Purpose: To assist students in avoiding dangerous situations and refer them to the appropriate sources of help.

Policy: N/A

Coverage: All students.

Procedure: **Deal with safety concerns FIRST**

This is the first and most important step for responding to a student in emotional distress. If any faculty or staff member feels in danger from any person or has received threats of harm from anyone, call the **Department of Public Safety at 852-6111** and follow their instructions. If you are in an office with a duress alarm (panic button), please do not hesitate to use it.

**Talking with a student in distress**

If you observe risk factors of suicide or violence to others when responding to a distressed student, the following guidelines are suggested:

- Express your concern to the student that he or she may be thinking about suicide or violence.
- Try to discuss the student’s thoughts openly without judgment or shock.
- Allow the student to express difficult emotions. Often the student in distress feels angry, helpless, hopeless, worthless, and out of control. Trying to dissuade a student from having these feelings can be perceived as an unwillingness to talk.
- Avoid any promise to keep the student's thoughts of suicide or violence secret.
- Refer the student to a trained counselor. Dial the HSC Counseling Services Hotline number, 852-PREV (852-7738). If all of the technology is working well, you should have your call answered by a person trained to respond to such a crisis. They will help arrange for back-up help from DPS.
  - If there is a problem getting a live-voice, real-person to answer that call, dial directly to Emergency Psychiatry Services at 562-3120.
  - If there is a problem getting through on that line, dial 911.
  - Do not rely on voice mail, email, or text messaging anywhere to be an adequate communication for your needs.
- Offer to make the call to the counseling agency. Give the student the phone once you have told the counselor what is happening. You can also walk the student over to one of the campus counseling center.
- Depend heavily on sworn officers of the law to assist you in getting a student to help because some crisis situations will require an officer to insist ( or make an arrest to ensure) that a person be transported safely and legally to an evaluation.
- When you are on campus, enlist a DPS officer to accompany you and the student to your target location (e.g., counselor’s office; psychiatrist’s office, Emergency Psychiatry Services at UofL Hospital). Do not send a student to a target location alone or simply in the company of a friend. The emotional dysfunction that accompanies or precedes a suicidal crisis can lead a distraught person into unwise choices such as escaping from the plan to be seen by a mental health professional. Only a sworn officer can legally intervene physically to cause the person to go against his or her will.
- If you are responding to a crisis where the student is away from campus, do not go alone to meet that student. Go in the company of a sworn officer of the law who will have jurisdiction. Contact DPS at 852-6111 and ask them to decide if they are the appropriate agency or if another police agency is needed. Officers are trained to respond to imminent
displays of dangerousness.

- Some situations will require that you initiate a Mental Inquest Warrant (MIW) at the third floor of the Jefferson County Court House, located at the corner of 6th and Jefferson St. Only the person who has received strong statements of dangerousness by conversation, telephone communication, voice mail, email, or written format can initiate the MIW. Second-hand reports of dangerousness will not be accepted and will be dismissed as hearsay. The Seven Counties Services Hotline (502-589-4313) is a good resource for advice on how and when to proceed with an MIW.

### Recognizing students in distress – what to look for

#### Academic indicators:
- Missed assignments
- Deterioration in quality of work
- A drop in grades
- Repeated absences from class
- A negative change in classroom performance
- Disorganized or erratic performance
- Continual seeking of special accommodations (late papers, extensions, postponed examinations, and the like)
- Essays or creative work that indicate extremes of hopelessness, social isolation, rage, or despair

#### Personal/Interpersonal indicators:
- Tearfulness
- Unprovoked anger or hostility
- Excessive dependency
- Expressions of hopelessness or worthlessness
- Expressions of concern about a student in the class by his/her peers
- A hunch or gut-level reaction that something is wrong
- Direct statements indicating distress, family problems, or other difficulties
- Exaggerated personality traits (e.g., more withdrawn or more animated than usual)

#### Physical indicators:
- Deterioration in physical appearance
- Visible changes in weight
- Lack of personal hygiene
- Excessive fatigue
- Coming to class bleary-eyed, hung over, or smelling of alcohol
- Appearing sick or ill

#### Safety/Risk indicators:
- Any written note or verbal statement that has a sense of finality or a suicidal flavor to it
- Statements to the effect that the student is “going away for a long time”
- Severe depression
- Any history of suicidal thoughts or attempts
- Giving away of prized possessions
### Issues to Consider

Avoid making sweeping promises of confidentiality, particularly if a student represents a safety risk to him- or herself or others. Students who may be a danger to themselves or others need swift professional intervention, and assurances of absolute confidentiality may get in the way.

It is acceptable to stay “in role” as a faculty or staff member. You do not have to take on the role of counselor. You need only to watch and refer.

### Reporting an incident to Student Affairs

In order to protect students and faculty to the extent possible, it is requested that you report to the Associate Dean for Student Affairs any incident involving a student in distress or suspected of being in distress as defined in this procedure regardless of any actions taken or not taken by you, by the student, or by others. Such report should be done irrespective of any explicit or implied promise of confidentiality to the student or students involved, provided that giving such report has not been enjoined by a competent court or is prohibited by law.