



Assisting the Emotionally Distressed Student

A guide for Staff, Faculty,
and Administrators at
Imperial Valley College

2013-2014

v.2

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Acknowledgements

This guide is a result of the collaborative efforts of many community college educators throughout the state dedicated to providing an optimal learning environment for all students.

INTRODUCTION

August 16, 2013

Dear Colleagues,

Attending college is a journey that brings moments of excitement, challenge, and reward for many of our students. At times, however, our students' educational path is impeded by psychological, financial, social, and family pressure that overwhelms many, even the well-adjusted student.

At Imperial Valley College, we have several programs in place to address our students' myriad needs. Included in these programs are ongoing mental health counseling, crisis support, campus safety, student services, and student development.

Additionally, IVC has recently created a Student of Concern Team, comprised of campus members trained and experienced in working with students who pose a risk to the safety of the campus community. The Crisis Team is also still in existence, and will be called upon by Campus Security as needed.

We, as faculty, staff, and administrators, are often a student's first point of contact when s/he is experiencing emotional distress. This guide was created to provide you with resources in the event that you encounter a student who demonstrates a need for support outside of your scope of duties. If you are unsure about how to handle a situation on campus involving a student, please feel free to contact any of the individuals on page 19 for guidance.

On behalf of our students, we thank you for your ongoing support of student success and safety.

Warm Regards,

The Student of Concern Team

Sergio Lopez, Tim Nakamura, Ted Ceasar, and Emily Bill

YOUR ROLE

As a faculty, staff or administrator interacting with students, you are in an excellent position to recognize behavior changes that characterize the emotionally distressed student. A student's behavior, especially if it is inconsistent with your previous observations, could well constitute an inarticulate attempt to draw attention to his/her plight--"a cry for help". Your ability to recognize the signs of emotional distress and to acknowledge your concerns directly to him/her is often noted by students as the most significant factor in their successful problem resolution.

SIGNS OF DISTRESS

- Missed classes/assignments
- Inability to concentrate
- Confusion
- Persistent worrying
- Social isolation
- Increased irritability
- Restlessness
- Bizarre behavior
- Procrastination
- Dangerous behavior
- Disheveled appearance
- Mood swings
- Indecisiveness

CRISIS INTERVENTION

The Student of Concern Team’s major goal is to link students of concern to campus and community resources. This includes assisting in an **Imminent, Urgent, or Uncertain** situation involving anyone on campus. The Student of Concern team also works with the Crisis Team members, who are trained and experienced in crisis intervention.

If there is an Imminent, Urgent, or Uncertain situation, a call for intervention must be made. When in doubt, err on the side of making that call.

In the case of imminent danger to a campus community member, contact 9-1-1 and Campus Security (760) 483-7411.

For Urgent situations, contact Campus Security at (760) 483-7411. Campus Security will then contact the appropriate Team (e.g. SOC, Crisis) or Department (e.g. Student Health, Mental Health Counseling Services) for further assistance. All other non-emergency or urgent concerns necessitate a referral using the Student of Concern form (see p. 6).

EXAMPLES OF CRISES

| Imminent Danger | Urgent | Uncertain |
|---|--|---|
| Call <u>9-1-1</u> and Campus Security <u>760-483-7411</u> | Call Campus Security <u>760-483-7411</u> | Submit Student of Concern form or Contact Mental Health Counseling Services <u>760-355-6196</u> |
| Threats of Physical Violence | Injury Due to Medical Condition | Recent Death of Friend |
| Witness to Physical Assault | Concern for Life: of Self or Other | Recent Death of Family Member |
| Witness to an Accident | Abuse: Child, Spousal, Elder | Anger or Hostility |
| Immediate Threats of Suicide | Sexual Assault/Harassment | Anxiety/Depression |
| | Under the Influence | |
| | Erratic Behavior | |

MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELING SERVICES

IVC's Mental Health Counseling Services are designed for students who can benefit from a short-term mental health intervention. If the initial assessor determines the student requires longer term counseling, s/he will likely be referred to a more appropriate off-campus resource.

Early intervention is always preferable to crisis intervention.

When you do discuss a referral for Mental Health Counseling Services with a student, it is helpful for the student to hear in a clear, concise manner your concerns and why you think counseling would be helpful. Share information about on-campus services available: all services are free to regularly enrolled students; all discussions are confidential except when the student presents a danger to self or others or when the counselor has reasonable suspicion that child or elder abuse is occurring. **These situations mandate reporting** (see Administrative Policy 3518 <http://www.imperial.edu/about/college-governance/board-of-trustees/board-policies-and-administrative-procedures/>).

