

Working with Students in Distress

Campus Resource, Safety, and Communication Guidelines

Toni Castro
Student Judicial Affairs Administrator
Vice President for Students Services

Lance M. Gibson
Director of Counseling

Gloria Rose Koepping
Psychologist

Richard Noyer
Supervisor of Campus Security and Safety

Safety on a college campus is a natural source of concern for parents, students and employees. Education, the business of Highline Community College, can only take place in an environment where each student and employee feels safe and secure.

At Highline, the Student Judicial Affairs Administrator works closely with the Counseling Department and Security & Safety officers to provide an environment in which students can achieve their academic and individual goals. Many personal and interpersonal conflicts are minimized or resolved through timely referrals to the Counseling Center, which provides educational, career, and personal counseling or intervention when appropriate. The Security and Safety office is also crucial to helping safeguard students' and employees' educational and personal rights and freedoms.

If a faculty or staff member encounters a person displaying violent or threatening behavior or a desire to harm him/herself, the instructor/employee should notify Security at Ext. 3911. Upon arrival the officer will assess the situation and will attempt to resolve it. If the officer is unable to resolve the problem and there is an apparent danger to others, an officer from the Des Moines Police Department will be summoned.

If the student is despondent and threatening harm to self or others, Security should also notify the Counseling Center to request the assistance of a professional counselor.

As we know, today's classrooms and college campuses are not sanctuaries, and are therefore susceptible to disruptive or violent behavior. Despite this fact, it is important to know that such behavior is **THE EXCEPTION --- NOT THE RULE.**

What To Do When A Disruption Occurs

- Remain calm. Do not allow the other person to 'hook' your emotions or involve your ego.
- Maintain a firm but moderate voice level; don't get into a shouting match.
- Do not threaten, demean, or use vulgarity.
- Do not touch the person or invade his/her personal space.
- If you feel threatened, back off.
- When meeting with a student who may be disruptive, ask someone to check on you. Meet where there is an escape route that is unobstructed.
- Keep your office blinds open at all times.
- Take into consideration the changing demographics of our student population and their understanding of policies, procedures and expectations.
- Provide students with a general understanding of the Student Rights and Responsibilities Code (WAC 132I-120). Clearly outline classroom expectations, rules, policies, etc.
- Speak to the behavior and don't stereotype or generalize about a particular group.
- Call Security at Ext. 3911 if you feel that you need immediate assistance.

Working with Students in Distress

You may wonder what you do to help a student with a personal or academic problem. What is your appropriate role? How involved should you be? What are the risks to getting involved? How do you know when you should be worried about a student? When and how should you transfer the responsibility for helping a student to a counselor, conduct officer or security officer on campus?

While many troubled students come to the Counseling Center on their own, faculty and staff members are often the first to recognize that a student may not be functioning well, academically or emotionally. Students may first turn to you because they are more familiar with you, and they hold you in respect due to your position as a faculty or staff member.

It is important to remember that suicide is the second leading cause of death among college students and that many, if not most students who 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. The goal is to help identify students' problems before they become serious. You can help us recognizing possible signs of distress and making appropriate referrals.

Warning Signals

Unusual Behavior

1. Dependency: Students wants to be around you all the time or makes excessive appointments to see you.
2. Loss of interest in prior activities, withdrawal from usual social interactions, seclusion, unwillingness to communicate, and isolation.
3. Significantly increased activity (e.g., extreme restlessness, nonstop talking, inability to relax).
4. Suspiciousness or feelings of being persecuted that do not seem warranted.
5. Inappropriate or bizarre conversation (e.g., talking nonsense or being unable to carry on a coherent conversation).
6. Unusual irritability, outbursts of anger, unexplained crying, aggressiveness, excessive worrying or anxiety.
7. Significant decline in personal hygiene, standard of dress, or grooming.
8. A change from normal socially appropriate behavior (e.g., becoming disruptive or aggressive, persistent lying or stealing).
9. Signs of eating disorders (e.g., significant weight loss, bingeing/vomiting, secretive eating).
10. Alcohol or drug abuse or other self-destructive behavior (e.g., cutting self or being accident prone).

Problems with Academic or Career/Major

1. Dramatic decline in academic performance.
2. Sudden drop in class attendance.
3. Patter of dropping classes or asking for extensions.
4. Severe procrastination or difficulty concentrating.
5. Incapacitating test anxiety.
6. Severe reaction to a poor grade on a test or paper.
7. Lack of alternative goals when doing poorly.
8. Overly high academic standards that aren't being met.
9. Chronic indecisiveness regarding career/major.
10. Extreme fear of speaking or participating in class.

Life Circumstance Concerns

1. Death or serious illness of a family member or close friend.
2. Illness (i.e., poor health)
3. Problems in dating or marital relationship, problems with roommates or family members, parent's divorce.
4. Overwhelming financial difficulties.
5. Extreme shyness, lack of social skills, difficulty in making and keeping friends.
6. Severe homesickness, graduation anxiety.

