



# Columbia University Blue Folder

Guidance and Resources to Assist Students in Distress

RECOGNIZE | RESPOND | REFER | RESOURCE

## MESSAGE TO FACULTY AND STAFF

The intersection of mental health and student behavior is a vital issue that affects each member of our community. Faculty and staff are uniquely positioned to show care and compassion for students experiencing distress. Identifying and addressing a distressed student is an important part of supporting them and keeping our University community safe and thriving. Student distress can present itself in many ways. Having the tools to **identify, address, and refer students appropriately** is important as you interact with them. When in doubt, consult with the resources shared here.\*

While the Blue Folder is intended to provide tips about addressing concerns that arise, you may still have questions. Faculty and staff can consult the following resources regarding any mental health or behavioral concerns:

### MORNINGSIDE/MANHATTANVILLE

[Columbia Health Counseling and Psychological Services \(CPS\)](#):  
(212) 854-2878

[Columbia University Irving Medical Center \(CUIMC\)](#)  
[Student Health on Haven Counseling Services](#):  
(212) 305-3400

**Trust your instincts.** If an encounter with a student leaves you feeling concerned, alarmed, or threatened, consult with someone.

### What about privacy?

When communicating with a student, it is important to use the language “private” and “discreet” rather than “confidential,” as you may need to share information with those listed in this document. The [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\)](#) permits communication about a student in connection with a health and safety emergency. FERPA does not protect observations of a student’s conduct or statements that a student makes.



\*Thank you to partners at University of California–Berkeley and Harvard University for sharing content in support of Columbia University’s *Blue Folder*.

## RECOGNIZE: INDICATORS OF DISTRESS

Use the following chart to help you identify a student in distress. Look for groupings, frequency, duration, and severity. Pay particular attention to notable changes in the student's behavior, performance, mood, and appearance. Any one of the following indicators alone does not necessarily suggest the student is experiencing distress. Together, however, they may indicate the student needs or may be asking for help.

### Safety Risk

**Immediately call Public Safety for a consult if you become aware of:**

- Unprovoked anger or hostility
- Physical violence (e.g., shoving, grabbing, assault, use of weapons)
- Implying or making direct threat(s) to harm self or others
- Academic assignments dominated by themes of extreme hopelessness, rage, worthlessness, isolation, despair, acting out, suicidal ideations/violent behaviors
- Stalking or harassing
- Communicating threats
- Damaging property or other destructive acts

### Academic Impact

- Sudden decline in quality of work and grades
- Repeated absences
- Disorganized performance
- Multiple requests for extensions
- Overly demanding of faculty's or staff's time and attention
- Requests for support from faculty or staff that are of a personal (vs. academic) nature

### Behavioral Concerns

- Openly talking about "not being around" or death (e.g., *"What's the difference? I won't be here anymore for finals."*)
- Directly or indirectly communicating suicidal thoughts (e.g., *"I don't ever want to wake up again."* *"Everyone would be better off if I just died."*)
- Marked changes in physical appearance (e.g., grooming or hygiene deterioration, weight loss/gain)
- Reckless, risky, or impulsive behavior
- Falls asleep in class
- Disoriented
- Behavior seems out of context or concerning
- Signs of delusions and paranoia
- Reports of guilt, worthlessness, flattening of emotional expression, or indifference

## Behavioral Concerns (continued)

- Self-disclosure about personal distress (e.g., family or financial problems, grief, suicidal thoughts)
- Unusual/disproportionate emotional response to events
- Excessive tearfulness or panic reactions
- Irritability or unusual apathy
- Verbal abuse (e.g., taunting, badgering, intimidation)
- Concern from peers
- Helplessness, hopelessness or despair
- Signs of possible self-injury (cuts, burns, bruises)

## Recognize and Respond to Suicide Risk

**The simplest and best advice is to take any concerns about suicide or self-harm seriously, and connect the student to professional help.** While no single formula can determine if someone is simply sad, “down,” or is severely depressed or at risk for suicide, these and similar behavioral red flags may indicate a student needs professional assistance.



# RESPOND: TIPS FOR DE-ESCALATION

From the Crisis Prevention Institute ([www.crisisprevention.com](http://www.crisisprevention.com))

## 1. BE EMPATHIC AND NONJUDGMENTAL

- Pay attention to the person—whatever they may be experiencing, it may be the most important thing in their life at the moment.

## 2. RESPECT PERSONAL SPACE

- Stand at least 1.5-3 feet away from a person who is escalating.
- If you must enter someone's personal space, explain your actions so the person feels less confused and/or frightened.

