

# Students in Distress: Graduate or Undergraduate

## A Resource Guide for Faculty, Staff, and TAs

### Warning Signals

Students may demonstrate behavior that indicates distress and a need for assistance. A combination of several factors more than a single circumstance is most likely to indicate a problem:

- Apparent memory loss or difficulty concentrating
- Cheating, rule breaking, or defiance
- Poor organizational skills or trouble with note taking
- Bizarre, aggressive, or morbid comments or written content
- Expressions of feeling hopeless, helpless, guilty, and/or worthless
- Self-injury or other self-destructive behavior
- Chronic fatigue, falling asleep in class
- Symptoms of being easily distracted or a tendency to daydream
- Poor or declining physical appearance, hygiene, and grooming
- Hyperactivity or rapid, pressured speech
- Extreme boredom, negativism, defensiveness, and secretiveness
- Erratic behavior, sudden mood swings, inappropriate anger, hostility, and irritability
- Talk of suicide or harm to self or others
- Signs of intoxication/substance abuse

For more information, links to additional training, and other resources, visit: [vu.edu/facultyandstaff](https://vu.edu/facultyandstaff)

### Responding to Warning Signals

#### Imminent: Threat of Harm/Life Endangering Situation

In a situation where there is an imminent threat of harm to self or to others (suicidal statements or suicide attempt, loss of consciousness, violent behavior or threats), **it is imperative that immediate action be taken.** It is of utmost importance to ensure the safety of the student or others.

**Call VPD at 615-42(1-1911), or 911, immediately.**

#### Urgent: No Imminent Threat of Harm

Substance abuse, eating disorders, or verbal abuse require intervention because of the potential for future harm. You may need to be persistent in conveying your concern. Concerned individuals may call the Psychological and Counseling Center at 615-32(2-2571) for advice and consultation.

#### Distress: Non-urgent or Minimally Disruptive Behavior

Elicit feedback and support regarding your concerns from the Dean of Students, the A&S Dean's Office, or other campus resources (below).

#### If you decide to express your concern to the student:

- Choose a place where you may talk quietly without interruption, at a time convenient for both of you.
- Be honest and focus on the specific signs that alerted you to a possible problem.
- Remain calm, compassionate, and willing to listen.
- Convey your willingness to help.
- Be aware that the student could respond in a variety of ways. Don't interpret negative, indifferent, or hostile responses as a wasted effort. A decision to seek help often takes time.
- Provide the student with the phone number of relevant resources (below). Reiterate that the services are free and confidential. Occasionally, it may be helpful to assist a student with making a contact.

### Need assistance or ideas for a difficult student-related situation?

Student wellness resources are not only for students. Assistance is available for faculty, staff, and TAs with questions about how to approach a student about a problem, and for those who wish to receive professional input about handling a difficult situation.

Available resources include counsel for ethical, medical, and legal issues related to students, as well as assistance in determining best courses of action for all parties involved. Contact G.L. Black in the office of the Dean of Students for more information. It is acceptable, and in some cases advisable, to consult with the office of the Dean of Students before raising an issue with a student.

### Resources and Contacts

Call first for  
immediate help

#### Medical emergency

Call 911  
The nearest emergency room to campus is at the VU Medical Center Complex on 22nd Avenue South.

#### On-campus emergency

Call 911 or call campus police:  
615-421-1911

#### Off-campus emergency

Call 911

#### Psychological and Counseling Center (PCC)

615-322-2571  
[Medschool.vanderbilt.edu/pcc](https://medschool.vanderbilt.edu/pcc)  
Location: 2015 Terrace Place  
(across street from Baker Building)  
Urgent Psychological Crisis/Triage:  
Walk-in during business hours, or call  
615-322-2571 at any time.

#### Project Safe Hotline

Staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week  
615-322-SAFE (7233)  
[Vanderbilt.edu/projectsafe](https://vanderbilt.edu/projectsafe)

#### Dean of Students

First point of contact for non-emergency situations wherein a direct referral to other resources listed here might be insufficient. Contact this office when it is unclear which resource(s) are appropriate for a particular student, or when complex ethical, medical, and/or legal factors may be involved.  
615-32(2-6400)  
[Vanderbilt.edu/deanofstudents](https://vanderbilt.edu/deanofstudents)

#### Student Health Center

615-32(2-2427)

#### University Chaplain and Religious Life

615-32(2-2457)

#### Wellness Programs & Alcohol Education

615-32(2-0480)

#### Equal Opportunity, Affirmative Action, and Disability Services

615-32(2-4705)

#### Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex (LGBTQI) Life

615-32(2-3330)

#### Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center

615-32(2-4843)

#### Additional Local Resources

Alcoholics Anonymous, Middle Tennessee  
Central Office Hotline: 615-831-1050

Nashville Crisis Hotline: 615-244-7444

Nashville Rape and Sexual Abuse Hotline:  
800-879-1999

OutCentral, Greater Nashville's LGBT  
Center: (615) 864-8182