Placing the initiative on the student to seek an appointment increases his/her personal responsibility and commitment to come in for counseling. There may be urgent times, however, when it is best for you to call to make an appointment with him/her or to accompany the student to the Student Health Center.

To refer a student for Mental Health Counseling Services, please instruct the student to complete a Mental Health Counseling Request form located in the Student Health Center. A Mental Health Counseling Services provider will contact the student within 48 business hours.

STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES HOURS AND CONTACT INFO

Student Health Services Hours:

M-TH 8:30 am to 4:30 pm (closed for lunch from 12-12:30), FRI 8:30 am to 12:30 pm

Location:

Room 2109 (Inside the Mel Wendrick Access Center)

Phone Contact:

Student Health Nurse: 760-355-6310

Mental Health Counseling Services Clinicians: 760-355-6196

STUDENT OF CONCERN TEAM & REFERRAL FORM

STUDENT OF CONCERN TEAM MISSION

The mission of the Imperial Valley College Student of Concern Team (SOC) is to promote a safe and healthy learning environment at IVC by coordinating a response to the student whose behavior raises concern for the health and safety of themselves or other members of the campus community.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the SOC team is to provide consultation to staff, faculty, and administration focused on prevention and early intervention in campus situations involving students experiencing extreme distress or engaging in harmful or disruptive behaviors. The Team will provide collaborative support and develop strategies to address concerns regarding students' well-being or behavior that is potentially harmful to self and/or others or is disruptive and/or threatening. This team will regularly assess these situations in the college community and will recommend action in accordance with existing college policy.

Typical consultations may involve students with suicide risk, eating disorders, alcohol and drug problems or aggressive/disruptive behavior. Behavior of concern may be demonstrated physically, verbally, or in writing.

STUDENT OF CONCERN REFERRAL FORM

If you have identified a student in need of assistance from the Team, *but the situation does not warrant an immediate or emergency response*, you must complete a Student of Concern Referral Form. This form can be found at the bottom of the IVC website's main page.

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380 E. Aten Rd., Imperial, CA 92251 | Main Campus Phone: 760-352-8320

For Employment Opportunities, please visit www.imperial.edu/jobs | [Website Problems?](#)

[AlertU Emergency Alerts Signup](#) | [Student Complaint Policy](#) | [Campus Smoking Policy](#) | [Student of Concern Form](#) | [IVC Facebook Page](#)

Please fill the form out as completely as possible. **Please note that the form is not to be used for emergency assistance.**

IDENTIFYING STUDENTS IN NEED OF ASSISTANCE

THE DEPRESSED STUDENT

Depression is part of a natural emotional and physical response to life's ups and downs. With the busy and demanding life of a college student, most students will experience periods of reactive depression in their college careers. When the depressive symptoms become so extreme or enduring that they begin to interfere with the student's ability to function in school, work or social environment, the student will come to your attention and be in need of assistance.

Because faculty and staff have varied and ongoing opportunities to observe and interact with students, they are often the first to recognize that a student is in distress. Look for a pattern of these indicators:

- Tearfulness/general emotionality
- Markedly diminished performance
- Dependency (a student who makes excessive requests for your time)
- Infrequent class attendance
- Lack of energy/motivation
- Increased anxiety/test anxiety/performance anxiety
- Irritability
- Deterioration in personal hygiene
- Significant weight loss or gain
- Alcohol or drug use

Students experiencing depression often respond well to a small amount of attention for a short period of time. Early intervention increases the chances of the student's rapid return to optimal performance.

Do:

- ✓ Let the student know you're aware she/he is feeling down and you would like to help.
- ✓ Encourage the student to discuss how she/he is feeling with someone they trust.
- ✓ Offer to refer him/her for Mental Health Counseling, and submit a Student of Concern Referral form.

Don't:

- ✓ Minimize the student's feelings (e.g. "Don't worry.")
- ✓ Bombard the student with "fix it" solutions or advice.
- ✓ Chastise the student for poor or incomplete work.
- ✓ Be afraid to ask the student whether he/she is suicidal.

THE SUICIDAL STUDENT

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among college students.

It is important to view all suicidal comments as serious and make appropriate referrals.

High-risk indicators include:

- Feelings of hopelessness
- Helplessness and futility
- A severe loss or threat of loss
- A detailed suicide plan, a history of a previous attempt
- History of alcohol or drug abuse
- Feelings of alienation and isolation.

