



# Supporting the Emotionally Distressed Student Guide

pressure depression afraid  
nervous  
down worry **anxious** concern  
stress **tension** uneasiness emotional  
panic **apprehensive** restless  
angry alone sadness frustrated

Courtesy of the Laney College Care Team

# Your Role

As a faculty, staff or administrator interacting with students, you are in an excellent position to recognize behavioral 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 their plight—a “cry for help”. Your ability to recognize the signs of emotional distress and to acknowledge your concerns directly to them is often noted by students as the most significant factor in their successful problem resolution.

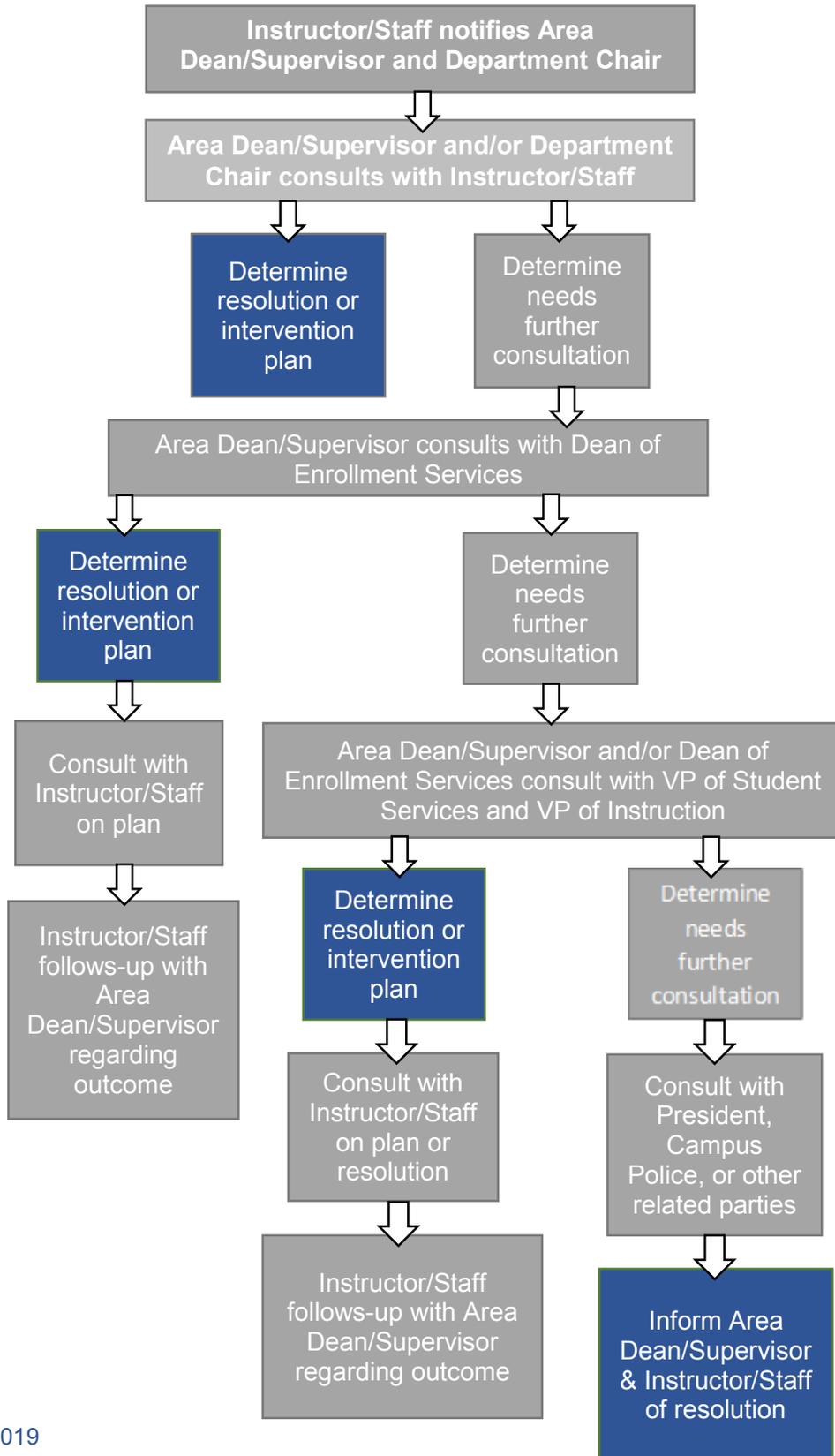
## SIGNS OF DISTRESS:

