



**Prevention and Response
to Critical Incidents
at the
University of Northern Iowa**

Fall 2008

www.uni.edu/alert



The University of Northern Iowa is committed to the safety and well-being of all students, faculty and staff.

There are multiple plans and teams in place to prevent, address and solve safety concerns on campus, as well as a group equipped to respond to an actual crisis. These teams include: Assessment and Consultation Team for Students, Assessment and Consultation Team for Faculty/Staff, Bias Response Team, Case Management Team, UNI Issues Group, and the Crisis Response/Planning Team. Descriptions of these teams and membership lists can be found on the UNI Alert website at www.uni.edu/alert.

Please be an active and responsible campus citizen by doing your part to maintain our safe environment. Review the following information and address concerns where you see them.

For more information and resources, visit www.uni.edu/alert

Reporting a concern during business hours

Confidentiality laws don't prevent you from reporting a concern.

To report concerns, contact:

Student concern: Counseling Center, 273-2676

Dean of Students, 273-2332

Director of Residence Life, 273-2333

Faculty concern: Office of the Provost, 273-2517

Dean of the college or department head

Staff concern: Director, Human Resources, 273-2619

Associate Director, 273-6432

Visitors: UNI Police, 273-2712

Reporting a concern after business hours:

Call UNI Police 273-2712 or 9-1-1 in an emergency

Reporting an immediate danger:

Call 9-1-1 immediately

Urgent or crisis situations may include, but are not limited to:

- A risk of suicide.
- A threat of harm to others.
- Severely disorganized, psychotic or out-of-control behavior.
- Trauma, such as sexual assault or the death or injury of someone close.

Be aware of these situations and take action.

Reporting a Concern about a Student or Others

UNI faculty, staff or students who are concerned about the behavior of an individual who is potentially dangerous to self or others or is disruptive should contact the person listed on page 1 who seems the most appropriate for the situation. Initially, the team member will consult with at least one other team member to determine an initial course of action or may commence an initial response with an individual consultation within the scope of their unit.

The team member will then provide follow-up and will report to the team during the next regular meeting. A team member may request a special meeting to discuss the concern.

Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

UNI offers an Employee Assistance Program through Allen Hospital. EAP offers initial assessment/referral and short-term counseling for employees and their immediate family members to address problems affecting personal relationships, health and work performance. For more information, contact Human Resources at 273-2422 or Deedra Dahlager at 273-7162.

Confidentiality and Records Regarding Students

Confidentiality laws do not prevent you from reporting a concern. It is permissible for faculty and staff to report concerns about students to department heads, deans administrators, student health clinic, counseling center, public safety, dean of students, etc. If you have questions, you are encouraged to call and discuss the situation to help you determine the appropriate course of action.

How you can help

Recognizing People in Distress

Some common indicator of students (and others) in distress include:

Depression

Symptoms include sleep disturbances, poor concentration, change in appetite, loss of interest in pleasureable activities, withdrawal, poor hygiene, loss of self-esteem, suicidal thoughts and preoccupation with death.

Agitation

Being disruptive, restless or hyperactive, being antagonistic, and may include an increase in alcohol and/or drug abuse.

Disorientation

May include odd or unusual thinking and behavior, lack of awareness of what is going on around them, misperception of facts or reality, rambling or disconnected speech, and behavior that seems out of context or bizarre.

Drug and Alcohol Abuse

Signs of intoxication during class, at work or other inappropriate times.

Suicidal Thoughts

Most people who attempt suicide communicate their distress through statements like “I don’t want to be here,” “No one would miss me if I were gone,” or “I’m going to kill myself.” Non-verbal messages could include giving away valued items, and putting legal, financial, and other affairs in order. Indications of suicide should be taken seriously.

Violence and Aggression

This includes physically violent behavior, verbal threats, threatening e-mail or letters, harassing or stalking behavior, and papers or exams that contain violent or threatening material.

