behavior including evidence of cutting.
11. Extreme shyness, lack of social skills, difficulty in making and keeping friends.
12. Severe homesickness, graduation anxiety.

Classroom Signals

1. Dramatic decline in performance.
2. Sudden drop in class attendance.
3. Pattern of dropping classes or asking for extensions.
4. Repeated procrastination or difficulty concentrating.
5. Incapacitating test anxiety.
6. Severe reaction to a poor grade on a test or paper.
7. Inability to develop alternative goals when doing poorly.
8. Overly high, self-imposed performance standards that aren't being met.
9. Chronic indecisiveness regarding career/education choices.
10. Unrealistic career goals.
11. Inadequate study skills, reading speed, or comprehension.
12. Extreme fear of speaking or participating in class.
13. Doubts about ability to succeed in school.

Life Circumstance Catalysts

1. Death or serious illness of a family member or close friend.
2. Personal illness.
3. Problems in dating or marital relationship, problems with roommates or family members, parents' divorce.
4. Overwhelming financial difficulties.

Common Symptoms of Depression

1. Inability to concentrate; impaired memory; indecisiveness; confusion.
2. Noticeable loss, or increase, in appetite.
3. Inability to find pleasure in anything; general feelings of dissatisfaction.
4. Extreme guilt or self-blame.
5. Persistent feelings of helplessness and hopelessness.
6. Loss of feelings toward family or friends
7. Low self-esteem.
8. Unexplained crying spells
9. Flat emotional responses to normally upsetting, or pleasurable, events.
10. Sleeping difficulties including insomnia or excessive sleep
11. Unexplained headaches, digestive problems, anxiety or panic attacks, or other physical symptoms.
12. Chronic fatigue; lack of energy.
13. Neglect of responsibilities and appearance.

Suicidal Tendencies

References to suicide should be taken seriously and the student should be referred to a counselor or other mental health professional. Statistically, at least 70% of all people who attempt suicide give some clue as to their intentions before they make an attempt. Immediate referral is indicated when the reference to suicide or your discussion with a student indicates any plans or previous suicide attempts. Signs of suicidal tendency include:

1. Feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, worthlessness.
2. Preoccupation with death
3. Giving away possessions.
4. Talking about plans for suicide.
5. Decline in appearance and/or personal grooming habits.

Addressing Problem Behaviors

Students may manifest inappropriate behavior in a variety of ways. Following are some of the behaviors that may be encountered in the classroom or department setting and suggestions for dealing with them.

Verbal Aggression

Students may become verbally aggressive when they feel frustrated or out of control. A fear of rejection and expressions of righteous indignation are frequently associated with this behavior. When confronted by a verbally aggressive student:

Do:

- Allow the student to vent and tell you what is upsetting them
- Remain calm and maintain an even tone, regardless of what the student is saying.
- Indicate that though you wish to listen to them, you are not willing to accept their verbally abusive behavior. For example, "The way you are talking to me is not acceptable. We can continue this conversation when you are calmer."
- Tell the student that he/she is violating your personal space and ask them to move back
- Reduce environmental stimulation by walking the student to a more quiet but still public area if you are comfortable doing so.
- Tell the student that you would like to put them in touch with someone who may be able to better help them resolve their issue. Walk the student to Student Services or to a supervisor who may be able to help

Don't:

- Get into an argument or escalate the situation by being confrontational.
- Press for explanation or reason for their behavior
- Enlist the aid of others to 'quiet them down'
- Be confrontational or threatening
- Allow yourself to become physically cornered

Physical Violence or Destruction of Property

Violence can erupt with little warning when the student is frustrated beyond the limits of personal control. It is helpful to know the location of the nearest phone as you go through your day, and if possible, carry a cell phone with you. If you suspect that a situation may escalate into physical violence, or destruction of property:

Do...

- Maintain a calm demeanor. Speak in measured, even tones.
- Listen to them and let them talk without interruption.
- Explain that the current behavior is unacceptable
- Warn them if they don't stop their current behavior, you will call security

- Call campus public safety at x7111/7411 and ask for an officer to come to your location.
- Keep yourself in an open, public area
- Keep at least 5 feet between you and the student

Don't...

