

Helping Students in Distress: A Faculty/Staff Resource Guide



Could one of these students be in distress?

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This booklet has been adapted from work done by Townson University

The *Helping Students in Distress: A Faculty/Staff Resource Guide* was developed to provide a useful resource for recognizing students who may be experiencing emotional, physical, or developmental challenges or difficulties. This brochure will provide some basic guidelines for a wide range of student behaviors. It also serves as a guide to assist you in making voluntary referrals to campus resources. We are not expecting that you would act as a professional counselor, but hope this information is helpful as you work with students in your role as a faculty or staff member.

College students typically encounter a great deal of stress during their academic experience. Although many students cope successfully with the demands of college life, for some the pressures can become overwhelming and unmanageable. Students may experience stress as they attempt to perform well academically, begin their career path, navigate interpersonal relationships, and as they balance academic, social, work and family obligations. Some may feel isolated, sad, helpless and hopeless. The emotional and behavioral consequences are often played out on campus in classrooms, residence halls, or offices.

As a faculty or staff member interacting with students, you are in a unique position to identify and help students who are in distress. You are likely to be the first person a student reaches out to for help. Your ability to recognize the signs of emotional distress and potential health issues and to make an initial intervention can have a significant impact on a student's future well-being. The purpose of this brochure is to help you to recognize some of the symptoms of students in distress, be supportive of their needs and facilitate appropriate referrals to the Olympic College counselors, Behavioral Intervention Team, and Access Services. These resources are available to assist and provide consultation to you regarding problems or situations that you encounter with students. You may report students of concern through the following link <https://publicdocs.maxient.com/incidentreport.php?OlympicCollege> or by using the "OC, Report It!" button located at the bottom of every OC webpage.

Signs of Distress

Academic Problems

- career and course indecision
- excessive procrastination
- uncharacteristically poor preparation or performance
- repeated requests for extensions or special considerations
- disruptive classroom behavior
- excessive absence/tardiness
- references to suicide or harm to others in verbal statements or writing

Behavioral Problems

- change in personal hygiene
- dramatic weight gain or loss
- frequently falling asleep in class
- irritability
- unruly behavior
- impaired speech
- disjointed thoughts
- tearfulness

Interpersonal Problems

- always asking for help with personal problems
- dependency
- hanging around office
- disruptive behavior
- inability to get along with others
- complaints from other students
- avoiding or dominating discussions
- withdrawing
- difficulty concentrating
- physically harming self
- destruction of property
- anxiety and panic
- inability to communicate clearly
- loss of reality contact (e.g., hallucinations)
- intense emotion
- inappropriate responses

Common Causes of Emotional Distress

- relationship problems/break-ups
- family problems
- grief and loss
- divorce of parents
- loneliness
- academic pressure or failure
- serious illness or injury
- difficulty adjusting to college life
- anxiety
- eating disorders
- difficulty adjusting to American culture
- sexual or physical abuse or assault
- identity confusion
- depression
- drug/alcohol abuse
- career indecision
- loss of goal or dream
- low self-esteem
- unplanned or undesired pregnancy
- language barriers
- financial issues

What You Can Do

A faculty or staff member is often the first person to recognize when a student is in distress and to reach out to that student. Faculty and staff are not expected to provide personal counseling to students. Rather, faculty and staff play an important role in encouraging students to use campus resources, including facilitating a referral to the OC counselors, Behavioral Intervention Team, and Access Services. We encourage you to speak directly to students when you sense that they are in academic or personal distress. Openly acknowledge that you are aware of their distress, that you are sincerely concerned about their welfare, and that you are willing to help them explore their options.

The following pages identify some specific issues you may encounter with students and how you can work with the students.



