

# Assisting Students in Distress

## SEE SOMETHING. SAY SOMETHING. DO SOMETHING.

### PURPOSE OF THE FOLDER:

Ramapo College of New Jersey is deeply committed to the physical and emotional well-being of our students. We can all play a part by noticing worrisome behavior and responding to students with empathy. By sharing your concerns and intervening early, you can help maintain a healthy and safe campus. This folder is designed to help you recognize signs of student distress and determine how to respond and refer students to the appropriate campus resource.

### SEE SOMETHING

RCNJ faculty and staff are in a unique position to recognize and demonstrate compassion for students in distress.

Students may feel *alone*, *isolated*, and even *hopeless* when faced with challenges in their academic and personal lives. These feelings can disrupt academic performance and lead to dysfunctional coping and other serious consequences.

You may be the first person to see something distressing in a student if you have frequent and prolonged contact with them. As members of the RCNJ community, it is important that we act with kindness and understanding.

### SAY SOMETHING

Students exhibiting troubling behaviors in your presence are likely having difficulties in other areas of their lives, including the classroom, with roommates, with family, and even in social settings.

Trust your instincts and say something if a student leaves you feeling worried, alarmed, or threatened.

### DO SOMETHING

Sometimes students cannot, or will not, turn to family, friends or others for help. Doing something, like expressing concern and/or informing a student of services available to them may be a critical factor in saving a student's academic career or even their life.

### WHAT ABOUT PRIVACY?

**Observations of a student's conduct or statements made by a student are not protected by FERPA.** Such information can be shared with college administrators, Public Safety or Counseling Services to promote student and campus safety.

Consideration for a student's privacy should always be given before information is shared. When communicating with a student, it is important to use the language "private and discrete" rather than "confidential," as you may need to share information with those resources listed in this document.

## INDICATORS OF DISTRESS

Use the following chart to identify a student in distress. Look for clusters of concerns, frequency, duration and severity – not just indicators in isolation.

### ACADEMIC INDICATORS

- Sudden decline in quality of work and grades
- Repeated absences
- Bizarre content in writing or presentations
- Multiple requests for extensions, incomplete assignments or failure to turn in work
- Overly demanding of faculty or staff time and attention
- You find yourself providing more personal support than academic support

### PHYSICAL INDICATORS

- Marked changes in physical appearance (e.g., grooming, hygiene, weight loss/gain)
- Excessive fatigue, appears listless or frequently nodding off
- Intoxication/high or smelling of alcohol/cannabis
- Disoriented or appears "out of it"
- Garbled, tangential, unusual, or slurred speech
- Behavior is out of context or bizarre

### PSYCHOLOGICAL INDICATORS

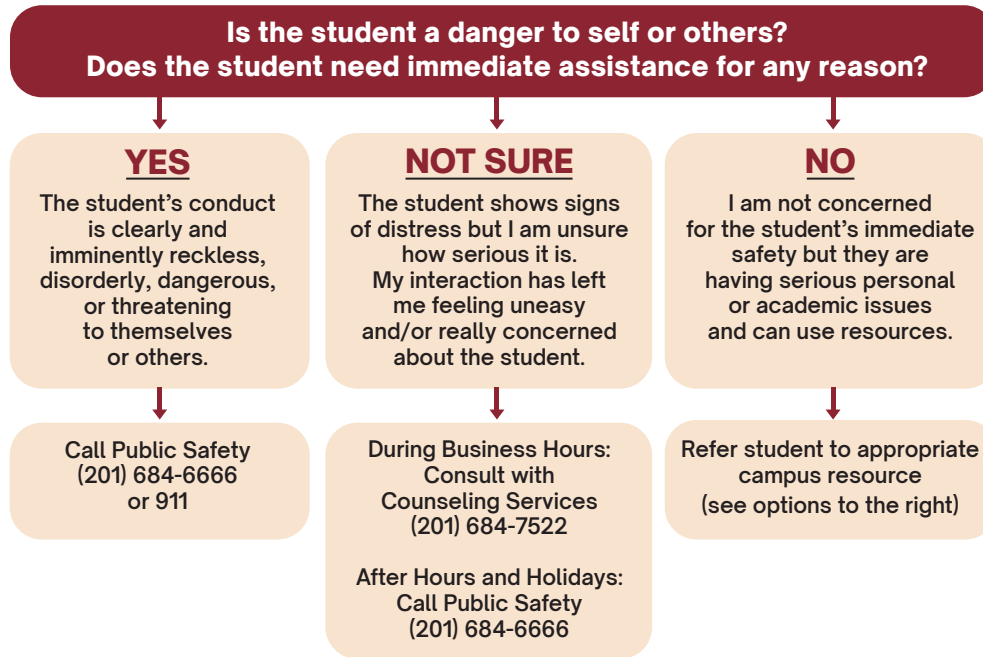
- Self-disclosure of personal distress (e.g., family or financial challenges, grief)
- Talk of suicide, either directly or indirectly
- Unusual or disproportionate emotional response to events
- Excessive tearfulness, panic, irritability, or apathy
- Expressions of concern from peers
- Delusions and paranoia