- Become emotional
- Become confrontational
- Press for an explanation or rationale for the behavior
- Allow yourself to become physically cornered

Delusional Behavior

Individuals who are delusional often have difficulty distinguishing fantasy from reality. Their thinking is not logical and they may appear confused, agitated or disturbed. Though this behavior is often disconcerting to those around them, these individuals are usually not dangerous and are typically scared, frightened, and/or overwhelmed by their environment. If you encounter a student whom you believe is exhibiting delusional behavior:

Do:

- Respond to the student with concern, kindness and firm reasoning
- Inform a member of the **Student Services staff** when you become aware of this type of student
- Maintain eye contact
- Express concern and suggest that they need help
- Acknowledge their feelings or fears without supporting the misperceptions
- Reveal your difficulty in understanding them if you aren't comprehending what they're saying
- Attempt to change the subject; divert their focus from delusion to current reality
- Contact the Student Services or SNDO for assistance or referral

Don't:

- Argue or try to convince them that their thinking is irrational.
- Play along or reinforce their delusional thinking
- Demand, command, or order
- Expect customary emotional responses
- Exhibit panic or fear

Making Referrals for Assistance

There are many internal college resources and external service agencies to which you can refer students for assistance. When referring a student for assistance, it can be most effective if you:

- Are with the student when he/she makes the call or if you call and make the appointment for the student (with his/her permission)
- Talk to the student privately and express your reasons for concern; offer referral and resource information as options for obtaining help.
- Listen carefully and respectfully to the student
- Avoid criticizing or sounding judgmental

If the student's emergency situation is emergent or life-threatening (to self or others), you should call 9-911.

If the student's situation is not life threatening, call Bates Campus Public Safety Office, x7111.

Confidentiality and the Law

If you refer a student to Bates Special Needs and Disability Office (SNDO), staff will ask the student if they may tell you that contact with the SNDO has been made. Any communication between the SNDO and a student is confidential. Legally, SNDO staff cannot discuss the particulars of a student's situation or even the fact that counseling is being received, without the student's written consent. If you are curious about whether a student followed up on your referral, you can always ask the student.

Consultation

If you have questions or concerns about a student's behavior, how best to approach that individual and/or to make a referral for assistance, do not hesitate to call the SNDO for assistance. If you believe that the situation is escalating or may become an emergency, please let staff know immediately.

Student Conduct/ Disciplinary Action

The role of Bates Technical College's Student Services personnel is to be an educator, consultant, disciplinarian, and advocate for students. Bates' **judicial** system is part of the colleges' student development program. The judicial system helps the college reinforce and maintain values and expectations.

Among these values and behavioral expectations are accountability, responsibility, fairness, justice, rights, freedom, safety and civility. The system balances the rights of individual students with the rights of the college, its employees and other students. The student judicial system is an extension of the teaching and learning mission of the college.

The college may take appropriate disciplinary action when student conduct unreasonably interferes with the college's educational responsibilities.



A publication of the Student Services Department
Last updated June 2010

Faculty are directed to review the **Student Rights and Responsibilities Code** (WAC 495A-121-029) in the Student handbook or on Bates' website

at: www.bates.ctc.edu/studentservices/StudentServicesMain/pdf/StudentHand.pdf

In order to pursue disciplinary action, a faculty member must be able to document specific behaviors which are disruptive or violate rules or policies specified in the WAC code. **Student**

Incident/Behavior Report Forms are available on line at:

www.bates.ctc.edu/about/HumanResources/files/StudentIncidentBehaviorReport2006.doc

Questions regarding disciplinary action should be directed to the Dean of Students at x 7023 or the Vice President for Student Services at x7025.

Referral Resources

Internal College Resources

The following Bates staff have counseling experience. Please don't hesitate to contact them if you have questions or believe you need assistance with a student.

Dion Teague	Downtown	x7023
Robin Stanton	Downtown	x7009
Dana McNutt	Downtown	x7264
Roger Curry	Downtown	x7042
Catherine Forte	Downtown	x7208/7259
Jim Field	South	x7410
Lexine Torres	South	x7479

Campus Public Safety Office

General Information		x7111/7411
Campus Safety Ray Richardson		

Special Needs/Disabilities Office

General Information		x7013
SNDO Coordinator	Dan Eberle	x7010

Diversity Office

College Diversity Coordinator	Kat Flores	x7178
-------------------------------	------------	-------

Student Services

Vice President	Ivan Gorne,	x7005
Dean of Students	Dion Teague	x7915

External Resource: Crisis Line

Immediate help for people in Crisis: 24-Hour Crisis Line		253.396.5089
---	--	--------------