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

## GENERAL STEPS FOR INTERVENTION:

1. **MEET**- Set up a private meeting with the student.
2. **ASK**- Inquire about their well-being.
3. **REFER**- Refer to appropriate services.

## Student Behavioral Concern Procedures



# Crisis Assessment

<b>When to Refer to Peralta Police</b>	<b>When to Consult with Department Chair &amp; Dean/Supervisor</b>
Possession of a gun, knife, or other object being used in a threatening manner	Withdrawn behavior of increasing concern: vacant stare, crying or deep sadness
Threats to harm self or others directly or indirectly	Acting out behaviors in classroom
	Gut-feeling that something is wrong
	Disclosures of sexual assault and/or harassment
	Deterioration in physical hygiene, significant weight loss or gain
	Change in behavior: Withdrawn, irritable, confrontational

# **GUIDELINES FOR INTERVENTION**

Openly acknowledge to students that you are aware of their distress, you are sincerely concerned about their welfare and 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 they are 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 their point of view without necessarily agreeing or disagreeing.
4. Attempt to identify the student's problem or concerns 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 attempt to reach or help a troubled student, you may become more involved than time or skills permit.
7. You are legally responsible in terms of the mandatory reporting of child abuse and elder abuse.

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

# **Identifying Students In Need of Assistance**

## **THE DEPRESSED STUDENT**

Depression, and the variety of ways it manifests itself, 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, it is safe to assume that most students will experience periods of reactive depression in their college careers. When the depressive symptoms become so extreme or are so 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 they are feeling down and you would like to help.
- Encourage the student to discuss how they are feeling with someone they trust.
- Offer to assist student in referring them for personal counseling. See the *Important Services To Know* list in the appendix.

### **DON'T:**

- Minimize the student's feelings, e.g., "Don't worry; everything will be better tomorrow".
- Bombard the student with "fix it" solutions or advice.
- Don't chastise the student for poor or incomplete work.
- Don't be afraid to ask the student whether they are feeling suicidal.

## **THE SUICIDAL STUDENT**

Suicide is a leading cause of death among college students. It is important to view all suicidal comments as serious and make appropriate referrals. High-risk factors 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; and, feelings of alienation and isolation.

### **DO:**

- Take the student seriously (80% of suicides give a warning of their intent).
- Be direct—ask if the student is suicidal, if they have a plan and the means to carry out that plan. Exploring this with the student may actually decrease the impulse to carry out their plan.
- Be available to listen.
- Call Peralta Police if threat of suicide is imminent at 510-466-7236.

### **DON'T:**

- Take it on yourself to be the only support for the student.
- Be a savior.
- Challenge or agree with any mistaken or illogical beliefs.
- Give ambiguous information.

## **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 they are 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.
- Offer to assist the student in referring them for personal counseling. See the *Important Services To Know* list in the appendix.

### **DON'T:**

- Minimize the perceived threat to which the student is reacting.
- Take responsibility for the student's 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, they 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. That said, 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.
- Acknowledge their feelings or fears without supporting the misperception, 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 specific information about the student's awareness of time, place and destination.

### **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 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 the world and you are the object of pent-up frustrations. This behavior may be associated with the use of alcohol and other drugs.

### **DO:**

- Acknowledge their anger and frustrations, 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 student to a quiet place if this is comfortable and the place is safe.
- Allow them to vent; get the feelings out; 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 hear you when you yell and scream.” “Let’s step outside to discuss this further.”
- Prohibit the student from entering your work area/classroom/office if behavior is repeated.
- Remember, SAFETY FIRST. If the behavior increases into threats of physical violence, call Peralta Police at 510-466-7236.

