Responding to Student Emergencies

Although emergency situations are rare, immediate and decisive action is necessary when they do occur. Generally, a psychological emergency involves one or more of the following conditions:

• A suicide attempt, gesture, threat, or stated intention
• A homicidal attempt, gesture, threat, or stated intention
• Behavior posing a threat to self
• Behavior posing a threat to others
• Loss of contact with reality
• Inability to care for self

In the event of an emergency, it is helpful to follow these basic guidelines:

• Stay calm as this will help you respond more effectively and also help to reduce the student’s anxiety or agitation
• If possible, provide a quiet private place for the student to rest while further steps are taken
• Talk to the student in a clear straight-forward manner
• If the student appears to be dangerous to self or others, do not leave the student unattended
• Make arrangements for appropriate intervention or aid

The primary campus resources for responding to mental health emergencies are Counseling and Psychological Services and the campus police. The following options are available to you:

• Phone consultation through CAPS is available 24 hrs including weekends and holidays at (831) 459-2628.
• You can walk the student over to CAPS for crisis consultation to the health center hours between 8:30am and 4:30 pm weekdays.
• If you have any immediate safety concerns or if you need immediate assistance, call 911 for the UCSC.
• Be prepared to provide as much information as possible about the student and the situation to the campus resource you contact

(Adapted from UCD)
Supporting Students in Distress: Helpful Tips for UCSC Staff and Faculty
Counseling & Psychological Services

Signs of Distress

- Nervousness and/or agitation
- Increased irritability, undue aggressive or abrasive behavior
- Excessive procrastination, poorly prepared work
- Infrequent class attendance, little or no work completed
- Depression, lack of energy
- Marked change in personal hygiene
- Withdrawal, fearfulness
- Dependency (e.g., the student who hangs around you or makes excessive appointments to see you)
- Indecisiveness, confusion
- Bizarre, alarming, or dangerous behaviors

Warning Signs of Potentially Suicidal Behavior

- Expression of desire to kill him/herself or wishing to be dead
- Presence of a plan to harm self
- Means are available to carry out a plan to harm him/herself
- Suicide plan is specific as to time, place, notes already written
- High stress due to grief, illness, loss of new job, academic difficulty, etc.
- Symptoms of depression are present, such as loss of appetite, sleep, severe hopelessness or agitation, feeling of exhaustion, guilt/shame, loss of interest in school, work or sexual activities, change or deterioration of hygiene
- Intoxication or drug abuse (including alcohol)
- Previous suicide attempt by the individual, a friend or a family member
- Isolation, loneliness or lack of support
- Withdrawal or agitation
- Preparation to leave, giving away possessions, packing belongings
- Secretive behavior
- Major mood changes, e.g. elation of person who has been depressed, extroversion of previously quiet person
- Indirect comments implying death is an option, e.g., person implies he/she may not be around in the future