

## **FACULTY & STAFF GUIDE**

### **FOR ASSISTING EMOTIONALLY TROUBLED INDIVIDUALS**

This guide identifies campus resources that are available to the Campus Community for consultation and/or referral for emotionally troubled individuals. While guidelines for addressing emotionally troubled individuals are presented, this document cannot address every situation that might arise. Please contact the appropriate resources indicated in this guide for consultation and/or referral as needed.

**If you believe that a troubled individual's behavior poses an immediate threat of harm to self, to you, or to any other person, call 402-554-2911.**

#### **Signs of an Emotionally Troubled Individuals**

Members of the Campus Community often encounter a great deal of stress during the course of their academic experience. While most individuals cope successfully with the challenges that these years bring, an increasing number of individuals find the various pressures of life too difficult to manage. As such, you may encounter distressed individuals in your office, classrooms, or department. Signs to watch for may include:

- Marked change in academic performance, class attendance
- Depressed mood, crying, withdrawn, lacking energy or motivation
- Threats of suicide or self-harm\*
- Threats of harm to another\*
- Exaggerated emotional response
- Coursework content that is disturbing
- E-mail or other communication that is perceived as disturbing or harassing to another person
- Bizarre/inappropriate behavior and/or disjointed thoughts
- Marked change in physical appearance, dress, or hygiene
- Chronic fatigue, repeatedly sleeping in class
- Appearance of being intoxicated or under the influence of drugs
- Behavior that is disruptive to the teaching environment
- Unusual or markedly changed pattern of interaction, e.g., totally avoiding participation, becoming excessively anxious when called upon, dominating discussions, etc.

**\*IF BEHAVIOR REPRESENTS AN IMMEDIATE THREAT OF HARM TO SELF OR OTHERS, CALL 402-554-2911.**

If the threat is not immediate, but you are concerned, call:  
Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-5 p.m.  
Assistant Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs Office, 402-554-2779  
Counseling Center, 402-554-2409  
Human Resources, 402-554-2321  
Evenings and Weekend, call Campus Security, 402-554-2648

## **RED FLAGS, WARNING SIGNS AND INDICATORS**

By Roger Depue, Ph.D.

Virginia.gov (2008). Report of the Virginia Tech Review Panel, Appendix M. Retrieved on May 15, 2008 from <http://www.governor.virginia.gov/TempContent/techpanelreport.cfm>.

Experts who evaluate possible indicators that an individual is at risk of harming himself or others know to seek out many sources for clues, certain red flags that merit attention. A single warning sign by itself usually does not warrant overt action by a threat assessment specialist. It should, however, attract the attention of an assessor who has been sensitized to look for other possible warning signs. If additional warning signs are present then more fact-finding is warranted to determine if there is a likelihood of danger.

Some warning signs carry more weight than others. For instance, a fascination with, and possession of, firearms are more significant than being a loner, because possession of firearms gives one the capacity to carry out an attack. But if a person simply possesses firearms and has no other warning signs, it is unlikely that he represents a significant risk of danger.

When a cluster of indicators is present then the risk becomes more serious. Thus, a person who possesses firearms, is a loner, shows an interest in past shooting situations, writes stories about homicide and suicide, exhibits aberrant behavior, has talked about retribution against others, and has a history of mental illness and refuses counseling would obviously be considered a significant risk of becoming dangerous to himself or others. A school threat assessment team upon learning about such a list of warning signs would be in a position to take immediate action including:

- Talking to the student and developing a treatment plan with conditions for remaining in school
- Calling the parents or other guardians
- Requesting permission to receive medical and educational records
- Checking with law enforcement to ascertain whether there have been any interactions with police
- Talking with roommates and faculty
- Suspending the student until the student has been treated and doctors indicate the student is not a safety risk

Following are some warning signs (indicators and red flags) associated with school shootings in the United States. Schools, places of employment, and other entities that are creating a threat assessment capability may want to be aware of these red flags:

**Violent fantasy content –**

- . Writings (Stories, essays, compositions),
- . Drawings (Artwork depicting violence),
- . Reading and viewing materials (Preference for books, magazines, television, video tapes and discs, movies, music, websites, and chat rooms with violent themes and degrading subject matter), and role playing acts of violence and degradation.

**Anger problems –**

- . Difficulty controlling anger, loss of temper, impulsivity,
- . Making threats.

**Fascination with weapons and accoutrements –**

- . Especially those designed and most often used to kill people (such as machine guns, semiautomatic pistols, snub nose revolvers, stilettos, bayonets, daggers, brass knuckles, special ammunition and explosives).

**Boasting and practicing of fighting and combat proficiency –**

- . Military and sharpshooter training, martial arts, use of garrotes, and knife fighting.

**Loner –**

- . Isolated and socially withdrawn, misfit, prefers own company to the company of others.

**Suicidal ideation –**

- . Depressed and expresses hopelessness and despair,
- . Reveals suicidal preparatory behavior.  
[See note below by Dr. Cheryl Yatsko]

**Homicidal ideation –**

- . Expresses contempt for other(s),
- . Makes comments and/or gestures indicating violent aggression.

**Stalking –**

- . Follows, harasses, surveils, attempts to contact regardless of the victim's expressed annoyance and demands to cease and desist.

**Non-compliance and disciplinary problems –**

- . Refusal to abide by written and/or verbal rules.

**Imitation of other murderers –**

Appearance, dress, grooming, possessions like those of violent shooters in past episodes (e.g. long black trench coats).

**Interest in previous shooting situations –**

- . Drawn toward media, books, entertainment, conversations dealing with past murders.

**Victim/martyr self-concept –**

- . Fantasy that someday he will represent the oppressed and wreak vengeance on the oppressors.

**Strangeness and aberrant behavior –**

- . Actions and words that cause people around him to become fearful and suspicious.

**Paranoia –**

- . Belief that he is being singled out for unfair treatment and/or abuse; feeling persecuted.

**Violence and cruelty –**

- . A history of using violence to solve problems (fighting, hitting, etc.), abusing animals or weaker individuals.

**Inappropriate affect –**

- . Enjoying cruel behavior and/or being able to view cruelty without being disturbed.

**Acting out –**

- . Expressing disproportionate anger or humor in situations not warranting it, attacking surrogate targets.

**Police contact –**

- . A history of contact with police for anger, stalking, disorderly conduct;
- . Past temporary restraining orders (or similar court orders),
- . A jail/prison record for aggressive crimes

**Mental health history related to dangerousness –**

- . A history of referral or commitments to mental health facilities for aggressive/destructive behavior.

**Expressionless face/anhedonia –**

- . An inability to express and/or experience joy and pleasure.

**Unusual interest in police, military, terrorist activities and materials**

Vehicles resembling police cars, military vehicles, surveillance equipment, handcuffs, weapons, clothing (camouflage, ski masks, etc.).

**Use of alcohol/drugs –**

- . Alcohol/drugs are used to reduce inhibitions so that aggressive behaviors are more easily expressed.

**Note:** Additional information on suicidal ideation provided by Dr. Cheryl Yatsko, Columbus State University, June 4, 2008.

**Suicidal Ideation -**

Depressed and expresses helplessness, hopelessness, and worthlessness.

Talking about death.

Talking about suicide, or making statements like “everybody would be better off without me.”

Acquiring the means, e.g., buying a gun.

Giving away possessions.

Saying goodbye.