Recognizing and Responding to Students in Distress

If you are concerned about a student, do not let uncertainty stop you from taking action. UMass Boston is committed to supporting students in distress. This folder has been developed to help you recognize, respond to, refer, and report troubling student behavior.

WHERE DO I START?

Stay Safe
When a student displays threatening or potentially violent behavior, the safety of you, the student, and the campus community are the top priorities. Coordinated professional care and follow-up are effective in preventing suicide and violence.

Play It Safe
If you are concerned about a student, consult your department chair, supervisor, or the Dean of Students Office. Promptly report safety concerns and Student Code of Conduct violations.

De-escalate and Provide Hope
Distressed students can be sensitive. Avoid threatening, potentially embarrassing, or intimidating statements. Help students connect with the resources they need.

Clarify Expectations
Set early limits on disruptive or self-destructive behavior. Remind students verbally or in writing of standards/expectations for conduct, and of possible consequences for disorderly behavior. Refer to the Student Code of Conduct and the Classroom Conduct Policy.

Listen Sensitive and Carefully
Vulnerable students need to be heard and helped. They may find it difficult to articulate their distress. Ask directly if they feel their functioning is impaired or if they have thoughts of harming or killing themselves or others.

Share What You Know
State and federal laws and university policies mandate reporting in many crisis situations. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) allows faculty and staff to report student health and safety concerns to relevant campus offices trained to handle situations with sensitivity and care. Taking appropriate action does not violate a student’s privacy.

Consult to Coordinate a Timely Response
Consult with appropriate university personnel to coordinate care for the student. Always report serious or persistent behavior to the Dean of Students Office as soon as possible. Misconduct may be formally addressed through the Student Conduct process, and additional campus resources may be necessary to help reduce or eliminate disruptive behaviors.

Follow Up
Once you have referred a student in distress, it is helpful (but not obligatory) for you to follow up in their ongoing care. Your firsthand knowledge and personal connections to this student are invaluable in understanding and appropriately responding to the student’s situation.

Take Care
Helping a troubled student can take a toll on your personal well-being. Make sure you acknowledge what you’ve been through and receive adequate support.

How to Help

Talking with someone in distress can be challenging. These tips can make it easier to reach out:

Start
Find a quiet, comfortable place to talk. Don’t promise to keep your discussions secret.

Connect
Pay attention and avoid distractions.

Ask
Use phrases that show you want to help. “I wanted to check in, because you haven’t seemed yourself lately.”

Listen
Take in what the person is saying without judgment or interruptions. Let them know you believe them. Paraphrase their words to make sure you fully understand.

Ask questions
“When did you begin feeling like this?” “How can I best support you?” Avoid saying: “I know how you feel.”

Offer hope
Let the person know you care and that help is available. Before ending the conversation, agree together on a next step, like a follow-up conversation or professional help.

Know your limits
A situation may be more than you can handle. Get help from a crisis line or a mental health or medical professional. If the person is reluctant to call, offer to sit with them while they do, or call for them.

Act in an emergency
If someone is in danger, call the UMass Boston Police Department on campus at 617.287.1212, or 911 off campus. If it is safe to do so, stay with the person in distress until help arrives.
Maintaining Compliance with State and Federal Laws and University Policies

UMass Boston has adopted numerous policies that protect and support our students, as well as our faculty and staff. Such policies include the following:

- Academic Honesty Policy
- Clery Act
- Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)
- Hazing
- Tobacco-Free Campus Policy
- Nondiscrimination Policy
- Student Code of Conduct
- Title IX
- University Alcohol, Marijuana, and Drug Policies

More information on these policies as well as others can be found at umb.edu/life_on_campus/policies.

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39% of students in college experience a significant mental health issue

50% of cases of mental health issues begin by age 14; 75% begin by age 24

2/3 of students with anxiety or depression don’t seek treatment

www.activeminds.org/about-mental-health/statistics

Report online at www.umb.edu/deanofstudents.
Building Networks of Support

College support networks help students cope with stress, overcome challenges, and connect to helpful resources. Encourage students to develop support networks that include advisors, support groups, and counselors. The following types of help are available:

### IMMEDIATE SUPPORT

- **UMass Boston Police Department**
  - 617.287.1212
  - public.safety@umb.edu
- **Office of Civil Rights and Title IX**
  - 617.287.7391
  - civilrights.titleix@umb.edu
- **Counseling Center**
  - 617.287.5690
  - Counseling.Center@umb.edu
- **Justice Bridge Legal Center**
  - 617.287.3190
  - u-access@umb.edu
- **University Health Services**
  - 617.287.5660
  - uhs@umb.edu
- **Dean of Students Office**
  - 617.287.3800
  - dean.students@umb.edu
- **U-ACCESS**
  - 617.287.3190
  - u-access@umb.edu
- **Ross Center for Disability Services**
  - 617.287.7430
  - ross.center@umb.edu

### COUNSELING AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

- **UHS Support and Therapy Groups**
  - 617.287.5690
  - Counseling.Center@umb.edu
- **UMB-UR-BEST**
  - UMB-UR-BEST@umb.edu
- **Interfaith Campus Ministry**
  - 617.287.5838
  - interfaith.campusmin@umb.edu

### ADDITIONAL ON-CAMPUS SUPPORT

- **Center for Student Multicultural Affairs**
  - 617.287.7844
  - mc.affairs@umb.edu
- **Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**
  - 617.287.4827
  - diversity@umb.edu
- **Women’s Center**
  - 617.287.7986
  - womens.center@umb.edu
- **Queer Student Center**
  - 617.287.7844
  - QSC@umb.edu
- **Veterans Affairs**
  - 617.287.5866
  - veterans@umb.edu
- **Office of New Student and Family Programs**
  - 617.287.6481
  - orientation@umb.edu
- **International Student and Scholar Office**
  - 617.287.6481
  - iss@umb.edu
- **Office of Off-Campus Living**
  - 617.287.6373
  - offcampus@umb.edu

### NATIONAL RESOURCES

- **Crisis Text Line**
  - text HOME to 741741
- **GLBT Peer Counseling National Hotline**
  - 1.888.843.4564
  - help@GLBThotline.org
- **National Drug Helpline**
  - 1.888.633.3239
- **National Eating Disorders Association**
  - 1.800.931.2237
- **National Council on Problem Gambling Helpline**
  - 1.800.522.4700
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**
  - 1.800.273.TALK (8255)
- **RAINN (Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network)**
  - 1.800.553.4357
  - SAMHSANewInfo@samhsa.hhs.gov
- **Trans Lifeline**
  - 1.877.565.8860
  - contact@translifeline.org
- **TrevorLifeline (LGBTQIA + crisis intervention)**
  - 1.866.488.7386

### Dean of Students Office

University of Massachusetts Boston
100 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, MA 02125-3393
- **P** 617.287.5800
- **F** 617.287.5811
- dean.students@umb.edu
- umb.edu/deanofstudents