### **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 all of the student's emotional controls. The adage, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," best applies here. This behavior may be 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; call Peralta Police at 510-466-7236.

### **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 STUDENT UNDER THE INFLUENCE**

Substance abuse is prevalent on college campuses. It is common to find alcohol and drug abuse in college.

The effects of substance abuse are well-known to most of us. Irresponsible, unpredictable behavior (i.e., not focused, incoherent, sleeping, drunk and disorderly in class), or a combination of the health and social impairments associated with substance abuse, noticeably sabotages student performance. Because of denial that exists in most cases of substance abuse, 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.
- Offer concern for the student's overall well-being.
- Refer student to services. See the *Important Services To Know* list in the appendix.

### **DON'T:**

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

## **THE STUDENT WITH PARANOIA**

Typically, these students complain about something other than their psychological difficulties. They are tense, anxious, and mistrustful, and may be “loners” or have few friends. They tend to interpret minor oversights as significant personal rejections, and often overreact to insignificant events. They see themselves as the focal point of everyone’s behavior, and everything that happens has a 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 may seem capable and bright.

### **DO:**

- Express compassion without implying friendship. Remember that students with paranoia have trouble with closeness and warmth.
- Be firm, steady, punctual, and consistent.
- Be specific and clear regarding the standards of behavior you expect.

### **DON'T:**

- Assure the student that you are their friend.
- Be overly warm and nurturing.
- Challenge or agree with any mistaken or illogical beliefs.
- Be ambiguous about expectations.

## **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. However, student-to-student harassment should also be taken very seriously. 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 of students is also defined by the California Education Code, Section 89535.

Sexual harassment usually is not an isolated incident, but rather 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 innuendo and double-meanings
- Displaying of sexually suggestive pictures or objects
- Repeated, non-reciprocated demands for dates or sex
- Unwelcome text messaging and other forms of electronic communications.

### **DO:**

- Listen carefully to the student, validating his/her experience. Has the student made an attempt to approach the person directly or in writing?
- If there is immediate risk of danger, contact Peralta Police at 510-466-7236.
- You may also refer student to the Title IX Officer, Vicki Ferguson, Tower Building, Room 813 for information on filing a complaint.
- Separate your personal biases from your professional role; maintain objectivity.
- Encourage the student to keep a log or find a witness.

### **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.

## **THE STUDENT WHO SUBMITS DISTURBING WRITINGS**

Occasionally student writing may raise concerns for an instructor about the student's psychological well-being. Of special concern is writing that seems to suggest deep despair or serious thoughts of harming self or others.

### **DO:**

- Report concerns about student writings that contain threats to harm self and/or others or project a sense of hopelessness
- Follow the Student Behavioral Concern Intervention Flow Chart located on page 3

### **DON'T:**

- Assume that writings that contain references to causing harm to self and/or others are simply to gain attention or are for dramatic effect.

In addition, please see the document, *Students Who Submit Disturbing Writing*, in the appendix.

## **STUDENT VETERANS**

There are several general, even stereotypical preconceptions regarding veteran students on college campuses (e.g., a slamming door will startle a veteran student, or that they have to sit near an exit, or can't handle conversation concerning war or governmental policy). The truth is, there are as many veteran students who match these descriptions as do not. Veteran students may be **but are not necessarily** disabled or mentally ill. That said, our Counseling Department, Disabled Students Program and Services, and Wellness Services are aware of some unique challenges veteran students may face, and are available for managing stress, creating stability, and supporting growth.

### **DO:**

- Be respectful.
- Respect others' decisions in life and their opinions.
- Treat veterans for who they are: Former military members seeking further education to improve their lives. They are looking to teachers for inspiration and guidance.
- Strive for openness and the ability to agree or disagree while at the same time respecting others' opinions.
- Recognize that some veterans like to be publicly recognized for their service, while others do not.
- Listen carefully: If a veteran approaches a teacher and identifies as having something resembling a mental or thought-altering disability, then that faculty member should take every necessary step to see that veteran is accommodated for their stated condition.
- Refer to the Veteran's Resource Center located in Building E, Room 260.