Suggestions for Supporting Students

- Request to see the student in private.
- Briefly acknowledge your observations and perceptions of the student's situation and express your concerns directly and honestly.
- Listen carefully to what the student is troubled about and try to see the issue from his or her point of view without agreeing or disagreeing.
- Follow up with the student to see how he or she is doing.
- Strange and inappropriate behavior should not be ignored. The student can be informed that such behavior is distracting and inappropriate.
- Your ability to connect with an alienated student will allow him or her to respond more effectively to your concerns.
- Help the student identify options for action and explore possible consequences; if possible, offer to phone or accompany the student to the counselors or other resources.
- Avoid labeling the student's behavior or the issues presented.
- Inform the student about what can be gained by meeting with a counselor to talk about his or her problems.
- Be open about the limits on your ability to help the student.
- If the student appears to be in imminent danger of hurting self or others, consult the counselors or the OC Safety and Security Department immediately. You may also call 911 if the danger is immediate. **DO NOT PROMISE TO KEEP THREATS TO SELF OR OTHERS SECRET.**

Specific Issues You May Encounter

Students with Troubling Behavior

Troubling behavior from a student usually causes us to feel alarmed, upset, or worried.

When faculty or staff members encounter troubling behavior, they feel concerned about the student's well-being. Students exhibiting troubling behavior may have difficulties in and out of the classroom.

Examples of troubling behavior may include:

- A student who jokes about killing himself or herself.
- A student who perspires profusely when giving a presentation in front of the class.
- A student who discloses that his or her loved one was diagnosed with a terminal or serious illness.
- A student who seems to work harder than most students but can't pass an exam.
- A student who appears to be losing significant weight yet speaks with pride about how little he or she eats.
- A student whose writing appears disjointed and fragmented as though he or she cannot maintain a logical sequence of thought.
- A student who reports that FBI agents are following him or her around.

Interventions for Troubling Behavior

Faculty and staff have options for responding to student behavior that they find troubling.

- Seek advice and counsel from the department Dean, Vice President of Student Services and Achievement, Dean of Student Development, Campus Safety, or an OC counselor.
- Initiate a discussion with the student about the behavior that is of concern.
- Refer the student to campus departments or offices that have the necessary expertise and personnel to help him or her.
- If you believe the situation deserves college attention or follow-up, contact your BIT members by using the OC Report It! button located in the footer of the OC webpage or call the Dean of Student Development at 360-475-7535.

Students with Disruptive Behavior

Disruptive behavior is student behavior that interferes with or interrupts the educational process of other students or the normal operations of the college.

A disruptive student typically resists interventions or corrective action.

Specific examples of disruptive behavior include:

- A student who verbally abuses or intimidates another
- A student who is overly demanding of faculty or staff
- A student who interrupts the educational process in the class by:
 - Making hostile remarks out of turn
 - Aggressively taking over the lecture
- A student who notably disrupts the environment outside the classroom

Interventions for Disruptive Behavior

The following procedures may be helpful when dealing with disruptive behavior:

- Verbally request that the student stop the disruptive behavior.
- If the problem persists, ask the student to leave the class or the area.
- Initiate a discussion with the student about the behavior that is of concern.
- Inform the student of the behavior that needs to change, define a timeline for when the change needs to be made, and explain the consequences if the change does not occur.
- After meeting with the student, document the content of the meeting in writing. It is sometimes helpful and/or necessary to provide the student with a written copy of the requirements and the consequences discussed.
- File a BIT report by using the email intervention@olympic.edu.
- Seek advice and counsel from the department Dean, Vice President of Student Services and Achievement, Dean of Student Development, Associate Dean for Student Leadership and Success, Campus Safety, or an OC counselor.

If the situation is serious and requires immediate assistance, call 911.

Students with Threatening Behavior

Threatening behavior from a student typically leaves us feeling frightened and in fear for our personal safety. These behaviors should be taken very seriously.

Examples of threatening behavior include:

- A student who implies or makes a direct threat to harm him or herself or others.
- A student who displays a firearm or weapon.
- A student who physically confronts or attacks another person.
- A student who stalks or harasses another person.
- A student who sends threatening e-mails, letters or other correspondence to another person.