- **Mildly troubled students** may exhibit behaviors which do not disrupt others but may indicate something is wrong and that assistance is needed.
 - Significant worsening of academic performance.
 - Excessive absences, especially if the student has previously demonstrated consistent attendance.
 - Unusual changes in patterns of interaction. Becoming withdrawn, avoidant, anxious, etc.
- **Moderately troubled students** may exhibit behaviors that indicate significant emotional distress. They may also be reluctant or unable to acknowledge a need for personal help.
 - Exaggerated or unusual emotional responses which are obviously inappropriate to the situation.
 - Repeated requests for special consideration, such as deadline extensions, especially if the student appears uncomfortable or highly emotional while disclosing the circumstances prompting the request.
 - New or repeated behavior which pushes the limits of decorum and which interferes with effective management of the immediate environment.
- **Severely troubled students** exhibit behaviors that signify an obvious crisis and that necessitate emergency action.
 - Extremely disruptive behavior, such as hostility, aggression or violence.
 - Overtly talking or hinting at **suicidal thoughts or intentions** (referring to suicide as a current and viable option).

- Threatening to harm others.
- Stalking behaviors or harassment.
- Inability to communicate clearly (garbled, slurred speech; unconnected, disjointed or rambling thoughts).
- Loss of contact with reality (hallucinations or delusions).
- Inappropriate communications, such as threatening letters, e-mail messages or voicemail.

Referring a Student For Counseling

As with many of life's problems, earlier intervention is often better. A person who receives appropriate help sooner, rather than later, may be less likely to experience more severe symptoms or problems.

The following signs may indicate a need to refer a student to the Counseling Center:

- Depression
- Suicidal thoughts or feelings
- Substance abuse
- Abrupt changes in behavior
- Inappropriate crying
- Outbursts of anger
- Low self-esteem
- Debilitating anxiety

Students also could benefit from counseling if they are having difficulty coping with a loss (e.g., death or relationship breakup), if they have experienced a traumatic incident (e.g., assault or accident), if they have experienced a significant stressor, or whenever emotional difficulties interfere with daily functioning.

How to Refer a Student to Counseling

Consider the following guidelines when talking with a student:

- Talk to the student in a private setting.
- Listen carefully and express your concern.
- Repeat back the essence of what the student tells you.
- Avoid criticizing or sounding judgmental.
- Suggest the Counseling Center as a resource to help the student.
- Inform the student that counseling is confidential and free of charge.
- Suggest that they call or visit the Counseling Center to arrange an initial appointment.
- Offer to initiate contact with the Counseling Center.

Urgent or Crisis Situations

If danger is immediate, call 9-1-1. If you believe there is an urgent situation with a student, call the Counseling Center at 273-2676 and we will consult with you about what to do. In many cases, we will recommend that you send or bring the student to the Counseling Center to meet with an on-duty crisis counselor.

After regular office hours, call UNI Public Safety at 273-2712 and they will contact a counseling center on-call staff member to consult with you.

Classroom Disruptions: What you can do

Disruptive behaviors in the classroom includes but isn't limited to:

- Challenging the instructor's authority in class.
- Inappropriate, disrespectful or uncivil responses to the comments or opinions of others in the classroom.
- Threats/challenges to do physical harm (even when stated in a joking manner).
- Intimidating or bullying behavior.
- Use of obscene or profane language.
- Excessive talking.
- Late arrival or early departure from class without permission.
- Use of personal electronic devices such as pagers, cell phones or PDAs.
- Coming to class under the influence of alcohol or another controlled substance.
- Bringing individuals to class who are not enrolled, including infants or children.
- Improper use of equipment, materials or resources.
- Inappropriate conduct while on field assignments.

