

## DEALING WITH A PERSON IN DISTRESS

**Q. What are some signs that a person may be in distress?**

**A. A person in distress may not be disruptive to others, but may exhibit behaviors which indicate something is wrong, show signs of emotional distress and indicate that assistance is needed. Such persons may also be reluctant or unable to acknowledge a need for personal help. Behaviors may include:**

- serious performance problems or a change from consistently doing well to unaccountably poor performance.
- excessive absences, especially if the person has previously demonstrated consistent attendance.
- unusual or markedly changed patterns of interaction (avoidance of participation, excessive anxiety when called upon, domination of discussions, etc.).
- other characteristics that suggest the person is having trouble managing stress successfully (a depressed, lethargic mood; very rapid speech; swollen, red eyes; marked change in personal dress and hygiene; falling asleep during class/work., etc.).
- repeated requests for special consideration, such as deadline extensions, especially if the person appears uncomfortable or highly emotional while disclosing the circumstances prompting the request.
- new or repeated behavior which pushes the limits of decorum and which interferes with effective management of the immediate environment.
- unusual or exaggerated emotional responses which are obviously inappropriate to the situation.

**Q. How should I respond to a student who is troubled or showing signs of distress?**

**A. For a person who is mildly or moderately troubled, you can choose to handle the situation in one or more of the following ways:**

- deal directly with the behavior/problem according to classroom/workplace protocol.
- address the situation on a more personal level.
- consult with a colleague, department head, Center for Counseling and Well-Being, a Behavioral Assessment Team member, and/or the Office of Human Resources.
- refer the person to an appropriate campus resource (see phone numbers on the back of this folder).

**Q. How do I refer a student to counseling?**

- Recommend they seek counseling services through the Center for Counseling and Well-Being (301-738-6273).
- Determine the student's willingness to go to a helping resource. Reassure the student that it is an act of strength to ask for help.
- Dispute the myth that only "weak" or "crazy" people go for counseling.
- Remind them that campus counseling services are free and confidential.
- Offer to help make the initial contact by calling, or you may offer to go with the student to the Center for Counseling and Well-being.

**Q. What are the warning signs of disruptive behavior?**

**A. A severely troubled or disruptive person exhibits behavior that requires immediate attention and care. These problems are the easiest to identify. Examples include:**

- highly disruptive behavior (hostility, aggression, violence, etc.).
- inability to communicate clearly (garbled, slurred speech; unconnected, disjointed or rambling thoughts).
- loss of contact with reality (seeing or hearing things which others cannot see or hear; beliefs or actions greatly at odds with reality or probability).
- stalking behaviors.
- inappropriate communications (including threatening letters, e-mail messages, harassment).
- overtly communicating suicidal thoughts, including referring to suicide as a current option (verbally or in written assignments).
- threats to harm others.

**Q. How should I respond to a disruptive person?**

- Remain calm and know whom to call for help, if necessary. Find someone to stay with the student while calls to the appropriate resources are made.
- Remember that it is NOT your responsibility to provide the professional help needed for a severely troubled/disruptive person. You need only to make the call and request assistance.
- When a student expresses a direct threat to themselves or others, or acts in a bizarre, highly irrational or disruptive way, call the Montgomery County Police at 9-1-1. If the situation permits, notify USG Security after you call the police. For USG Security dial 6065 from any campus phone or 301-738-6065 from any cell phone or outside line.

## IMPROPER BEHAVIOR

**Q. How should I respond when a student displays inappropriate behavior in my class?**

**A.** Faculty members have broad authority to manage their classrooms and establish reasonable guidelines for class discussions that ensure everyone has an opportunity to participate in an orderly manner. If you believe a student's behavior is inappropriate, consider a general word of caution rather than singling a student out or embarrassing the student. "If the behavior in question is irritating, but not disruptive, try speaking with the student after class. Most students are unaware of distracting habits or mannerisms, and have no intent to be offensive or disruptive. There may be rare circumstances where it is necessary to speak to a student during class about his or her behavior. Correct the student in a manner indicating that further discussion can occur after class." (Pavela, 2001, p.5).

If a student's behavior reaches the point that it interferes with your ability to conduct the class or the ability of other students to benefit from the class, the student should be asked to leave the room for the remainder of the class period. The student should be provided with a reason for this action and an opportunity to discuss the matter with you as soon as is practical. In such situations, consultation and referral to Student Judicial Programs may be appropriate.

*Adapted from the ASJA Law and Policy Report, No.26, ASJA & Gary Pavela, 2001.*

**The phone numbers for contacting Student Conduct Offices at USG partner institutions are:**

<b>Bowie State University</b>	301-860-3394
<b>Salisbury University</b>	410-543-6080
<b>Towson University</b>	410-704-2057
<b>University of Baltimore</b>	410-837-4755
<b>University of Maryland Baltimore</b>	866-594-5220
<b>University of Maryland Baltimore County</b>	410-455-2453
<b>University of Maryland College Park</b>	301-314-8204
<b>University of Maryland Eastern Shore</b>	410-651-7850
<b>University of Maryland Global Campus</b>	240-684-2246

Check the Behavioral Assessment Team (BAT) website ([shadygrove.umd.edu/campus-resources/public-safety/behavioral-assessment-team](http://shadygrove.umd.edu/campus-resources/public-safety/behavioral-assessment-team)) for links to the Student Conduct Codes for each of the home campuses.