Interventions for Threatening Behavior

The safety and well-being of the campus community is the top priority when a student exhibits threatening or potentially violent behavior.

Specific interventions include:

- Immediately contact the police at 911. Contact OC Safety at (360) 475-7800.
- Contact the department Dean for advice and support.
- Inform the Vice President of Student Services and Achievement and file a complaint through OC Report It!

If the situation is serious and requires immediate assistance, call 911.

The Suicidal Student

Suicide is the second-leading cause of death among college students. Suicidal persons are intensely ambivalent about killing themselves and typically respond to help; suicidal states are definitely time-limited and most who commit suicide are neither crazy nor psychotic.

High-risk indicators include: feelings of hopelessness and futility; a severe loss or threat of loss; a detailed suicide plan; history of a previous attempt; history of alcohol or drug abuse; and feelings of alienation and isolation. Suicidal students usually want to communicate their feelings; any opportunity to do so should be encouraged.

Do:

- Be available to listen, to talk, to be concerned.
- Acknowledge that a threat or attempt at suicide is a plea for help.
- Take the student seriously. Eighty percent of those attempting suicide give warning of their intent.
- Refer the student to:
 - 24-hour Crisis Line: 360-479-3033 or 1-800-843-4793**
 - National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 800-273-TALK (8255)**
 - OC Counseling Services during normal business hours (M-F): 360-475-7530**
- Care for yourself. Helping someone who is suicidal is hard, demanding and draining work.

Don't:

- Minimize the situation or depth of feeling, e.g., "Oh, it will be much better tomorrow."
- Be afraid to ask the person if they are so depressed or sad that they want to hurt themselves ("You seem so upset and discouraged that I'm wondering if you are considering suicide.").
- Overcommit yourself and, therefore, not be able to deliver on what you promise.
- Ignore your limitations.

The Depressed Student

These students show a multitude of symptoms, which may include guilt, low self-esteem, and feelings of worthlessness and inadequacy. Physical symptoms include decreased or increased appetite, difficulty sleeping and low interest in daily activities. Depressed students often show low activity levels and have little energy.

Do:

- Let the student know you're aware he or she is feeling down and you would like to help.
- Reach out and encourage the student to express how he or she is feeling. The student is often reluctant to talk initially, yet attention from others helps the student feel more worthwhile and comfortable opening up.
- Tell the student of your concern for him or her.

Don't:

- Say "Don't worry," "Crying won't help," or "Everything will be better tomorrow."
- Be afraid to ask whether the student is suicidal if you think he or she may be.

The Anxious Student

Dealing with unexpected events and conflicts are primary causes of anxiety. Unknown and unfamiliar situations raise anxiety; high and unreasonable self-expectations also increase anxiety. These students often have trouble making decisions.

Do:

- Let them discuss their feelings. Often, this alone relieves pressure.
- Remain calm and reassure students when appropriate.
- Be clear and explicit.

Don't:

- Take responsibility for the student's emotional state.
- Make things more complicated.
- Overwhelm him or her with information or ideas.

The Substance-Abusing Student

A variety of substances are available that provide escape from pressing demands. The most abused substance is alcohol. Alcohol and other drug-related accidents remain the single greatest cause of preventable death among college students.

Do:

- Share your honest concern and encourage the student to seek help.
- Be alert for signs of alcohol and drug abuse: preoccupation with drugs, periods of memory loss, or deteriorating performance in class.
- Get necessary help from OC Safety and Security staff in instances of intoxication.

Don't:

- Ignore the problem.
- Chastise or lecture.
- Encourage the behavior in any manner.

The Student with an Eating Disorder

Eating disorders are believed to impact 20 percent of college students. Eating disorders include anorexia and bulimia. Anorexia involves restricting one's eating, often leading to malnourishment. Bulimia usually entails binge eating followed by excessive exercise, vomiting or the use of the medication such as diet pills. Eating disorders are widely considered to be the most dangerous mental health issues due to a high mortality rate.