Steps for Preventing and Managing Disruptions in the Classroom

- Step 1** Set clear expectations for behavior in course syllabus and discuss with students the first day of class.
- Step 2** When disruptive behavior causes you or other students concern, ask the student to remain after class for a conversation or schedule a meeting. Do not meet with the student alone if you have concerns for your safety. If a meeting cannot be arranged in person, communicate by phone, E-mail, or letter to reach the student before the next class session. If the behavior causes you serious concern, you may inform the student they cannot return to class until he/she has met with you to discuss the concerns.
- Step 3** During your meeting, discuss the disruptive behavior, clarify your expectations, ask for cooperation in adhering to class standards, and outline possible consequences if the disruptive behavior continues.

- Step 4** Make a record of any meetings or conversations and send a letter to the student summarizing the discussion.

You are encouraged to involve your department head, supervisor or the Dean of Students when meeting with a student to discuss seriously disruptive behavior. The involvement of other faculty and staff will serve to reinforce the importance of your standards, add other perspectives and help keep the conversation focused on behaviors rather than personalities. If you need immediate assistance in responding to a threat to your safety, or the safety of others, call 9-1-1.

Response to Threats/De-escalate a Situation

Myth: Violent perpetrators just snap.

Fact: Almost all violent perpetrators will give some indication of violent intentions long before they act.

Response to threats

- All threats must be taken seriously.
- People tend to reward those who threaten by backing down or retaliating, either way the perpetrator is reinforced with attention.
- Threats which are ignored provide the perpetrator with the feeling they are not being taken seriously.
- Most threats are harmless, but there are lessons learned from those who threaten in an environment which prohibits such action.

Hints to de-escalate conflict with individuals

- Take a deep breath and relax.
- Look the other person in the eye.
- Both either sit or stand when communicating.
- Speak slowly and softly.
- Keep your arms and legs uncrossed.
- Remember to look for win-win results.
- Paraphrase what the other person has said .
- Give “I” messages.
- Watch your language; try not to use words that tend to escalate conflict, such as never, always, unless, can't, won't or don't.
- Use words that tend to de-escalate, such as maybe, perhaps, what if or seems like.
- Ask questions to encourage them to look at solutions.
- Ask open-ended questions.

Your safety

- Never place yourself in a situation where you are dealing with a potentially dangerous person alone.
- Always make plans to have additional persons in the meeting or in the area to assist if necessary.
- Anytime you feel personally threatened, stop the interaction and leave.

UNI Alert

UNI Alert notifies the campus community of emergencies or threats to physical safety in situations such as tornados/severe weather, violence, hazardous materials incident, etc. Notification is through phone (landline and cell), email and text messages. Faculty, staff and students should update their personal contact information (through MyUniverse) to insure that timely and accurate notification can be made.

More information can be found at www.uni.edu/alert.

Suicide Concerns: What You Can Do

Suicide is often cited as the second leading cause of death among college students, with more than 1,000 students dying each year in the U.S. Most people who kill themselves believe that suicide is the *only* solution to unbearable feelings or problems; they have a sense of hopelessness. Their intense emotional distress may blind them to the alternative solutions available to them. Factors that increase the risk of suicide include previous suicide attempts, having a suicide plan and the means to carry it out, a family history of suicide, depression or manic-depression, and alcohol or drug abuse. Firearms are used more often than all other methods combined.

What you can do

- **Stay calm.** Take the time to listen carefully to the person.
- **Express your concern and support.** “I’m worried about...” “You’re not alone. There’s help available.”
- **Talk about it directly.**
 - Have you thought about hurting yourself?
 - If yes, have you thought about how you would hurt yourself?
 - Have you tried to hurt yourself before? How? When?
 - Do you have the means to harm yourself?
 - Don’t make a promise to keep their suicidal thoughts a secret—you may need to get help.
 - Don’t debate, lecture or argue with the person. That may add to the person’s guilt or bad feelings.