## 3. USE NONTHREATENING, NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

- Keeping tone and body language neutral go a long way towards defusing a situation.
- As a person escalates, they lose the ability to hear your words; they will increasingly react to your non-verbal communication (e.g., gestures, facial expressions, movements and tone of voice).

## 4. KEEP YOUR EMOTIONS IN CHECK

- Always remain calm, rational and professional; your actions will have a direct impact on whether or not the situation escalates.
- Convey a sense that the situation is manageable, and that you know what steps to take. Doing so will help to keep both you and the student calm in the moment.

## 5. FOCUS ON FEELINGS

- Watch and listen carefully for the person's real message and identify how the person is feeling.
- Supportive words will help the person know that you understand what's happening in the situation, and can help to elicit a positive response.

## 6. SET LIMITS

- Give clear, simple and enforceable limits when a person's behavior is belligerent, defensive or disruptive.
- When a person is upset, they lose the ability to hear what you say. Be clear, speak simply and offer the positive choice first.

## 7. CHOOSE WISELY WHAT YOU INSIST UPON

- Offering people flexibility and options can help you avoid unnecessary conflicts or power struggles.
- Be thoughtful in deciding which rules are negotiable, and which are not.

## 8. ALLOW SILENCE AND TIME FOR REFLECTION AND DECISION-MAKING

- Silence is a powerful communication tool and can give people a chance to reflect on what's happening and what steps they wish to take.
- When a person is upset, they may not be able to think clearly. Give them a few moments to think through what you've said.
- Stress increases when a person feels rushed. Allowing time can bring calm to the situation and allow for better decision making.

## RESPOND: BEHAVIORAL CONCERNS

### Response Process

**SAFETY IS FIRST.** If the behavior is so severe that it poses a threat to the student's own safety, your safety, or the safety of others, call 911 and Public Safety immediately.

**BE DIRECT WITH THE STUDENT.** Identify what the disruptive activity is. Request that the behavior stop and articulate its impact on the class. Doing this privately is typically recommended; however, addressing the entire class is sometimes necessary. Use your judgment.

If a student's presentation raises concerns about substance abuse, violence, or suicide, ask directly. Do not be afraid to engage, it shows you care.

- "Hi \_\_\_\_\_. I just wanted to check in. I've noticed \_\_\_\_\_ and wanted to see if you wanted to talk about it."
- "I've noticed \_\_\_\_\_ and I want you to know that I am here to support you."

**LISTEN TO THE STUDENT.** Actively listen, using a non-confrontational approach and a calm voice. Avoid threatening, humiliating, and intimidating responses. Allow them the opportunity to respond, and ask appropriate follow-up questions.

- "I'd like to hear more about that."
- "I'm sorry, that seems like a difficult situation to be in. What is that like for you?"
- "That sounds really difficult, how is that affecting you?"

### RE-ESTABLISH YOUR ROLE AND EXPECTATIONS WITH THE STUDENT.

While you are not a confidential employee, convey that you will respect their privacy as much as you can. Let them know you need to connect them with the appropriate resources to best support them, including the Dean of Students. Follow up in an email with the student and copy their Dean of Students.

- *"I'm glad you felt comfortable to share that with me."*
- *"If it's alright with you, I'd like to connect you with resources such as the Dean of Students and counseling, who may be helpful to you."*
- *"I may need to share information with the Dean of Students Office in order to figure out how best to help you/get you the resources that would be helpful."*

### REFER THE STUDENT TO UNIVERSITY RESOURCES.

Remember that your role is to connect the student to the right resource for support. Connecting the student to additional resources helps prevent a situation in which you become the student's main source of support.

- *"Thank you for being so open with me. I want to be sure that you can access the resources you need to get through this challenging situation."*

It's okay to say:

- *"I am not sure, but there are people at Columbia who can help."*
- *"I am not sure, let me find out."*

**FOLLOW THROUGH WITH THE STUDENT.** Ensure that the student gets connected to resources, and follow up with the student to express ongoing care and concern.

- “How have you been since we last spoke?”
- “Was that resource helpful?”

**ALWAYS DOCUMENT YOUR INTERACTIONS WITH STUDENTS EXPERIENCING DISTRESS** and consult with your department chair, supervisor and Dean of Students after any incident. Refer and consult with resources provided here, sharing your documentation appropriately.

**CONDUCT ADDITIONAL FOLLOW-UP IF YOU REMAIN CONCERNED.** If, after addressing the behavior, you still feel concerned, continue to refer the student to the appropriate resources, inform their Dean of Students, and notify Center for Student Success and Intervention (CSSI) through an incident report. For more information, visit [CSSI's Website](#).