### SAFETY RISK INDICATORS

- Verbal abuse (e.g., taunting, badgering, intimidation)
- Unprovoked anger or hostility
- Communicating threats via email, by text or phone
- Physical violence (e.g., shoving, grabbing, assault, display of weapons)
- Implying or making threat to harm self or others
- Academic assignments dominated by themes of hopelessness, rage, worthlessness, isolation, despair, suicide, or violent behaviors

## RESPONSE PROTOCOL

Follow the chart to determine who to contact when supporting a student in distress:



## RESPONSE

Responding to students in distress can feel unfamiliar and uncomfortable. It is important to engage the student and relay your concerns. Be mindful of the student's background, identity, and culture, as well as your own. Listen patiently, withhold judgement, and allow for silences if the student is slow to respond. The tips and questions outlined below can help guide a difficult conversation.

### STAY SAFE

If there is imminent danger to you, the student, or someone else, call Public Safety at 201-684-6666 or 911.

### TAKE YOUR TIME

Actively listen to the student's concerns and consider how you might be able to help. Choose an appropriate place or situation for having this conversation.

### STAY CALM

Take a few deep breaths to calm yourself. Use a calm voice when talking and asking questions.

### USE ACTIVE LISTENING

Make eye contact and give your full attention. Restate what the student says to make sure you understand what is causing the distress (e.g., "As I listen to you, I hear you saying...").

### ASK DIRECT QUESTIONS

Don't be afraid to directly ask the student if they are having thoughts of dying by suicide or harming others. By asking questions you are not introducing the thought.

If you are concerned for your own or others' safety, do not hesitate to call Public Safety at **(201) 684-6666**.

## IMPORTANT RESOURCES

### ON CAMPUS

Public Safety: ..... (201) 684-6666

Counseling Services: ..... (201) 684-7522

Health Services: ..... (201) 684-7536

TITLE IX: ..... (201) 684-7220

Office of Violence Prevention: ..... (201) 684-7430

Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT): ..... or [bit@ramapo.edu](mailto:bit@ramapo.edu)

We Care Program ..... or [wecare@ramapo.edu](mailto:wecare@ramapo.edu)

### OFF CAMPUS

Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: ..... Call or text 988

Veterans: Press "1" when calling | **Spanish Speakers:** Press "2" when calling

Crisis Text Line: ..... Text: HOME to 741741

NAMI Teen & Young Adult Helpline:  
Text Friend to 62640 or call: ..... (800) 950-NAMI (6264)

healingSPACE: Bergen County sexual violence resource center: ..... (201) 487-2227

The Trevor Project - Crisis Counseling for  
LGBTQIA+ young adults: ..... (866) 488-7386 or Text START to 678678

Trans Lifeline: ..... (877) 565-8860

Addictions Services Hotline of NJ: ..... (844) 276-2777

## RESPONDING TIPS

### SAY WHAT YOU SEE

Be direct. Let the student know that you've noticed a change and you want to talk.

### HEAR THEM OUT

Be there to listen and be fully present. As an active listener, be curious and ask appropriate follow-up questions.

### KNOW YOUR ROLE

Set clear boundaries and connect students to those who can meet their needs. You are the bridge. Remember you are not a confidential resource but honor their privacy as best as possible.

### CONNECT TO HELP

Determine whether the student needs immediate support and refer them to the appropriate resources.