

RECOGNIZING & RESPONDING TO DISTRESS

You may be one of the first people to notice that something is wrong. Although emotional distress may be expected, especially during times of high stress, you may notice that a person is acting out of character or in ways that are inconsistent with typical behavior. Often, a person's behavior may cause you to feel worried. You may be a resource in times of difficulty, and your expression of concern may be critical in helping them regain emotional stability. You may also be in a good position to provide referrals and resources so that appropriate interventions can occur.

INDICATORS OF DISTRESS

Physical Indicators:

- Deteriorating hygiene
- Excessive fatigue or irritability
- Tearfulness
- Slurred or hyperactive speech
- Out of touch with reality
- Dramatic weight loss
- Difficulty eating or sleeping
- Disclosure of personal distress
- Panic or anxiety attacks
- Verbally abusive
- Expressions of hopelessness
- Concern from others
- Depressed mood
- Confusion

Academic/Occupational Indicators:

- Marked changes in behaviors
- Undue aggressiveness
- Exaggerated emotional response
- Isolation from friends, family members or colleagues
- Significant decline in performance
- Repeated absences or tardiness
- Overly demanding of attention
- Disruptive behavior

RESPONDING DOS & DON'TS

RESPONDING DOS

- Stay calm
- Trust your intuition
- Listen carefully
- Take concerns seriously
- Take your time
- Know your limitations
- Consult appropriately
- Ask direct questions
- Provide resources
- Encourage person to accept professional support

RESPONDING DON'TS

- Ignore the warning signs
- Leave the person alone
- Minimize the situation
- Promise confidentiality
- Judge or criticize
- Make the problem your own
- Involve yourself beyond your limits
- Endanger yourself
- Argue or try to change the individual's emotions

WHAT YOU CAN SAY

Here are some examples of what you might say in a conversation with someone who may be distressed. Remember to use language that is natural to you and fits the context of the interaction.

SAY WHAT YOU SEE

- "I just wanted to check in. I've noticed _____, and wanted to see if you want to talk about it."
- "I've noticed _____ and I want you to know I am here to support you."
- "You seem upset today. What's going on?"

SHOW YOU CARE

- "I care about your well-being, so I just wanted to check in to see how you are doing."
- "Thanks for taking time to talk with me. I care about how you're doing and want you to know I am here for support."
- "How can I be helpful?"

HEAR THEM OUT

- Focus on active listening. Demonstrate you are paying attention with phrases like:
 - + "Wow, I'd like to hear more about that."
 - + "What is that like for you?"
 - + "That sounds really hard, how is that affecting your life?"

KNOW YOUR ROLE

- "I wonder if you may find it helpful to seek more specialized support."
- "I would like to consult a professional to help me know how I can best help you."

CONNECT TO HELP

- "I really think you may find _____ to be a helpful resource."
- "Reaching out to _____ for the first time can be confusing. Would you like help connecting to _____?"
- "I really think _____ can address your needs."

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DANGEROUS AND DISTRESSED

Distressed

- Anxious
- Sad
- Tearful
- Withdrawn
- Lacks motivation
- Seeks frequent attention
- Interactions feel more personal and less academic-focused

Consult and make appropriate referrals.

Dangerous

- Behavior is potentially deadly
- Conduct is imminently reckless
- Behavior is dangerous to self/others
- Verbal threats of violence
- Intense anger
- Intoxication
- Intense withdrawal
- Discusses weapons/lethal means

Call 911 immediately.

**IF YOU ARE CONCERNED FOR YOUR IMMEDIATE SAFETY
OR THE IMMEDIATE SAFETY OF OTHERS, CALL 911.**