

Recognizing Distress

Everyone feels depressed or upset at one time or another. The following lists warning signs which, when present over a period of time, suggest a more significant level of distress.

Marked Change in Academic/Work Performance or Behavior

- Change in classroom/work performance such as a drop in grades or productivity
- Deterioration in quality of work and preparation
- Excessive or repeated absences or tardiness
- Missed or late assignments or appointments
- Erratic or disorganized participation or performance
- Frequent or repeated requests for special consideration
- Avoiding participation or excessively anxious when called upon in class or meetings
- Dominating discussions
- Disruptive behavior during class or meetings

Unusual or Dramatic Shifts in Behavior or Appearance

- Dramatic change in energy level, positive or negative
- Dramatic changes in weight, lost or gained
- Persistent sadness and/or frequent tearfulness
- Lethargic, falling asleep in class or at their desk
- Hyperactivity, very rapid speech, or inflated sense of self
- Exaggerated emotional response that is obviously inappropriate to the situation
- Deterioration in personal hygiene or dress
- Strange or bizarre behavior indicating loss of contact with reality
- Incoherent speech or writing
- Inability to focus their eyes when having a conversation
- Obvious alcohol or drug abuse or intoxication
- Noticeable cuts, bruises or bandages
- Excessive dependency on you or other individuals
- Social isolation from friends, family and/or classmates or roommates

Reported Life Stressors

- Problems with roommates, family, or romantic partners
- Disruption in their support system(s)
- Experiencing the death of a significant other (including a pet)
- Experiencing a physical or sexual assault
- Experiencing discrimination based on gender, race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or disabilities
- Experiencing legal difficulties
- Any problem or situation, whether real or imagined, that is experienced as a loss, disappointment, failure, humiliation, or other stressor (job, finances, housing, relationships, etc.)

References to Suicide, Homicide or Death

- Essays or projects that express themes of hopelessness, isolation, rage or despair
- Expressed feelings of helplessness or inability to cope
- Verbal or written references to, or threats of, suicide
- Verbal or written references to, or threats of, destructive or assaultive behavior or homicide

Other Warning Signs

None of the following signs, standing alone, are sufficient for predicting violent or aggressive behavior. Seen in combination or increasing over a period of time, they may indicate a need for further analysis or investigation, as well as possible intervention.

Interpersonal Behavior

- Lacks social connections or friends
- Exhibits social withdrawal and/or isolation
- Is frequently angry, exhibits loss of temper on a daily basis
- Is verbally hostile, combative or abusive
- Fails to acknowledge or consider the feelings or thoughts of others
- Consistently shows lack of respect for the property of others
- Demonstrates intolerance for differences and/or prejudicial attitudes
- Expresses frequent feelings of rejection or being alone
- Reports having been previously victimized or bullied
- Reports being currently picked on or persecuted

Other Behavior

- Demonstrates low self-esteem
- Expresses frustration in inappropriate ways
- Acts impulsively, often without considering consequences
- Shows Increased drug or alcohol use
- Shows Increased risk-taking
- Is fascinated with weapons (guns, knives, etc.) and/or death
- Is involved in physical fights, pushing or shoving
- Commits acts of vandalism or destruction of property
- Expresses violence or themes of violence in writings or drawings
- Verbalizes threats of violence or plans for hurting people or causing damage to property
- Has a history of discipline problems or frequent run-ins with authority
- Has a history of violent and/or aggressive behavior

Add to any of the above signs one or more previously mentioned life stressors (listed again below), and the risk for violent or aggressive behavior is increased.

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