### **DON'T:**

- Demonstrate extreme bias, especially when discussing politics, war policy, or any sort of government agenda.
- Diminish the veteran student's experience. They have committed a portion of their lives to dealing with government policy and its repercussions.

### **ADDITIONAL VETERAN SUPPORT:**

#### **Oakland Vet Center**

7700 Edgewater Drive, Ste. 125  
Oakland, CA 94612  
(510) 562-7906  
[www.oaklandvetcenter.org](http://www.oaklandvetcenter.org)

#### **Swords to Plowshares**

2719 Telegraph Avenue  
Oakland, CA 94612  
(510) 844-7500  
[www.swords-to-plowshares.org](http://www.swords-to-plowshares.org)

# APPENDIX

## **IMPORTANT SERVICES TO KNOW:**

### **Peralta Police**

510-464-7236

### **Food Insecurities**

Eagle Food Pantry  
Alameda County Food Bank Distribution  
510-464-3188

### **Health & Wellness Services**

Health & Wellness Center I  
Tower Building, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
510-464-3332  
Health & Wellness Center II  
Student Center, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
510-464-3139

### **Disabled Student Program & Services**

Building E, Room 251  
510-464-3429/510-464-3328

### **Counseling Services**

(Mental Health) 510-464-3535  
(Academic) 510-464-3154

### **Meditation Room**

Student Center, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
510-464-3188  
510-464-3188

### **Veteran's Resource Center**

Building E, Room 260  
510-986-6994

### **Title IX Coordinator**

Vicki Ferguson, VPSS  
Tower, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor, Room 813  
510-464-3340

For additional resources or referrals, please see the Student Guide to Free & Low-Cost Resources at Laney College & Local Community or visit: [https://laney.edu/student\\_activities/](https://laney.edu/student_activities/)



**LANEY COLLEGE  
OFFICE OF INSTRUCTION  
DEPARTMENT CHAIRS & PROGRAM COORDINATORS 2019-2020**

<b>DEPARTMENT</b>	<b>NAME</b>	<b>PHONE</b>
Architectural/Engineering Technology	Ron Betts (Co-chair)	510.464.3450
	Mallory Barkdull	510.464.3177
Art	Anna Vaughn	510.986.6996
Astronomy/ Chemistry/Physics	Stephen Corlett	510.464.3279
Biology/Life Sciences	Amy Bohorquez	510.464.3472
	Rebecca Bailey Rajeev Banerjee	
	Leslie Blackie	510.986.6960
	Laurie Allen-Requa	510.464.3110
	Douglas Bruce	510.464.3402
		510.464.3473
Business and Economics	Kim Glosson	510.464.3187
Carpentry	Karl Seelbach	510.464.3455
Communications	Shirley Brownfox	510.464.3209
Computer Information Systems	Kim Bridges	510.464.3189
Construction Management	Melissa McElvane (Co-chair)	
	Kelle Lynch-McMahon	510.464.3451
Cosmetology	Sydney Simmons Windham	510.464.3289
Counseling	Kimberly Blackwell (Co-chair)	510.464.3144
	Kathy Ma	510.464.3132
Culinary Arts	Chantal Martin (Co-chair)	510.464.3449
	Lorriann Raji	510.464.3407
Dance	Andrea Lee	510.464.3375
Earth & Human Sciences	Donald Moore (Co-chair)	510.464.3183
	Mark Rauzon	510.464.3278
English	Chris Weidenbach	510.464.3167
English As A Second Language	Barbara Yasue	510.464.3370
Ethnic Studies	Roger Chung	510.464.3176
Electrical & Electronics Technology	Forough Hashemi, Ph.D.	510.464.3198
Environmental Control Technology	Charles Frost	510.986.5622
Graphic Arts	Daniela Pachtrapanska Nikolaeva	510.464.3263
Humanities/Phil	Amir Sabzevary	510.464.3207
Journalism	Eleni Gastis	510.464.3254
Library Services	Evelyn Lord (Head Librarian)	510.464.3496
Machine Technology	Louis Quindlen	510.464.3444
Mathematics	David Ross	510.464.3184
Media Communications	Vina Cera (Co-chair)	510.464.3550
	Steven Shlisky	510.464.3551
Modern Language/LCI	Arturo Davila-Sanchez	510.464.3199
Music	John Reager	510.986.5614
Kinesiology, Athletics and Health Education	Dustin Cheyne (Co-chair) Joshua Ramos	510.986.6926
		510.464.3475
Photography	Joan Bobkoff (Co-chair)	510.464.3241
	Michael Mejia	510.464.3253
Social Science/Behavior	Tarek El Jarrari (Co-chair)	510.986.6991
	Felipe Wilson	510.464.3379
Theatre Arts	Michael Torres	510.464.3544
Welding Technology	Richard Hashimoto	510.464.3385
	Myron Franklin	510.464.3446
Wood Technology	Ron Betts (Co-chair)	510.464.3450
	Mallory Barkdull	510.464.3177