Do:

- ✓ Take the student seriously – 80 percent of suicides give a warning of their intent.
- ✓ Be direct – ask if the student is suicidal, if he/she has a plan and if he/she has the means to carry out that plan. Exploring this with the student actually decreases the impulse to use it.
- ✓ Be available to listen.
- ✓ Advise 9-1-1 and Campus Security if threat of suicide is imminent.

Don't:

- ✓ Assure the student that you are his/her best friend (it is ok to agree you are a stranger, but even strangers can be concerned.)
- ✓ Be overly warm and nurturing.
- ✓ Flatter or participate in their games; you don't know their rules.
- ✓ Be cute or humorous.
- ✓ Challenge or agree with any mistaken or illogical beliefs.
- ✓ Be ambiguous.

THE ANXIOUS STUDENT

Anxiety is a normal response to a perceived danger or threat to one's well being.

For some students the cause of their anxiety will be clear but for others it is difficult to pinpoint.

Regardless of the cause, the resulting symptoms may be experienced as rapid heart palpitations, chest pain or discomfort, dizziness, sweating, trembling or shaking, and cold, clammy hands. The student may also complain of difficulty concentrating, always being "on the edge," having difficulty making decisions or being too fearful to take action. In rare cases, a student may experience a panic attack in which the physical symptoms occur spontaneously and intensely in such a way that the student may fear he/she is dying. The following guidelines remain appropriate in most cases.

Do:

- ✓ Let them discuss their feelings and thoughts. Often this alone relieves a great deal of pressure.
- ✓ Provide reassurance.
- ✓ Remain calm.
- ✓ Be clear and directive.
- ✓ Provide a safe and quiet environment until the symptoms subside (refer student to Health Services for rest).
- ✓ Offer to refer him/her for Mental Health Counseling, and submit a Student of Concern Referral form.

Don't:

- ✓ Minimize the perceived threat to which the student is reacting.
- ✓ Take responsibility for their emotional state.
- ✓ Overwhelm them with information or ideas to "fix" their condition.

THE STUDENT IN POOR CONTACT WITH REALITY

These students have difficulty distinguishing fantasy from reality, the dream from the waking state. Their thinking is typically illogical, confused or irrational; their emotional responses may be incongruent or inappropriate; and their behavior may be bizarre and disturbing. This student may elicit alarm or fear from others, they are generally not dangerous and are more frightened and overwhelmed by you than you are by them.

If you cannot make sense of their conversation, they may be in trouble.

Do:

- ✓ Respond with warmth and kindness, but with firm reasoning.
- ✓ Remove extra stimulation from the environment, (turn off the radio; step outside of a noisy classroom).
- ✓ Acknowledge your concerns, state that you can see they need help.
- ✓ Activate the Crisis Team by contacting Campus Security at 483-7411.
- ✓ Acknowledge their feelings or fears without supporting the misperceptions, e.g., "I understand you think someone is following you, but I don't see anyone and I believe you're safe."
- ✓ Focus on the "here and now."
- ✓ Ask for specific information about the student's awareness of time, place and destination.
- ✓ Speak to their healthy side, which they have. It's OK to laugh and joke when appropriate.

Don't:

- ✓ Argue or try to convince them of the irrationality of their thinking. This commonly produces a stronger defense of the false perceptions.
- ✓ Play along, e.g., "Oh yeah, I hear the voices (or see the devil)."
- ✓ Encourage further discussion of the delusional processes.
- ✓ Demand, command, or order.
- ✓ Expect customary emotional responses.

THE VERBALLY AGGRESSIVE STUDENT

Students may become verbally abusive when in frustrating situations that they see as being beyond their control.

Anger and frustration may result in explosive outbursts or ongoing belligerent, hostile behavior - this is student's way of gaining power and control in an otherwise out-of-control experience.

It is important to remember that the student is generally not angry with you personally, but is angry at his/her world and you are the object of pent-up frustrations. This behavior is often associated with the use of alcohol and other drugs.

Do:

- ✓ Acknowledge their anger and frustration, e.g., "I hear how angry you are."
- ✓ Rephrase what they are saying and identify their emotion, e.g., "I can see how upset you are because you feel your rights are being violated and nobody will listen."
- ✓ Reduce stimulation; invite the person to a quiet place if this is comfortable and the place is safe
- ✓ Allow them to vent, get the feelings out, and tell you what is upsetting them; listen.
- ✓ Be directive and firm about the behaviors you will accept, e.g., "Please stand back, you're too close." "I cannot listen to you when you yell and scream at me that way." "Let's step outside to discuss this further."
- ✓ Activate response by contacting Campus Security (760-483-7411)
- ✓ Remember, Safety First.
- ✓ If threat increases call 9-1-1.
- ✓ Prohibit the student from entering your work area/classroom/office if behavior is repeated.