The presence of an eating disorder in a student's life not only impacts his or her body image and food intake but can also affect a student's social and academic functioning. Students may struggle with attention and concentration issues, depressive symptoms, physical pain, low energy, social isolation and low self-esteem.

Do:

- Recognize the danger associated with eating disorder behaviors rather than viewing them as a choice, lifestyle or an attempt to obtain attention.
- Encourage the student to seek out formal help including counseling and a thorough medical assessment.
- Support the student even if she or he is not currently motivated to obtain help.

Don't

- Assume that all thin students have an eating disorder by remembering that these issues impact students of all shapes and sizes.
- Confront a student by stating "I think that you have an eating disorder." Instead share your concerns with the student by naming the behaviors you've witnessed.
- Encourage the client to "just eat" or "stop throwing up." Recovery from an eating disorder often requires mental health treatment to alter behaviors.

The Sexually Assaulted Student

Conservative estimates put the rate of attempted and/or completed sexual assaults for college students at 1 in 6. Moreover, these assaults are overwhelmingly committed by someone the student knows. These incidents of sexual assault are very traumatic. The nature of sexual assault makes it an inherently humiliating crime, which often makes it very difficult for students to talk about. These students may have difficulties with concentration or motivation, suffer sleep disturbances, have trouble trusting others, and may feel highly anxious and/or afraid.

Do:

- Listen to what they are telling you and believe them.
- Help students to understand and consider their options regarding medical and psychological care, as well as legal or judicial proceedings.
- **Refer students to the OC Title IX Coordinator at 360-475-7740**
- Encourage them to seek support. Provide the students with information for local resources:

24-Hour Crime Victim Crisis Line: 1-800-833-6384

Kitsap Sexual Assault Center (24 Hours): 360-479-8500

After Hours: 360-473-2200 or 1-800-338-7410

Navy Family Advocacy Program: 360-315-3045

Navy Spouse Abuse Victims Services: 360-396-5451

National Domestic Violence Hotline 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

Washington State Domestic Violence Hotline: 800-562-6025 (voice/TTY)

YWCA Community Center 360-479-0522

24-Hour Hotline: 360-479-1980/1-800-500-5513

ALIVE Office 360-479-5118/Toll free 1-800-500-5513
Bainbridge/North Kitsap Hotline 206-780-2931
Legal Advocacy 360-479-0491

Don't:

- Ask a lot of prying questions, as you may inadvertently send the message that you don't believe them or that you are questioning how they handled themselves in that situation.
- Blame them for what happened and let them know it was not their fault.
- Be skeptical or show that you don't believe them. The vast majority of students do **NOT** make up stories about being assaulted.
- Try to be this person's only support, recovery takes a long time and often involves the need for professional services.

The Academically Underachieving Student

While it is easy to conclude that the academically underachieving student is simply unmotivated, the real situation is often more complicated. Students may be preoccupied with situational and family problems, or have emotional problems that are distracting and disabling. They may have learning disabilities, Attention Deficit Disorder or substance abuse problems. Previous failures for any reason can engender a hopeless outlook and a defensive attitude of "I don't care."

Do:

- Inquire compassionately as to what the problems are.
- Provide enough time for the student to open up. His or her initial defensiveness might be off-putting to an instructor who values involvement and dedication in students.
- Help the student assess the source of underachievement, e.g., distractions, preoccupations, emotional problems, depression, difficulties with underlying academic and study skills.
- Empathically address the difficulty of dealing with a failure mentality.
- Submit an Early Alert referral through Starfish

Don't:

- Take the student's problem personally or be insulted that they do not find the class engaging.
- Assume too quickly the problem is mere laziness.
- Punish the student for lack of involvement.
- Dismiss the student and problem as unworkable in one meeting.