# **Responding to Disturbing Writing: A Guide for Faculty**

## **Principles and Purposes**

Writing develops the creativity of students, which necessarily involves allowing them to express themselves freely. Students should not feel that their instructors will automatically monitor and threaten them with disciplinary action for the themes and language they choose. Instructors should not feel that they must take on the roles of therapists or police officers—roles for which they may not have any professional training. Occasionally, student writing can make peers uncomfortable and/or raise questions about the author's mental state and the instructor may feel the need to address these issues. This guide offers a series of questions to help instructors think through the disturbing elements in student writing, outlines strategies, resources, and procedures for taking appropriate actions.

## **Identifying Disturbing Writing**

Everyone's sense of what is disturbing will differ. We recommend that instructors follow their own instincts, and the context of the assignment, when determining what constitutes disturbing writing. We should be most concerned about writing that seems to warn of potential harm to self or others, or writing that reflects a deep desperation or helplessness. Themes of violence and gruesome details might be indicators, but they do not in themselves establish a problem. Outright threats are more problematic. The following questions may help you assess the student's situation and whether what's disturbing reflects creative exploration or something more dangerous.

For creative writing:

Is the creative work excessively violent? Do characters respond to everyday events with a level or kind of violence one does not expect, or may even find frightening? If so, does the violence seem more expressive of rage and anger than it does of a literary aesthetic or a thematic purpose? Is a depiction of a retaliation seeming excessive to the affront?

Are the characters' thoughts and actions violent or threatening? Do characters think about or question their violent actions? If one set of characters demonstrate no self-awareness or moral consciousness, are other characters aware of or disturbed by what has taken place? In other words, does the text reveal the presence of a literary sensibility mediating and making judgments about the characters' thoughts and actions, or does it suggest unmediated venting of rage and anger? If the literary sensibility is missing, is the student receptive to adding that layer and to learning how to do so?

Is this the student's first piece of violent writing? If yes, what is the nature of their other work? Is violence at the center of everything the student has written, or does other writing suggest that violence is something the student is experimenting with for literary effect?

Are the violent actions in the work so disturbing or so extreme as to suggest they go beyond any possible sense of purpose in relation to the larger narrative? Do they seem to be the point of the piece, or a component? Does the nature of the violence—or the nature of the writing overall—suggest extreme depression or suicidal inclinations?

Is the writing full of expressions of hostility toward other racial or ethnic groups? Is the writing threateningly misogynistic, homophobic, racist, or in any way expressive of a mindset that may

pose a threat to other students?

For non-fiction writing:

Does the student present a hopeless or nihilistic interpretation of the subject?

Are there unnecessary violent or predatory deviations from the subject at hand?

When provided feedback on an assignment, how does the student respond? Does the student take the feedback as a personal insult, or are they willing to make the noted corrections?

