Working with Distressed Students: A Decision-Making Tree for Faculty and Staff

Purpose of the BIT
The Behavior Intervention Team assesses and coordinates responses to issues and concerns about students requiring intervention in order to help students achieve success at NDSU, and help the campus community members feel safe and supported. Addressed concerns may include specific incidents or general concerns about behavior of a student or a group of students. When a referral is made, the team will attempt to determine what is happening and what type of assistance the student may need.

Membership
The BIT includes representation from the following (the team also will consult with other NDSU offices/departments as appropriate):
• Dean of Student Life Office
• Counseling Center
• Residence Life
• University Police and Safety Office
• Academic Affairs
• Office for Equity, Diversity and Global Outreach

Contact Information
Follow the steps outlined by this decision-making tree and, when appropriate, contact the BIT at 231-6537 or by email at ndsu.bit@ndsu.edu.

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NDSU Behavioral Intervention Team (BIT) • www.ndsu.edu/student_life Counseling Center • www.ndsu.edu/counseling

NDSU Counseling Center, Ceres 212
You want to help. As a North Dakota State University faculty or staff member, you sometimes encounter students in distress. This information will help you know what to look for, recognize the warning signs and take a course of action to get students the assistance they need.

**STUDENT IS UNDER DISTRESS.**

**SIGNS OF DISTRESS** (Include, but are not limited to):
- Nervousness, agitation, or irritability
- Infrequent class attendance
- Changes in academic performance
- Changes in appearance or personal relationships
- Deterioration in hygiene
- Unusual aggression, or obtrusive behavior
- Fearfulness
- Dependency (e.g., student who is excessively clingy)
- Frequent alcohol and/or drug use

**EXPRESS YOUR CONCERNS TO THE STUDENT, POINTING OUT YOUR OBSERVATIONS AND ASKING ABOUT HIS/HER SITUATION.**

**DO YOU BELIEVE THERE IS ILLIMIENT DANGER?**

**YES** IMMINENT DANGER IS CLEARLY PRESENT.

Examples:
- You believe the student is uncontrolled or unresponsive
- You believe the student has not ingested pills beyond the recommended dose (whether the situation is a suicide or a life-threatening overdose)
- Student is threatening immediate danger (e.g., threatening to jump out a window, ingest pills, slash himself/herself)
- Student attempts, or threatens, to cause physical harm to someone else (or to people in general)

**NO** IMMINENT DANGER IS CLEARLY NOT PRESENT.

Examples:
- You do not believe the student is uncontrolled or unresponsive
- You believe the student has ingested pills beyond the recommended dose (whether the situation is a suicide or a life-threatening overdose)
- You do not believe the student is threatening immediate danger (e.g., threatening to jump out a window, ingest pills, slash himself/herself)
- The student to whom you are speaking does not appear to be in immediate danger

**WRITE DOWN** relevant details about the situation (who, what, when, where)

**IMMEDIATELY CALL UNIVERSITY POLICE AT 231-8998.**

**CONTACT YOUR SUPERVISOR AND INFORM HER/HIM OF THE SITUATION.**

Write down:
- Relevant details about the situation (who, what, when, where)
- Any background information you have about the student’s difficulties
- A number where you can be reached

Give a copy to University Police (if you observe emergency treatment providers), a copy to your supervisor, and keep a copy yourself.

**REPORT THE INCIDENT TO THE BEHAVIOR INTERVENTION TEAM** by calling the Dean of Student Life Office (231-6537) or email n utilizes@ndsu.edu.

**THE COUNSELING CENTER (231-707) is available for ongoing consultation (as needed) to help address the impact of the situation.**

**UNCLEAR WHETHER IMMEDIATE DANGER IS PRESENT EXAMPLES**

- You report a history of self-injurious behavior (e.g., cutting or burning) but now states a desire to engage in this behavior again
- Student is found intoxicated or asleep under the influence of substances
- Student makes statements that are suggestive of suicide/ homicidal thinking that are not overtly indicative of imminent danger (e.g., I don’t know if I can do it)
- Student appears emotionally disturbed and does not respond in your attempts to engage
- Student experiences a sudden disruption (e.g., death, breakup, divorce) and seems emotionally unstable/inconsolable
- Student’s behavior appears unusual (e.g., uncontrollable anger) when you notice no apparent response to the death of immediate family member
- Student’s work, assignments, or grades contain material that raises concerns about suicide, homicide and/or violence.