Resources

Presenting yourself as knowledgeable about campus resources can ease a student's discomfort about seeking help. Let the student know you are concerned about them and their well-being. Assist the student in understanding that a referral is not a rejection of them. Here are some suggestions:

Emergency Referrals (when the student is in imminent danger of hurting self or others)

- Take the student seriously; show concern.
- Acknowledge the student's call for help.
- Ask the student if he or she is so depressed or sad that he or she wants to hurt self or others.
- Refer the student to:

24-hour Crisis Line: 360-479-3033 or 1-800-843-4793

24-hour Emergency Services 360-373-3425 – Crisis Response Team (Crisis Intervention Services/Involuntary Treatment Investigations)

Kitsap Mental Health Services 360-373-7049

24-hour Crisis Clinic of Thurston and Mason Counties: 360-586-2800

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 800-273-TALK (8255)

OC 24-hour campus Safety and Security at 360.475.7800

- If a student has already left your class, office, or location, and you are concerned, you may call 911 and ask for a mental health check to be done for the student.

Non-Emergency Referrals:

- Encourage the student to contact the appropriate department directly to schedule an initial interview.
- Offer to let the student call from your office if you believe your extra support and encouragement will help the student make the contact.
- Discuss confidentiality of services that are outlined on the next pages of this brochure.
- Provide information on other appropriate campus resources using the phone numbers in this brochure.

Olympic College Counseling

Our staff provides comprehensive counseling services for OC students and assists students in overcoming barriers to their personal and educational success.

Counseling Services appointments are made by calling 360.475.7530 or by email:

CounselFac@olympic.edu

To consult with a specific counselor:

- **John Babbo**
360.475.7537
- **Anthony Carson**
360.475.7645
- **Trish Christean**
360.475.7763
- **Teresa Jones**
360.475.7683

Access Services

Olympic College complies with Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Washington Administrative Code (WAC), which prohibit discrimination solely on the basis of an individual's disability from any program or service offered by Olympic College. We offer a number of services for students who face physical or developmental challenges related to going to school. If the student has a documented disability, contact Access Services to request services or accommodations.

360-475-7540, AccessServices@olympic.edu

Karen Fusco, Director

Julie Evenstad, Program Coordinator

Pam Murphy, Office Assistant

Behavioral Intervention Team

The Behavioral Intervention Team is designed to assist faculty and staff when students display behavior that may be of concern. Please make reports at

<https://publicdocs.maxient.com/incidentreport.php?OlympicCollege> or click on the “OC, Report It!” button located at the bottom of the OC website.

Members of the team include: John Babbo, Dr. Damon Bell, Anthony Carson, Trish Christean, Teresa Jones, Dr. Jim Mohr, Sue Riddle, and the Campus Safety Director.

Medical Emergencies

If you have a true medical emergency while on campus, call 9-911 and call the OC 24-hour campus Safety Line at 360.475.7800 and they will guide the ambulance to your location.

Urgent Care Facilities in Kitsap County:

Central Kitsap Urgent Care

Monday-Friday 8:00 AM – 7:00 PM, Saturday-Sunday 10:00 AM – 4:00 PM

360-692-9852

10513 Silverdale Way NW

Silverdale, WA 98383

The Doctors Clinic Urgent Care - Bremerton:

Monday-Friday 9:00 AM - 8:00 PM, Saturday & Sunday 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM

360-782-3400

1651 NE Bentley Drive

Bremerton, WA 98311

Harrison Belfair

Hours Daily: 7:30 AM – 7:30 PM

360-277-2975

21 NE Romance Hill Road

Belfair, WA 98528

Harrison Bremerton

24 hours, 7 days a week

360-744-3911

2520 Cherry Avenue

Bremerton, WA 98310

Harrison Port Orchard

Open 8:00 am – 11:00 pm, 7 days a week

360-744-6275

450 South Kitsap Blvd.

Port Orchard, WA 98366

Harrison Silverdale

24 hours, 7 days a week

1800 NW Myhre Road

Silverdale, WA 98383

Poulsbo Urgent Care/Immediate Clinic

Open 8:00 am - 8:00 pm, 7 days a week

360-779-9727

20730 Bond Rd NE, Ste. 205, Poulsbo, WA 98370

Student Code of Conduct

Vice President of Student Services & Achievement

Dr. Damon Bell
360-475-7476
HSS 201B

Associate Dean of Student Leadership and Success

Faviola Barbosa
360-475-7443
BSC 115

Olympic College students are both citizens and members of the College community. As citizens, students shall enjoy the same freedoms that other citizens enjoy. As members of the College community, they are subject to those responsibilities which accrue to them by virtue of this membership.

Admission to Olympic College carries with it the expectation that students will conduct themselves as responsible members of the College community, that they will comply with established rules and regulations of the College, maintain high standards of honesty and integrity, and respect the rights, privileges, and property of other members of the College community.

Olympic College expects that students will conform to the laws of the greater society and regulations established to assure the orderly conduct of the affairs of the College. The student is at once a member of the community at large and the College community. As such, the student is subject to the rights, responsibilities, laws, and regulations of each community and accountable to both. To accomplish these purposes the College is governed by rules, regulations, and procedures designed to safeguard its functions and protect the rights and freedoms of all members of the College community.

You can find the Student Conduct Code at <https://www.olympic.edu/StaffFaculty/Policies/ConductCode/>
You can submit a conduct violation by either going to the following link
<https://publicdocs.maxient.com/incidentreport.php?OlympicCollege> or clicking on the “OC, Report It!” button located at the bottom of every OC webpage.

Other Resources

Campus Resources	Community Resources
Advising and Counseling http://www.olympic.edu/Students/Advising/ http://www.olympic.edu/Students/StudentServices/CounselingServices/	Peninsulas' 211 2-1-1 or 866-736-7634 www.win211.org
Career Center Bremerton 360-475-7480 Shelton 360-432-5431 http://www.olympic.edu/Students/StudentServices/CareerCenter/	Catholic Community Services/Kitsap Family Center: 360-405-9486 http://www.ccsww.org/site/PageServer
Olympic College Campus Safety Bremerton: 360-475-7800	Community Action Council of Lewis, Mason & Thurston County 360-426-9726 http://www.caclmt.org/
Early Alert Referral http://www.olympic.edu/current-students/counseling-services/early-alert-program	Crisis Clinic (24 hours) 360-479-3033 or 1-800-843-4793
Educational Opportunity Center 360-475-7166	Dispute Resolution Center 1-800-377-3583
Faculty and Staff Resources http://www.olympic.edu/staff-faculty/resources-staff-and-faculty	Kitsap Mental Health 360-405-4010 http://www.kitsapmentalhealth.org/home.aspx
Financial Aid 360-475-7160	Substance Abuse Treatment http://www.kitsapgov.com/hs/substanceabuse/saquestions.htm
Multicultural and Student Programs 360-475-7682	Turning Pointe Domestic Violence Services 360-432-1212 http://www.turningpointe.org/ Shelton, WA
Registration and Records Bremerton 360-475-7200 Poulsbo 360-394-3725 Shelton 360-432-5400	Washington State Youth Suicide Prevention Program 1-800-273-talk www.vspp.org
Students in Need Group (SING) 360-475-6817 http://www.olympic.edu/services/students-need-group-sing	Washington State Mental Health Organizations www.usrecovery.info/Mental-Health-Organizations/Washington
Veterans & Military Support Center 360-473-2821	National Suicide Prevention Hotline 1-800-273-TALK (8255) 1-800-SUICIDE (784-2433)
Veterans and Military Benefits Office 360-475-7560	Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence 24-Hour Hotline 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) Statewide Multilingual 1-800-562-6025
	24-Hour Crime Victim Crisis Line: 800-833-6384 http://www.commerce.wa.gov/Services/individualassistance/CrimeVictimResources/Pages/default.aspx

