

# SUPPORTING STUDENTS IN DISTRESS

## RED FOLDER INITIATIVE



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY  
WASHINGTON, DC

Faculty and staff are often the first to observe signs of distress in students. **The Dean of Students' Red Folder Initiative** offers a three-step process to **recognize, respond** to, and **refer** distressed students to ensure they receive appropriate resources.



**RECOGNIZE**



**RESPOND**



**REFER**



## RECOGNIZE INDICATORS OF DISTRESS

ACADEMIC	PHYSICAL	PSYCHOLOGICAL	SAFETY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Missed assignments</li> <li>• Deterioration in work quality</li> <li>• Repeated absences</li> <li>• Verbal aggression/significant agitation in meetings</li> <li>• Continually requesting modifications (late papers, extensions, postponed deadlines)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acting withdrawn, volatile, tearful or expressing hopelessness</li> <li>• Excessive fatigue or atypical sleep patterns</li> <li>• Marked changes in physical appearance</li> <li>• Disconnected or slurred speech</li> <li>• Increase in substance abuse</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delusions or paranoia</li> <li>• Sharing personal distress (family or financial problems, loss of family member, suicidal thoughts)</li> <li>• Unusual response to events (panic or excessive tearfulness)</li> <li>• Unusual irritability or apathy</li> <li>• Verbal abuse (taunting, badgering)</li> <li>• Concern expressed by peers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical violence</li> <li>• Implying or making direct threats of harm to self or others</li> <li>• Unprovoked anger</li> <li>• Assignments with themes of extreme hopelessness, violence, rage, isolation, despair, suicidal ideation</li> <li>• Stalking or harassment</li> </ul>



## RESPOND WITH EMPATHY & CONCERN

### STAY SAFE

Prioritize your safety and call AUPD (202-885-3636) if there is immediate danger present for you, the student, or anyone else.

### CONSULT WITH OTHERS

Reach out to campus partners for advice prior to a conversation with a student. Consult with a colleague.

### STAY CALM

Use a calm voice when speaking with the student. Talk privately, if possible, so they feel comfortable disclosing their concerns.

### LISTEN & AFFIRM

Give your full attention. Restate what you hear the student sharing with you. Let them know they aren't alone.

### GIVE CONCRETE HELP

Give actionable steps. Write down contact information. Offer to sit with student while they call to make appointments.



## REFER TO SUPPORTIVE RESOURCES

### SITUATIONS REQUIRING IMMEDIATE ACTION

The student is a danger to self or others or is overtly referencing self-harm, harm to others, or suicide. The student is in extreme distress, is incoherent or unresponsive, or is causing extreme distress to others.

- Physical violence
- Implying or making direct threats of harm to self or others
- Unprovoked anger
- Assignments with themes of extreme violence, hopelessness, rage, isolation, despair, suicidal ideation
- Stalking or harassment

 **CALL AUPD - 202-885-3636**

### SITUATIONS REQUIRING ASSISTANCE

This is not an emergency; however, the student is showing signs of distress and there may be concerns impacting multiple areas of the student's life.

- Sharing personal distress (loss, financial concerns)
- Unusual response to events (panic/excessive tears)
- Essays or creative work that may indicate concerning feelings
- Verbal aggression (taunting, badgering, intimidation)
- Concern expressed by peers
- Withdrawing from peers or academics
- Excessive fatigue or atypical sleep patterns
- Significant agitation in meetings

 **SUBMIT A CARE REFERRAL**

### STRESSED vs. DISTRESSED STUDENTS



**Stress** is a normal reaction to the pressures and demands of being a college student. Stress can be challenging, but it is often manageable, short-lived, and results in a fulfilling or rewarding feeling. Ways to support students to manage their stress include: encouraging self care and mindfulness; suggesting outreach to trusted friends or family; spending time outside and practicing relaxation techniques.

**Distress** can occur when a person feels unable to cope with their feelings, ultimately resulting in negative impacts to many areas of a person's life including their functionality.



The **CARE (Communicate, Assess, Refer, Educate) Network** exists to recognize and monitor AU community members experiencing various forms of crisis or concern, enabling timely referrals that support early intervention.

Referrals to the CARE Network can be submitted online by anyone at any time for any concern. Once submitted, the Office of the Dean of Students processes the referral, and it is assigned to a DOS representative who then outreaches to the identified individual to offer guidance, resources, and support.



SCAN THE QR CODE OR  
CLICK **HERE** TO  
SUBMIT A CARE REFERRAL