Is there evidenced of defending the “indefensible” (e.g. assault, slavery, etc.) under the guise of ‘the other side’ or playing ‘devil’s advocate?’

## **Responding to disturbing writing**

Once you’ve decided you are concerned about a piece of writing, we suggest you move through the following steps. If you feel even a hint of threat to yourself or other students, however, please do not try to meet with the student alone nor try to solve the problem alone. You should immediately contact your division dean or department chair who will advise you on possible next steps.

### **Step 1: Instructor Speaks Informally with the Student**

If you suspect that the disturbing features of the writing are literary in nature, talk to the student about the writing. Try to make this discussion as informal as possible.

You’re after honest and direct exchange. It may be best to do this before or after class, or in a common area, rather than having the student come by your office. If the student seems at all threatening, do not meet the student alone.

It may be a good idea to let the student talk as much as they want. You’re after a more complete sense of the person behind the writing. As much as possible, keep an open mind. Listen carefully to the student. Be curious.

Try to open up the conversation in a way that makes the student feel comfortable. One way to increase comfort is to focus on the text itself, not on the student. You might consider asking about the inspiration for the piece. Was it inspired by an image or idea, some event in the news or some bit of history, or was it inspired by another piece of writing? Allow the student to contextualize what they have written. Most writers will be able to give you some sense of how their writing began and evolved. Ask the student to discuss the motivation of characters, and their sense of how different imagery or actions will function in relation to the overall effect of the work. Try to touch on any published works the student feels are relevant. If students have read authors such as Lee Childs or Bret Easton Ellis or Anne Rice or Chuck Palahniuk, these influences may give insight into the disturbing material in the writing.

At this point, it may be appropriate to offer your best counsel to the student and to provide as much support as possible in helping the student deal with any issues you perceive as a result of your meeting. If the student offers personal information suggesting a need or wish for help, or if the student seems unable or unwilling to discuss the piece in literary or academic terms, encourage the student to visit the Laney Wellness Center to meet with the mental health therapist (See the resource referral chart in the appendices of this manual). You can volunteer to call for the appointment and follow through at a later class to see if the student has gone.

Please document your meetings and advice by writing down the date, specific advice given, location of the meeting, and outcomes or recommendations.

If after this meeting you continue to be concerned about the student and their writing, if you think you are dealing with a student whose writing suggests that they may present a threat to self or others, advance to Step Two.

### **Step 2: Instructor Consults with the Division Dean**

If your conversation with the student does not convince you that the disturbing features of the writing are stylistic, consult with the dean of the department. Share the writing in question, explain the situation in detail, review notes from your meeting/s with the student, and seek advice about interacting with the student. Try to present a thorough picture of the student and their writing.

If the conversation between the instructor and dean leaves either feeling uncomfortable, they should confer with the vice president of student services. You may determine together that it is advisable to confer with other instructors who have taught this student, both in creative writing and in other courses, in order to determine if there have been other concerns raised about this student's work.

### **Step 3: Division Dean Involves the Vice President of Student Services**

The college's primary concern is teaching. Instructors should not be expected to be mental health professionals, or law enforcement officers. If the writing turns out to be an indicator of danger, it is the responsibility of the instructor to guide the student towards the help they need. These discussions of the student's writing should be undertaken with deep concern for the privacy of the student and their right to free expression. Advancing to Step 3 is an indication that the opinion of the instructor, the department chair, and the dean believe there needs to be more investigation into the writing. The sole concern of the investigation should be the possibility that the student's writing is an indicator of danger and that intervention may be the wisest course of action.

## **Concluding Thoughts**

Judging writing and student intentions is an interpretive act. It is impossible to predict behavior on the basis of writing alone. When teachers are concerned about a student, their best service is to encourage that student to engage with specialists. We offer these guidelines caring about our students both as developing writers and as human beings. Guidelines help us think through situations, but they cannot tell us what to do in any absolute certainty.



**Dream. Flourish. Succeed.**

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