**ACTIVATE A WELLNESS CHECK, AS NEEDED.** If you have not seen or heard from a student over a period of time and/or you have immediate concern for the student's well-being, call Public Safety to initiate a wellness check. The purpose of a wellness check is to ensure that a student of concern is safe, able to communicate and understands there is concern about their well-being.



## RESPOND: IDENTIFYING STUDENT NEED

### Does the Student Need Immediate Assistance?

The student's conduct is clearly reckless, disorderly, dangerous, or threatening and suggestive of immediate harm to self or others in the community.

#### YES . . . RESPOND

If you believe a student is in **immediate danger of self-harm** and is in New York City, first call **911**, then call **Public Safety**:

- **MORNINGSIDE**  
(212) 854-5555
- **MANHATTANVILLE**  
(212) 853-3333
- **CUIMC**  
(212) 305-7979

If you believe a student is **NOT** in **immediate danger of self-harm**, refer the student to Counseling and Psychological Services (Morningside) or Counseling Services (CUIMC). Additionally, inform their Dean of Students and submit a report to the Center for Student Success and Intervention at **(212) 854-6872** or [cssi@columbia.edu](mailto:cssi@columbia.edu).

You observe indicators of distress but severity is unclear. The interaction has left you feeling uneasy or concerned about the student.

#### NOT SURE . . . CONSULT

Speak with someone for consultation (24/7 support available):

- **MORNINGSIDE/MANHATTANVILLE**  
Columbia Health Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS)  
(212) 854-2878
- **CUIMC**  
Student Health on Haven Counseling Services  
(212) 305-3400

Additionally, inform their Dean of Students and submit a report or call CSSI at **(212) 854-6872** or email [cssi@columbia.edu](mailto:cssi@columbia.edu).

I'm not concerned for the student's immediate safety, but they are having significant academic and/or personal issues and need some support.

#### NO . . . REFER

Refer to the appropriate campus resource, using the detailed list provided in the *Blue Folder*.

## REFER AND CONSULT

### You Are Not Alone – Please Consult with and Refer Students to University Resources

There are numerous offices here to support you. Below are four resources that you should consult early if you have concern about a student's well-being. You can also refer students to the appropriate offices.

#### Deans of Students

Refer students to their school's Deans of Students when they exhibit or share concerns related to their personal, physical, and emotional well-being. Select cases are brought to the Center for Student Success and Intervention when appropriate. A list of the Deans of Students is available [online](#).

**NOTE:** Referring to a Dean of Students does not take place of other reporting requirements as a mandatory reporter; you can learn more about mandatory reporting [here](#).

#### Counseling Services and Consultations

University counseling services are available for confidential counseling and referral for students and for faculty/staff consultation.

**MORNINGSIDE / MANHATTANVILLE**  
Counseling and Psychological Services:  
**(212) 854-2878** (24/7 Support)

**COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY IRVING MEDICAL CENTER (CUIMC)**  
Counseling Services:  
**(212) 305-3400** (24/7 Support)

#### Center for Student Success and Intervention

The Center for Student Success and Intervention (CSSI) uses a 360-degree lens to approach student support work, including student conduct, intervention case management, and basic needs. CSSI is available for consultation and referral for student behavior you feel violates University policy and students managing basic needs (food and housing insecurity) at **(212) 854-6872**.

#### Public Safety

Public Safety is available for faculty/staff consultation, and can conduct wellness-checks.

**MORNINGSIDE** Main: **(212) 854-2797**  
Emergency: **(212) 854-5555**

**MANHATTANVILLE** Main: **(212) 853-3301**  
Emergency: **(212) 853-3333**

**CUIMC** Main: **(212) 305-8100**  
Emergency: **(212) 305-7979**

## REFER: SEXUAL VIOLENCE RESPONSE

The [Sexual Violence Response \(SVR\)](#) team leads Columbia University's prevention, advocacy, prevention, and outreach related to sexual violence and harassment. SVR is committed to transforming culture to prevent violence and advocates for anyone impacted by these forms of harm—students, staff, faculty, and campus visitors.

### Sexual Violence Response Role and Services

Survivors can speak confidentially with an advocate to explore their rights and options and to connect with resources, medical support, emergency housing, safety planning, filing orders of protection, care packages, and healing initiatives. All people impacted by sexual violence have the right to be treated with respect and care, and survivors can receive support—whether they decide to report or not.



