

Responding to Students in Distress

Is the student a danger to self and/or others, or does the student need immediate assistance?



Yes



The student's conduct is clearly and imminently reckless, disorderly, dangerous and/or threatening, including self-harm or a medical emergency.



Call **911** and Campus Safety at **610-526-6099**.



Not Sure



The student shows signs of distress, but you are unsure how serious it is. Your interaction has left you feeling uneasy and/or concerned.



Contact Counseling Services at **610-526-6045**, email **kanthony@harcum.edu**, or file an ACT report. To file an ACT report, click the link located under the Campus Life drop-down menu on the Harcum home page.



No



You are not concerned for the student's immediate safety, but the student is having personal or academic issues and could use more support and/or resources.



Make a referral to Counseling Services at **kanthony@harcum.edu** or file an ACT report. To file an ACT report, click the link located under the Campus Life drop-down menu on the Harcum home page.

Find out more inside

Is the student a danger to self or others?

Does the student need immediate assistance for any reason?

✳ IF YES: The student's conduct is clearly and imminently reckless, disorderly, dangerous or threatening, including self-harm or medical emergency. **The following behaviors usually indicate that the student is in crisis and needs emergency care immediately:**

- **Harassment** – unwanted personal contact, phone calls, text messages, or any type of communication continuing after the person has requested it to stop
- **Disorderly conduct**, including inappropriate outbursts or persistent interruptions and any behavior inappropriate for the classroom
- **Disruptive or threatening conduct**, including but not limited to throwing items in anger, bullying, making threats, refusing to leave the classroom, refusing others the option to leave, or brandishing a weapon
- **Medical issues** including, but not limited to unresponsiveness, sudden change in behavior, inappropriate response, shortness of breath or chest pain, bleeding or severe swelling, sudden onset pain, seizures, vomiting, or obvious physical injury
- **Inability to communicate clearly** (garbled slurred speech, disjointed thoughts)
- **Loss of contact with reality** (seeing/hearing things that are not there, beliefs or actions at odds with reality)
- **Homicidal threats**
- **Overt suicidal thoughts**, including suicidal or self-destructive ideation or a conversation or written communication that includes the how, when, and where of a suicide plan
 - » Talking about wanting to die or to kill oneself
 - » Looking for a way to kill oneself
 - » Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live
 - » Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
 - » Talking about being a burden to others
 - » Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
 - » Acting anxious or agitated; behaving recklessly
 - » Sleeping too little or too much
 - » Withdrawing or feeling isolated
 - » Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
 - » Displaying extreme mood swings

✳ IF UNSURE: The student shows signs of distress, but you are unsure how serious it is. Your interaction has left you feeling uneasy and/or concerned. **These behaviors may indicate significant emotional distress, reluctance, or an inability to acknowledge a need for personal help and may include:**

- Repeated request for special consideration
- New or regularly occurring behavior which pushes the limit and may interfere with class management
- Self-destructive behaviors, including but not limited to repeatedly missing assignments, frequent absences, taking excessive risks, alienating others, loss of future/career focus, long term depression
- Unusual or exaggerated emotional responses
 - » Marked change in mood, motor activity, or speech
 - » Marked change in social interactions, including but not limited to withdrawing socially, having continual friction with fellow students, declining interest in extracurricular activities, exhibiting behaviors indicating confusion and distress
 - » Erratic or irresponsible behaviors, including but not limited to dramatic drop in grades or sudden change in academic performance, repeated absences from class, procrastination, lying, cheating, defiance of authority, fits of anger, fights, rule breaking
 - » Marked change in physical appearance including a dramatic change in weight (loss or gain) and/or poor personal hygiene
 - » Signs of depression, including but not limited to expressions of self-reproach, low energy level, tearfulness, insomnia, poor appetite, fatigue, decreased attention and ability to concentrate, restriction in involvement of pleasurable activities
 - » Anxiety disorders, including but not limited to irrational or excessive fear or worry, panic attacks, phobias, obsessive compulsive behaviors



IF NO: You are not concerned for the student's immediate safety, but the student is having personal or academic issues and could use more support and/or resources. Although the student is not disruptive to others in class, behavior may indicate that something is wrong and that **help may be needed**.

Academic issues may include:

- Declining grades
- Unaccountable change from good to poor performance
- Change from frequent attendance to excessive absences
- Change in pattern of interaction

Mental health issues may include:

- Marked change in mood, motor activity, or speech
- Marked change in social interactions
- Erratic or irresponsible behaviors
- Marked change in physical appearance
- Signs of depression
- Anxiety disorders

Helping Students in Distress

A student's behavior, especially if it changes over time, may be an indicator of distress or a "cry for help". You may be the first person to recognize signs of distress in a student. Trust your instinct if a student leaves you feeling worried, alarmed, or threatened.

- **RECOGNIZE:** Harcum College faculty and staff are in a unique position to demonstrate compassion for students in distress. Students may feel alone, isolated, and even hopeless when faced with academic and life challenges. These feelings can easily disrupt academic performance and may lead to difficulties coping and other serious consequences.
- **RESPOND:** Students exhibiting troubling behaviors are likely having difficulties in various settings including the classroom, with roommates, with family, and in social settings. Trust your instinct and say something if a student leaves you feeling worried, alarmed, or threatened.
- **REFER:** Sometimes students cannot or will not turn to family or friends, so do something. Your expression of concern may be critical to saving a student's academic career or even their life.



In case of emergency, call **911** and Campus Safety at **215-526-6099**.

If you have additional questions about responding to a student in distress, contact the Director of Counseling Services at **610-526-6045**.

During business hours, call the Director of Counseling Services at **610-526-6045** and/or file an ACT report. To file an ACT report, click the link located under the Campus Life drop-down menu on the Harcum home page. After business hours, including weekends and holidays, call the Director of Counseling Services for counseling assistance at **610-212-4587**.

Making a Referral

Be honest with the student about the limits of your time, ability, expertise, and/or objectivity. Faculty and staff are not expected to provide counseling. Assure the individual that many students seek help over the course of their college career. Assist the student in choosing the best resource. Let the student know that you think they should get assistance from another source, including the Director of Counseling Services at **610-526-6045** or if needed after-hours, call **610-212-4587**. If it is an emergency, call **911** and Campus Safety at **215-526-6099**. If the student expresses being victimized of a crime or of a sexual nature, contact the Title IX Coordinator at **610-526-6012** and Campus Safety at **215-526-6099**.

Do's and Don'ts

- DO** show that you take the student's feeling seriously.
- DO** let the student know that you want to help.
- DO** listen attentively and empathize.
- DO** stay close until help is available or the risk has passed.
- DON'T** try to shock or challenge the student.
- DON'T** analyze the student's motives.
- DON'T** become argumentative.
- DON'T** react with shock or disdain at the student's thoughts or feelings.
- DON'T** act as a counselor if you are not a trained counselor.
- DON'T** offer confidentiality if you are not a trained counselor.



ACT consists of individuals who represent various departments within the Harcum community to address behavioral concerns in a comprehensive manner. To file an ACT report, click the online ACT report link located under the Campus Life drop-down menu on the Harcum home page.

Counseling Services

610-526-6045

Campus Safety

610-526-6099

Student Health Center

610-526-6090

Title IX Coordinator

610-526-6012

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