

Characteristics of Distressed or Distressing Students

Sometimes it is very clear when a student is having difficulty coping and sometimes their distress is masked with less obvious characteristics. Some obvious and not-so obvious signs of distress to look for are:

Problems with Academic Performance

- Poor academic performance and preparation, particularly if such behavior represents a change in previous functioning
- Excessive absences or tardiness, especially if representing a previous change in functioning
- Chronic indecisiveness or procrastination
- Repeated requests for special considerations
- Increased concern about grades despite satisfactory performance
- Increased dependence- student hangs around you or makes excessive appointments to see you during office hours

Traumatic Change in Academic Status

- Academic Probation
- Academic Dismissal

Unusual Behavior

- Listlessness, lack of energy, or falling asleep in class
- Disruptive classroom behavior
- Marked changes in personal hygiene
- Impaired speech or disjointed, confused thought
- Aggressive or threatening behavior
- Extreme mood changes or excessive, inappropriate display of emotions
- Hyperactivity, irritability, or heightened anxiety
- Prolonged or extreme emotionality
- Dramatic weight loss or weight gain with no apparent physical illness/reason
- Bizarre or strange behavior indicating a loss of contact with reality
- Use of mood altering chemicals (e.g. alcohol or other drugs)

Traumatic Change in Relationships

- Death of a family member or close friend
- Difficulties in marriage or close relationships
- Problems with family or roommates

References to Suicide or Homicide

- Overt (or veiled) references to suicide—verbally or in writing
- Statements of helplessness or hopelessness
- Indications of persistent or prolonged unhappiness
- Isolated self from friends and family

- Pessimistic feelings about the future
- Homicidal threats

Other Common Stressors That Students Experience

- Isolation and loneliness
- Identity confusion
- Break-up of intimate relationship
- Low motivation or inability to establish goals
- Serious illness
- Academic pressure or failure
- Parenting responsibilities
- Cultural oppression/discrimination
- Outside work or family pressures
- Rejection by family

(Adapted from UCD, UCSC, and OCCDHE guidelines)