### Responding to Disclosures of Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment

#### 1. Provide Care and Support

- Appreciate student for seeking support
- If responsible employee, explain confidentiality limitations
- Offer resources and connection to an advocate
- Allow student to make their own choices

#### 2. Connect to an Advocate at [SVR](#)

- Offer a warm referral by calling together
- Call the 24/7 Helpline with the student at **(212) 854-4357**
- Introduce student to the on-call advocate
- Step out to provide the student privacy

#### 3. Mandatory Reporting

- [Report an Incident](#)
- You can also consult with the [Title IX Coordinator](#) at **(212) 853-1276**
- Practice self-care

To connect with urgent support, call the **24/7 Helpline at (212) 854-4357**. To consult with a specialist or to schedule an appointment, contact the **SVR main line at (212) 854-3500**.

## RESOURCE

The following offices are available for student referral and faculty/staff consultation. Resources marked with an asterisk are confidential. The University offers a number of confidential resources for individuals who are unsure whether to report prohibited conduct and/or who are seeking counseling or other emotional support in addition to or without making a report. Confidential resources are great first points of contact to help you make informed decisions and retain your autonomy in the next steps.

### University / Campus Resources

#### Counseling and Psychological Services\*

(Morningside/Manhattanville)

(212) 854-2878 (24-Hour Support)

#### Counseling Services\* (CUIMC)

(212) 305-3400 (24-Hour Support)

University counseling services are available across campuses for confidential counseling and referral for students and for consultation with faculty about students of concern.

#### Center for Student Success and Intervention

(212) 854-6872

Consult regarding concerns about students experiencing and/or causing distress. Coordinate support for students in distress across university departments or schools.

#### Sexual Violence Response\*

(212) 854-HELP (4357)

Sexual Violence Response advocates are available 24-hours, year-round to provide confidential and trauma-informed support for those that have experienced gender and power-based violence, including sexual assault, dating and intimate partner violence, stalking, sexual harassment, and sexual exploitation.

#### Title IX Coordinator

(212) 853-1276

Columbia's Title IX Coordinator takes reports alleging discrimination and harassment on the basis of categories including race, color, national origin, gender, age, and sexual orientation/identity, which includes allegations of sexual harassment and sexual violence.

#### Public Safety

If you believe a student is in immediate danger of self-harm and is in New York City, first call 911, then call Public Safety.

##### **MORNINGSIDE**

Main: (212) 854-2797

Emergency: (212) 854-5555

##### **MANHATTANVILLE**

Main: (212) 853-3301

Emergency: (212) 853-3333

##### **CUIMC**

Main: (212) 305-8100

Emergency: (212) 305-7979

You can also call for assessment of threatening or potentially violent faculty/staff behavior.

#### Employee Assistance Program (EAP)\*

(844) 636-1260

Supporting students of concern can have a personal impact on faculty and staff wellbeing. The EAP program is available for all Columbia faculty and staff, offering counseling and support.

## Affiliate Schools Counseling and Psychological Services\*

- [Counseling Center](#) (Jewish Theological Seminary) at (212) 854-2878 (urgent concerns) or email [counseling@jtsa.edu](mailto:counseling@jtsa.edu) (non urgent referral).
- Teachers College contact [Counseling and Psychological Services](#)\* Morningside/Manhattanville (212) 854-2878 (24-Hour Support)

- Support is also available through [Student Support and Advocacy](#) (Teachers College)
- [Furman Counseling Center](#) (Barnard) at (212) 854-2092

Should you or your student need support while off campus, the following community resources are available.

## Community Resources

### [NYPD Precinct 26](#)

Emergency: **911**

Non-Emergency: **(212) 678-1311**

### [NYPD Precinct 33](#)

Emergency: **911**

Non-Emergency: **(212) 927-3200**

Call for concerns about safety and well-being.

### [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#)

**988**

Call for immediate, confidential crisis support and intervention.

### [Mount Sinai Morningside](#)

**(212) 523-4000**

The closest hospital/ER to campus, located at 419 W. 114 Street.

### [For Immediate Psychiatric Care](#) (MORNINGSIDE)

**(212) 523-3347**

Students may also go directly to the Mount Sinai Morningside Emergency Room located at 113th Street and Amsterdam Avenue (443 W. 113 Street).

### **New York Presbyterian Columbia University Irving Medical Center**

**(212) 305-2500**

The closest hospital/ER to CUIMC campus, located at 630 W. 168 Street.

### **For Immediate Psychiatric Care** (CUIMC)

**(212) 305-8075**

Students may also go directly to New York-Presbyterian/ Columbia Emergency Room located at 630 W. 168 Street

### [NYC HOPE – NYC Domestic Violence Hotline](#)

**(800) 621-HOPE** (4673)