**CALL THE COUNSELING CENTER and ask to consult with a counselor (231-7671). Do not email.**

If the situation occurs after normal business hours, contact University Police (231-8998).

**PROVIDE ALL THE RELATIVE INFORMATION you have about the student (231-7671) in the form of a referral.**

- If you are a faculty member you may fax the appropriate information to the student over the phone, and with guidance, you can provide valuable information about the situation in a mental health.
- When you contact the Counseling Center about a student, the center will work with you to determine the proper course of action.

**CONTACT YOUR SUPERVISOR AND INFORM HER/HIM OF THE SITUATION.**

Discuss concerns with supervisor and contact in appropriate resource(s), or about how to refer, call the Counseling Center (231-7671) and ask to speak with a counselor.

**SHOULD YOU DECIDE TO REFER TO THE COUNSELING CENTER**

- Know that the Counseling Center would not discuss your concerns about the student and your thoughts about the urgency of the situation
- Consider calling with the student or accompanying the student to the Counseling Center to indicate counseling services
- Continue to follow up with the student as appropriate; contact the Counseling Center if you observe a significant change in the student's behaviors.

**NOTE:** If at any point you believe the student’s “Emergent Danger” status has changed, return form to his/her counselor, if your “Emergent Danger” status drops out of this decision-making time.

**YOU ARE WORRIED ABOUT THE STUDENT’S SAFETY, DO YOU SEE POSSIBLE WARNING SIGNS?**

WARNING SIGNS (include, but are not limited to):
- Talks about or attempts suicide
- Makes statements such as “I want this all to end” or “I can’t go on anymore”
- Behaves in a bizarre, alarming and/or dangerous manner
- Makes statements about hurting or killing others
- Exhibits changes in behavior, mood and/or appearance
- Appears depressed (frequent crying, insomnia, weight loss or gain, loss of interest, loss of pleasure)
- Appears/reporting hopelessness or helplessness
- Engagement in self-harm (e.g., cutting)

As much as you and the student are concerned, do not provide support but: do not become the student’s counselor/therapist.

**DISCUSS COUNSELING SERVICES AND/OR OTHER UNIVERSITY RESOURCES that might be helpful and address any concerns the student might have about these resources.**

If the student is not happy with the counseling that you are recommending the appropriate resources and/or how to refer, call the Counseling Center (231-7671) and ask to speak with a counselor.

**IMMEDIATELY CALL UNIVERSITY POLICE AT 231-8998.**

**CONTACT YOUR SUPERVISOR AND INFORM HER/HIM OF THE SITUATION.**

Discuss concerns with supervisor and contact in appropriate resource(s), or about how to refer, call the Counseling Center (231-7671) and ask to speak with a counselor.

**NOTE:** If at any point you believe the student’s “Emergent Danger” status has changed, return form to his/her counselor.
You want to help. As a North Dakota State University faculty or staff member, you sometimes encounter students in distress. This information will help you know what to look for, recognize the warning signs and take a course of action to get students the assistance they need.

**Student is under distress. Signs of distress (include, but are not limited to):**
- Nervousness, agitation, or irritability
- Inappropriate social or relationship behavior
- Depression in hygiene
- Unusual speeding or aggressive behavior
- Fearfulness
- Dependency (e.g., student who is excessively clingy)
- Frequent alcohol and/or drug use

**Express your concerns to the student, point out your observations and ask about his/her situation.**

**Are you worried about the student’s safety? Do you see possible warning signs?**

**Warning signs (include, but are not limited to):**
- Takes about or threatens suicide
- Makes statements such as “I want this all to end” or “I can’t see a way out”
- Behavior is bizarre, alarming and/or dangerous
- Makes statements about hurting or killing others
- Changes in behavior; mood and/or appearance
- Appears depressed (frequent crying, insomnia, weight loss/gain, list of preoccupations)
- Appears/report hopefulness or hopelessness
- Engagement in self-harm (e.g., cutting)

**Identify the proper course of action.**

**Immediate actions as it relates to the displayed warning signs:**

1. Directly ask student about your observations or warning signs.
2. Directly ask student about suicide (include, but are not limited to):...
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North Dakota State University does not discriminate on the basis of age, color, disability, gender expression/identity, genetic information, marital status, national origin, public assistance status, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation or status as a U.S. veteran. Direct inquiries to the Vice President for Equity, Diversity and Global Outreach, 205 Old Main, (701) 231-7708.