- **Keep the person safe.** Don't leave them alone until you believe they will be safe.
- **Get professional assistance.** If danger is imminent, call 9-9-1-1 for help.
 - **Professional Resources:**
 - UNI Counseling Center.....273-2676
 - UNI Police273-2712
 - Foundation2 Statewide Crisis Line 800-332-4224
 - National Suicide Hotline 800-SUICIDE (784-2433)
- **Don't ignore warning signs.** At least 70 percent of people who try to kill themselves give some sort of signal about their intentions.
 - Giving away possessions or “tying up loose ends.”
 - Lack of interest in activities, appearance or friends.
 - “Life isn't worth living.”
 - “Nobody cares.”
 - Thoughts and feelings may include: can't stop the pain, can't think clearly, can't make decisions, can't see any way out, can't sleep, eat or work, can't get out of depression, can't make the sadness go away, can't see a future without pain, can't see themselves as worthwhile, can't get anyone's attention, can't seem to get control
 - Don't try and deal with a dangerous or potentially dangerous person alone.
 - Contact UNI Police if the situation warrants, preferably in advance of the meeting.

Disclosure of Information About Students

- Confidentiality laws do not prevent you from reporting a concern
- Can be disclosed with person's permission
- Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA Section 99.36)
 - What conditions apply to disclosure of information in health and safety emergencies? An educational agency or institution may disclose personally identifiable information from an education record to appropriate parties in connection with an emergency if knowledge of the information is necessary to protect the health or safety of the student or other individuals.
 - Education records, as defined by FERPA, expressly **exclude** “records on a student who is 18 years of age or older, or who is attending an institution of post secondary education, **which are made or maintained by a** physician, psychiatrist, psychologist or other recognized professional or paraprofessional acting in his professional capacity or paraprofessional capacity, or assisting in that capacity, and **which are made, maintained or used only in conjunction with the provision of treatment to the**

student, and are not available to anyone other than persons providing such treatment, except that such records can be personally reviewed by a physician or other appropriate professional of the student's choice.”

- Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)
 - Allows disclosure of *protected health information (PHI)* with person's permission; or
 - To avert a serious threat to the health or safety of a person or the public, or to facilitate care.
 - Public health
 - Communicable diseases
- State laws regarding mental health
 - With student's permission
 - To protect a client or someone else from imminent danger
 - Court ordered
 - To report child or dependent adult abuse
- Americans with Disabilities Act
 - For students, registration with Student Disability Services and nature of accommodations are generally considered education records and are covered by FERPA.
 - The person's diagnosis or disability would generally be considered PHI and would not be disclosed without consent or unless other conditions are met (such as under HIPAA).

In summary, it is permissible for faculty and staff to report concerns about students to department heads, deans, administrators, student health clinic, counseling center, public safety, dean of students, etc. When there is an emergency regarding health and safety, it is permissible to notify parties who may be able to intervene.

Nancy Tribbensee, Ph.D., J.D., former vice president for Arizona State University and current counsel for Arizona Regents, has suggested that a psychologist or counselor who releases information to protect someone from imminent danger is not “breaking confidentiality,” but “keeping a promise.”

Safety from Natural Disasters, Fire, Etc.

The University of Northern Iowa has a comprehensive plan to address natural disasters, fires, hazardous materials and many other safety concerns on campus. In-depth information on emergency shelters, fire exit routes and other safety plans are available at www.vpaf.uni.edu/fs/healthsafety.

UNI Safety Consultants

Safety Officer.....	273-3189
Safety Manager.....	273-7269
Radiation Safety Officer.....	273-6234
Environmental Safety Specialist.....	273-3445
Fire Safety Specialist.....	273-2004

Crisis Response/Planning Team

UNI Police.....	273-2712
UNI Counseling Center.....	273-2676
Dean of Students.....	273-2332
Department of Residence.....	273-2333
Human Resources.....	273-2619
Compliance and Equity Management.....	273-2846
University Counsel.....	273-3241
Student Health Clinic.....	273-7224
Academic Affairs/Provost Office.....	273-2517
University Marketing and Public Relations.....	273-2761
University Risk Manager.....	273-6827
Outreach/Special Programs.....	273-3526
Administration and Finance.....	273-3526
Physical Plant/Safety Office.....	273-3189