Signs of Depression

1. Inability to concentrate, impaired memory, indecisiveness, confusion.
2. Change in appetite (e.g., complete loss of appetite or compulsive eating).
3. Inability to find pleasure in anything; dissatisfaction with life in general.
4. Extreme guilt or self-blame for present or past events.
5. Extreme feelings of helplessness and hopelessness with regard to the present and future.
6. Loss of warm feelings toward family or friends; loss of self-esteem.
7. Crying spells for marked lack of response to normally upsetting events.
8. Sleeping difficulties (e.g., insomnia, early wakefulness, or excessive sleeping).
9. Unexplained headaches, digestive problems, anxiety or panic attacks, or other physical symptoms.
10. Chronic fatigue and lack of energy.
11. Neglect of responsibilities and appearance.

References to Suicide

1. Feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, worthlessness.
2. Preoccupation with death; giving away valued possessions.
3. Thoughts or threats of suicide or plans for suicide.

All references to suicide should be taken seriously and referred to a counselor or other mental health professional. At least 70% of all people committing 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.

The Verbally Aggressive Student

Verbally aggressive students usually react when they experience a frustrating situation, which they see as beyond their control; anger and frustration become displaced onto others; fear of rejection and expressions of righteous indignation are frequently associated with this pattern.

Do....

- allow them to vent and tell you what is upsetting them
- indicate to them that you are not willing to accept their verbally abusive behavior. For example, say "The way you are talking to me is not acceptable; I cannot hear or understand you when you are speaking to me that way!"
- if they are getting too close, tell them they are violating your personal space and to please move back
- if you are comfortable doing so, reduce environmental stimulation by walking them to a quiet but public area
- tell the student that you will put them in touch with someone who may be able to better help them resolve this issue. Walk the student to the Counseling Center or to a supervisor who may be able to help

Don't....

- get into an argument or engage in name calling
- press for an explanation or reasons for their behavior
- enlist the aid of others (students or faculty) to "quiet them down"
- confront or use threats
- allow yourself to get physically cornered

The Hostile or Physically Destructive Student

Hostility typically occurs when a student is totally frustrated and feels unable to do anything about it. It occurs in moments of intense frustration or when sustained frustration erodes the person's behavioral control. Having a phone readily is important when working with a hostile or destructive student. If possible, carry a cell phone with you.

Do....

- present a calm appearance
- listen to them and let them talk
- speak quietly and calmly
- explain clearly what behaviors are acceptable
- warn them if they don't stop you will call security immediately
- tell the person you are going to call security (call security at Ext. 3911)
- describe to security the nature of the emergency and give an accurate location, including building number and room number
- remain in an open area where you can move easily (do not allow yourself to become cornered)
- keep at least 5 ft. of distance from the person (out of kicking range)

Don't...

- incite or encourage their behavior
- get into an argument or engage in name calling
- press for an explanation or reasons for their behavior
- confront or use threats
- allow yourself to get physically cornered

The Student in Poor Contact with Reality

The student in poor contact with reality has difficulty discerning fantasy from reality; thinking is often illogical, confused, and disturbed. A student who has hallucination, delusions or exhibits bizarre behavior is generally not dangerous and is typically scared, frightened, and overwhelmed.

Do....

- inform a member of the counseling staff when you become aware of this type of student
- respond to the student with concern, kindness and firm reasoning
- maintain eye contact, even if they don't
- articulate your concerns and state that you can see they need help
- acknowledge the feelings or fears without supporting the misperceptions, e.g., "I understand you think they are trying to hurt you, and I know how real it seems to you, but I don't hear the voices (see the devil, etc.)"
- reveal your difficulty in understanding them, e.g., "I am sorry but I do not understand. Could you repeat that or say it in a different way?"
- switch topics, divert focus from delusions to reality
- contact the Counseling Center (Ext. 3353) for assistance for referral

Don't.....

- argue or try to convince them of the irrationality of their thinking. This will cause them to defend their position (false perceptions) all the more
- play along, e.g., "Oh yeah, I hear the voices."
- encourage further examples of craziness – rather, switch topics, divert
- focus from delusions to reality and the present
- demand, command, or order
- expect customary emotional responses
- panic, which gives the messages that you expect something catastrophic to happen

Making Referrals

Referrals are Most Effective:

- when you call and make an appointment for the student
- when you escort the student to the Counseling Center
- when, if the student is receptive, you suggest that he or she call to schedule an appointment with a counselor
- when the student makes the call in front of you
- when you refer the student to a specific counselor
- when you talk to the student in private
- when you specifically state your reasons for concern
- when you listen carefully
- when you avoid criticizing or sounding judgmental
- when you discuss with the student a referral to the Counseling Center

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

If the student's situation is non-life threatening, call Security at Ext. 3911.

Confidentiality and the Law

If you refer a student to the Counseling Center, we ask the student if we may tell you that contact with the Center has been made. Naturally, the communication between a counselor and a client is confidential. The counseling staff cannot and do not discuss the particulars of a student's situation or even the fact that counseling is being received without the student's written consent. Remember that if you are curious about whether a student followed up on your referral, you can always ask the student.