Don't:

- ✓ Get into an argument or shouting match.
- ✓ Become hostile or punitive, e.g., "You can't talk to me that way!"
- ✓ Press for explanations for their behavior.
- ✓ Ignore the situation.
- ✓ Touch the student.

THE VIOLENT STUDENT

Violence due to emotional distress is rare.

It typically occurs when the student's level of frustration has been so intense or of such an enduring nature as to erode the student's entire emotional controls.

The adage, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," best applies here. This behavior is often associated with the use of alcohol and other drugs.

Do:

- ✓ Prevent total frustration and helplessness by quickly and calmly acknowledging the intensity of the situation, e.g., "I can see you're really upset."
- ✓ Explain clearly and directly what behaviors are acceptable, e.g., "You certainly have the right to be angry but breaking things is not okay."
- ✓ Stay safe; maintain easy access to a door; keep furniture between you and the student.
- ✓ Immediately seek assistance; contact 9-1-1 and Campus Security at 760-483-7411.

Don't:

- ✓ Ignore warning signs that the person is about to explode, e.g., yelling, screaming, clenched fists, threats.
- ✓ Threaten or corner the student.
- ✓ Touch the student.

THE DEMANDING PASSIVE STUDENT

Typically even the utmost time and energy given to these students is not enough. They often seek to control your time and unconsciously believe the amount of time received is a reflection of their worth.

You may find yourself increasingly drained and feeling responsible for this student in a way that is beyond your normal involvement.

It is important that this student be connected with many sources of support on-campus and in the community in general.

Do:

- ✓ Let them make their own decisions.
- ✓ Set firm and clear limits on your personal time and involvement.
- ✓ Offer referrals to other resources on and off campus.
- ✓ During repeated interactions stand while speaking with student; limit discussion to 3 minutes.
- ✓ Offer to refer him/her for Mental Health Counseling, and submit a Student of Concern Referral form.

Don't:

- ✓ Get trapped into giving advice, special conditions, etc.
- ✓ Avoid the student as an alternative to setting and enforcing limits.

THE STUDENT UNDER THE INFLUENCE

Alcohol is the most widely used psychoactive drug. It is common to find alcohol abusers in college populations also abusing other drugs, both prescription and illicit. Patterns of use are affected by fads and peer pressure.

Currently, alcohol is the preferred drug on college campuses.

The effects of alcohol on the user are well known to most of us. Alcohol abuse by a student is most often identified by faculty. Irresponsible, unpredictable behavior affecting the learning situation (i.e., drunk and disorderly in class), or a combination of the health and social impairments associated with alcohol abuse noticeably sabotages student performance. Because of denial that exists in most substance abusers, it is important to express your concern to the student in terms of specific changes in behavior/performance rather than terms of suspicions about alcohol/drug use.

Do:

- ✓ Confront the student with the behavior that is of concern
- ✓ Address the substance abuse issue if the student is open and willing.
- ✓ Contact Campus Security if you encounter a student under the influence on campus.
- ✓ Offer concern for the student's overall well-being.

Don't:

- ✓ Convey judgment or criticism about the student's substance abuse.
- ✓ Make allowances for the student's irresponsible behavior.
- ✓ Ignore signs of intoxication in the classroom.

THE SUSPICIOUS STUDENT

Typically these students complain about something other than their psychological difficulties. They are tense, anxious, mistrustful, loners, and have few friends.

They tend to interpret minor oversights as significant personal rejection and often overreact to insignificant occurrences.

They see themselves as the focal point of everyone's behavior and everything that happens has special meaning to them. They are overly concerned with fairness and being treated equally. Feelings of worthlessness and inadequacy underlie most of their behavior. They seem capable and bright.

Do:

- ✓ Express compassion without intimate friendship.
- ✓ Remember that suspicious students have trouble with closeness and warmth.
- ✓ Be firm, steady, punctual, and consistent.
- ✓ Be specific and clear regarding the standards of behavior you expect.
- ✓ Offer to refer him/her for Mental Health Counseling, and submit a Student of Concern Referral form.

Don't:

- ✓ Assure the student that you are his/her friend (it is ok to agree you are a stranger, but even strangers can be concerned).
- ✓ Be overly warm and nurturing.
- ✓ Flatter or participate in their games; you don't know their rules.
- ✓ Be cute or humorous.
- ✓ Challenge or agree with any mistaken or illogical beliefs.
- ✓ Be ambiguous.

THE SEXUALLY HARASSED STUDENT

Sexual harassment involves unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct; it is usually found in the context of a relationship of unequal power, rank or status.