**USM Board of Regents Policy on Event-related Student Misconduct**

<http://www.usmd.edu/regents/bylaws/SectionV/V800.html>

## TYPE OF SITUATION

- **Emotionally Upset/Psychologically Overwhelmed (trouble coping, emotional, cut off from others, hopelessness)**
  - USG Center for Counseling and Well-Being (301-738-6273, usg-ccw@umd.edu, IV-3139, M-Th 10-7, F 10-2)
- **Psychiatric Concerns (level of distress or disruption more significant; need immediate attention or hospitalization)**
  - USG Center for Counseling and Well-Being (301-738-6273, usg-ccw@umd.edu, IV-3139, M-Th 10-7, F 10-2)
  - Montgomery County Crisis Center (240-777-4000)
  - USG Public Safety (301-738-6065)
- **Inappropriate Behaviors (creating nuisance, defacing/destroying campus/individual property)**
  - USG Public Safety (301-738-6065)
- **USG Behavioral Assessment Team (BAT)**  
(Michael Wahl - 301-738-6021, mwahl2@umd.edu; Director, Center for Counseling and Well-Being, 301-738-6273; usg-ccw@umd.edu; Robyn Dinicola - 301-738-6073, rdwagle@umd.edu) — shadygrove.umd.edu/campus-resources/public-safety/behavioral-assessment-team
- **Threat of Immediate Harm (student making verbal threats of violence, or acting so you believe violence is imminent)**
  - Remove yourself from the situation — Call 911
  - Call USG Public Safety (301-738-6065) to alert them about situation
- **Unsure How to Proceed**
  - USG Center for Counseling and Well-Being (301-738-6273, usg-ccw@umd.edu, IV-3139, M-Th 10-7, F 10-2)
  - **USG Behavioral Assessment Team (BAT)**  
(Michael Wahl - 301-738-6021, mwahl2@umd.edu; Director, Center for Counseling and Well-Being - 301-738-6273, usg-ccw@umd.edu; Robyn Dinicola - 301-738-6073, rdwagle@umd.edu) — shadygrove.umd.edu/campus-resources/public-safety/behavioral-assessment-team

**Student Conduct Violations:** The Code of Student Conduct for each respective institution at USG outlines the standards and expectations for students' conduct and behavior, on and off campus. The Code of Student Conduct assists students in understanding their role in the academic community and establishes procedures to ensure due process in the adjudication of complaints and concerns. See inside for more information.

Information for this guide has been adapted from the University of Florida \*911\* Guide and the UMBC Behavioral Response Guide.

Updated September 2023

The Office of Student Services, Public Safety, Center for Counseling and Well-being, and the Behavioral Assessment Team have developed this informational guide to aid faculty and staff at USG in assisting people who are experiencing difficulties.

## GUIDELINES FOR DEALING WITH A PERSON IN DISTRESS

- **Be aware of the location of the nearest telephone, whether it is within the building or a personal cell phone.**
- **If the person is exhibiting inappropriate behavior in the classroom or office environment but does not pose a threat:**
  - address the inappropriate behavior with the person, and/or
  - ask the person to leave the room or office.
- **If you are concerned for your safety or that of others, call 9-1-1 immediately and then, if circumstances permit, call USG security.**
  - On a campus phone, press the "Security" tab or dial x6065. Dial
  - 301-738-6065 from a non-campus phone.
- **If in doubt, call 9-1-1 to reach the Montgomery County Police.**

## BEHAVIORAL ASSESSMENT TEAM

The Behavioral Assessment Team (BAT) at USG is an active team of staff members who provide resource information helpful to other staff, faculty, and administrators dealing with distressed, disturbed, potentially disruptive, or otherwise problematic members of the USG community. The team is designed to provide information and referrals to those dealing with or concerned about these behaviors. The BAT is NOT designed to deal with immediate threats or immediate crisis situations. Assistance in immediate crises is obtained by calling the Montgomery County Police (911) and/or contacting the USG security desk at 301-738-6065. The BAT will make referrals to home campuses, the Montgomery County Police, or any other outside entity deemed appropriate. The Team is not an administrative, treatment or disciplinary body. It does not adjudicate, discipline, or impose sanctions against any member

of the campus community, nor does it provide or mandate treatment.

**Faculty and staff members of the USG community may contact and consult with Behavioral Assessment Team members, whose contact information is listed below:**

**Michael Wahl**  
Safety & Security Manager  
301-738-6021 or mwahl2@umd.edu

Director, Center for Counseling and Consultation  
301-738-6273 or jkandell@umd.edu

**Robin Dinicola**  
Chief Student Affairs Officer  
301-738-6073 or rdwagle@umd.edu

## RESOURCES

### **OFF CAMPUS**

EMERGENCY .....	9-1-1
County Police (You must be able to tell them your building address and room number) .....	9-1-1
Montgomery County Crisis Center Hotline .....	240-777-4000
EveryMind Crisis Prevention and Intervention Hotline .....	301-738-2255
Suicide & Crisis Lifeline .....	9-8-8

### **USG CONTACTS**

Security Desk .....	301-738-6065
Safety & Security Manager .....	301-738-6021
Center for Counseling and Well-Being .....	301-738-6273
Center for Student Engagement & Financial Resources .....	301-738-6023
Human Resources .....	301-738-6116
USG Behavioral Assessment Team (BAT) .....	USG-BAT@umd.edu