Consultation

If you have specific questions about a student and how best to approach that individual to make a referral, do not hesitate to call Counseling in order to discuss the situation. When you call, tell the receptionist who you are and explain why you need to talk with a counselor. Be clear if you believe an emergency exists.

Student Rights and Responsibilities

Highline Community College will take appropriate disciplinary action when student conduct unreasonably interferes with teaching and learning or administrative functions of the college. Faculty are encouraged to review the **Student Rights and Responsibilities Code** (WAC 132I-120) available in the Dean for Student Services office or on <http://www.highline.edu/stuserv/vptudents/waccontents.html/>

In order to pursue disciplinary action, a faculty member or college employee must document specific behaviors that are disruptive or violate rules or policies specified in the code. Questions regarding alleged violations or disciplinary action should be directed to the Student Judicial Affairs Administrator/Dean for Students at Ext. 3351.

The judicial process is a student development program, which is an extension of teaching and learning at the college, and holds students accountable for inappropriate conduct. The process reinforces student rights and responsibilities, and maintains institutional values. Among these values are accountability, responsibility, fairness, justice, freedom, safety and orderliness. The judicial process follows a progressive discipline model by imposing sanctions that are fair, reasonable, and proportionate to the violation.

A student's registration constitutes acceptance of responsibility to comply with college policies and regulations as outlined in the Student Rights and Responsibilities Code.

Student Services plays a vital role in promoting and sustaining a welcoming and positive campus climate. As educators, it's important that we accept responsibility for teaching students what is expected of them as members of the college community.

Judicial Process Goals are as follows:

The National Center for Academic Integrity outlines the following goals for a formal student judicial process:

1. To guarantee fairness to everyone involved;
2. To promote the pursuit of truth;
3. To maintain the integrity of the discipline system by ensuring consistency in the administration of discipline.

In addition, the Center suggests these goals, which we also follow:

1. Educating the student who committed the violation;
2. Rehabilitating the student who committed the violation;
3. Deterring repeat offenders and other potential violators;
4. Protecting the educational mission of the institution;
5. Protecting the instructor and the institution;

6. Maintaining records to allow process monitoring and the identification of trends;
7. Administrative closure

Published by the National Center for Academic Integrity

Overview of the Judicial Process:

The informal process is most often used when:

- the violation would not require sanctions greater than a verbal or written warning, the lowering of a grade, or failing an assignment; and
- referral to a counselor is likely to resolve and /or mediate the situation; and
- the student has no prior violations(s).

The formal process is most often used when:

- The egregiousness of the act or violation may require sanctions greater than a verbal warning; and
- The student denies responsibility; and
- The student has prior violations

If the formal process is determined to be appropriate, the following occurs:

- A certified letter (a written charge statement) is sent to the student to inform her/him of the alleged violation and summon her/him to a disciplinary hearing
- A disciplinary hearing with the student is conducted (Due Process). This is an opportunity for the student to hear all allegations presented against him/her and to respond. If the student fails to attend, the hearing is held in his/her absence.
- The Judicial Affairs Administrator makes a determination of appropriate sanctions based on the information and evidence gathered prior to and during the hearing. Possible sanctions include: warning, probation, restitution, or suspension from the college. Sanctions that involve grading are done in consultation with appropriate faculty.

Prior violations can be determined through consultation with the Judicial Affairs Administrator. It is recommended that informal resolutions between students and faculty be reported to the Judicial Affairs Administrator for tracking purposes.

Anti-harassment Order

An Anti-harassment Order is a civil court order available only to victims of harassment.

An Anti-harassment Order may:

1. Restrain the respondent from contacting another person;
2. Restrain the respondent from keeping another person under surveillance;
3. Require the respondent to stay distance away from another person's home or workplace.

Anti-harassment Orders are sent to the Security and Safety office on campus and come under the administrative purview of the Supervisor of Security and Safety. Orders are fully enforceable. Additional information can be found through the King County District Court (206)205-9200 or <http://www.metrokc.gov/kcdc/ahinfo.htm>

Campus Resources

Counseling Faculty (3353 – appointments)

Director of Counseling
Psychologist
Counselor
Counselor

Lance M. Gibson (3581)
Gloria Rose Koepping (3579)
Thressa Alston (3580)
Patricia Haggerty (3578)

Security and Safety (3218 or 3911 [emergency])

Supervisor of Security and Safety
<http://www.highline.edu/admin/security/>

Richard Noyer (3218)

Dean for Student Services/Chief Student Affairs Officer

Student Judicial Affairs Administrator
Executive Assistant for Students Services

Toni Castro (3351)
Dena Dillon (3077)

Employee Assistance Program

Executive Director of Human Resources

206-281-6315
Cesar Portillo (3320)

Des Moines Police Department

Emergency 9-911
Non-Emergency 206-878-3301

Crisis Clinic

www.crisisclinic.org

Immediate help for people in crisis
24-Hour Crisis Line

206-461-3222
1-800-621-5767

Community Resource Information & Referrals
King County Community Information Line

206-461-3200
1-800-621-4636