It does not matter that the person's intention was not to harass. It is the effect it has on others that counts.

As long as the conduct interferes with a student's academic performance or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive learning environment, it is considered sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment usually is not an isolated one-time-only case but a repeated pattern of behavior that may include: Comments about one's body or clothing. Questions about one's sexual behavior. Demeaning references to one's gender. Sexually oriented jokes. Conversations filled with innuendoes and double meanings. Displaying of sexually suggestive pictures or objects. Repeated non-reciprocated demands for dates or sex.

Sexual harassment of students is defined by the California Education Code, Section 89535. Common reactions by students who have been harassed is to doubt their perceptions, wondering if it was a joke, did it really happen or, if in some way, they have brought it on themselves. A student may begin to participate less in the classroom, avoid or drop classes, or even change majors.

Do:

- ✓ Listen carefully to the student, validating her/his experience.
- ✓ Separate your personal biases from your professional role - maintain objectivity.
- ✓ Report this situation to Campus Security at 760-483-7411
- ✓ Encourage the student to approach the person directly or in writing to let him or her know that the behavior is unwelcome.
- ✓ Encourage the student to keep a log or find a witness.
- ✓ Help student seek informal advice through a department chair, supervisor or advisor.
- ✓ Offer to refer him/her for Mental Health Counseling

Don't:

- ✓ Do nothing. Taking no action invalidates the student's already shaky perception and puts the college in a vulnerable position should this behavior continue.
- ✓ Overreact.

GUIDELINES FOR INTERVENTION

Openly acknowledge to students that you are aware of their distress, you are sincerely concerned about their welfare, the welfare of those around them, and that you are willing to help. Exploring their alternatives can have a profound effect.

We encourage you, whenever possible, to speak directly and honestly to a student when you sense that s/he is in academic and/or personal distress.

1. Request to see the student in private. This may help minimize embarrassment and defensiveness.
2. Briefly acknowledge your observations of them (specific to behaviors and or performance); express your concerns directly and honestly.
3. Listen carefully to what the student may be troubled about and try to see the issues from his/her point of view without necessarily agreeing or disagreeing.
4. Attempt to identify the student's problem or concern as well as your concerns or uneasiness.
5. Unusual and inappropriate behaviors should not be ignored. Comment directly on what you have observed.
6. Involve yourself in the process as it impacts your immediate work area and situation. At times, in an attempt to reach or help a troubled student, you may become more involved than time or skill permits.
7. **You are legally responsible in terms of the mandatory reporting of child abuse and elder abuse** (see Administrative Policy 3518 <http://www.imperial.edu/about/college-governance/board-of-trustees/board-policies-and-administrative-procedures/>)

Extending oneself to others always involves some risk-taking but it can be a gratifying experience when kept within realistic limits.

CRISIS SUPPORT

STUDENT OF CONCERN TEAM

Emily Betty Bill, MA, LPCC
Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor (LPC #315)
760-355-6196, Rm 2109

Ted Ceasar
Dean of Counseling
760-355-6311, Bldg. 100

Sergio A. Lopez
Dean of Student Affairs and Enrollment Services
760-355-6455, Bldg. 1000

Tim Nakamura
Director of Campus Safety
760-355-6295

MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELING SERVICES

Emily Betty Bill, MA, LPCC
Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor (LPC #315)
760-355-6196, Rm 2109

STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES

Aida Valdez, RN
760-355-6310, Rm 2109

CRISIS TEAM MEMBERS

Team members are activated by calling Campus Security at 760-483-7411.

| | | |
|--------------|-------------------|---------------|
| Ted Ceasar | Mary Lofgren | Raquel Garcia |
| Emily Bill | Jose Plascencia | |
| Sergio Lopez | Lorraine Mazeroll | |
| Robin Staton | Krista Byrd | |

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

| RESOURCE | PHONE | AVAILABILITY |
|--|---------------------|-----------------------|
| National Suicide Prevention Lifeline | 800-273-8255 | 24/7 |
| Imperial County Behavioral Health Crisis Line | 800-817-5292 | 24/7 |
| National Sexual Assault Hotline | 800-656-4673 | 24/7 |
| Imperial County Behavioral Health | 760-482-4000 | M-F, 8am-5p |
| Adult Protective Services | 760-336-3945 | M-F, 8a-12p and 1p-5p |
| Child Protective Services | 760-337-7700 | M-F, 8a-5p |
| Imperial County Victim/Witness Assistance | 760-336-3930 | M-F, 8a-5p |
| Imperial County Public Health Department | 760-482-4438 | M-F, 8a-5p |