Kean University:



Faculty & Staff Guide

to Students in Distress

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**Helping Students in Distress:**

**A Guide for Kean University Faculty and Staff**

While most college students adjust to the many stresses of college life, others endure challenges that lead to feelings of being overwhelmed.

Kean University is committed to promoting wellness throughout its community. Faculty and staff professionals are uniquely positioned to witness or become aware of student distress. Students often communicate such conditions to faculty and staff professionals, with the hopes of being directed to available resources. Expressions of concern, along with guidance to appropriate Kean University support offices, can prove to be of critical importance to student well being.

**Indicators of Potential Distress**

* Excessive absences
* Unusual and/or persistent requests for academic accommodations
* Meaningful changes in academic performance
* Noticeable changes in appearance/hygiene
* Significant weight loss or weight gain
* Lethargic behaviors or falling asleep in class
* Negative emotions out of proportion to the situation
* Sudden disruptive outbursts or behaviors
* Isolation from others
* Noticeable changes in mood or hyperactivity

**How to Help a Student in Distress**

 Effective responses to distressed students can vary according to one’s personality, experiences, beliefs, and skills. Some students may be more receptive to accepting assistance than others. Additional factors include the setting of student disclosures and the depth of the relationship between the student and staff or faculty professional. In each situation, it is important to maintain one’s role - that is, one of staff or faculty, not of counselor.

 Please provide information and specific referral options to Kean University community resources.

**Interacting with the Distressed Student**

* **Speak to the student** in private, whenever possible. Providing undivided attention helps others to feel heard and respected.
* **Be Direct and nonjudgmental**. Clearly express your concerns in specific, nonjudgemental terms that focus on behaviors (e.g. “I’ve noticed that you have been absent 3 times over the past two weeks”).
* **Actively listen.** Express understanding by summarizing what you have heard, and/or conveying the feelings that you have heard (e.g. “It sounds like adjusting to a big campus has been difficult, and you are feeling overwhelmed right now”).
* **Refer.** Identify available community resources that might be helpful to the student’s particular needs (See University Resource List). If you feel that a Kean University Behavioral Intervention Team ([KUBIT](https://www.kean.edu/kubit-cares)) report is indicated, please consider letting the student know that you are doing so. This can help KUBIT members to successfully initiate dialogue with the student.
* **Follow up.** Check with the student regarding their status, offer encouragement, etc. Consult with others - supervisor, peers, office staff - if you are unsure if your interventions are effective.
* **Request guidance.** As stated above, authoring a KUBIT report is a good option if you feel that the student is distressed, has not accessed resources, etc. You may also contact Kean Counseling Center (KCC) to discuss if your concerns warrant additional actions.

**Students in Crisis**

A crisis is a situation that overwhelms a person’s coping mechanisms, resulting in emotional and physiological responses elevated enough to initiate disorientation, non-functional or destructive reactions, or threats to self or others. A serious mental health crisis can include the following:

* Suicidal statements (verbal or in writing)
* Violent statements (verbal or in writing)
* Criminal acts (e.g. destroying property)
* Severely compromised communications (e.g. expressing incoherent thoughts)
* Losing contact with reality (e.g. hallucinating)
* Panic reactions
* Hostile, aggressive, and/or disruptive behavior

**How to Respond to Student in Crisis**

When a student appears to be in danger of harming themself or others, calling [Kean University Police Department](https://www.kean.edu/offices/university-police) (KUPD) (908-737-4800) or 911 is essential.

**How to Respond to Non-Crisis Situations**

When a student appears to be distressed but not in immediate danger to self or others, please consider filing a [KUBIT Report.](https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?KeanUniv&layout_id=3) This team of multi disciplined professionals provides proactive caring support to students displaying disruptive and/or concerning behaviors. The KUBIT team gathers information to assess the student’s situation, provides recommendations for appropriate intervention strategies, and helps to connect students with campus and/or community resources.

**Referring to Kean Counseling Center (KCC)**

 KCC offers scheduled as well as urgent sessions for students who are experiencing high levels of difficulty. Faculty and staff can walk the student to KCC, a member of its staff will see the student the same day. If the student’s difficulties are expressed after KCC operational hours, faculty and staff should contact KUPD for assistance. KCC is open 5 days a week (Monday, Thursday, and Friday from 9:00am -5:00pm and Tuesday, Wednesday from 9:00am-7:00pm). Additionally, [Uwill](https://uwill.com/) offers teletherapy appointments and crisis conversations, and can be a good option for when difficulties arise outside of KCC hours. This is a free service to Kean students.

**Confidentiality**

 Due to the ethical and legal parameters of confidentiality, KCC professionals are unable to discuss student information (including but not limited to attendance of sessions) without written consent. However, faculty and staff may follow up with the student (as advised above).

**Campus Environment Assessment**

The Office of Facilities and Campus Planning will conduct an assessment, every five years, of elements of the campus environment that might be used in a suicide attempt including, but not limited to: access to building rooftops, balconies, windows, and bridges; access to toxic substances including chemicals in campus laboratories; and access to drugs, alcohol, controlled dangerous substances, and firearms.

**Conclusion**

 Faculty and Staff are essential to our student population's well-being. You may serve as the first professionals to identify evidence of student distress. Kean University offers many support services for both the distressed student and the helping professional. Faculty and Staff are encouraged to clearly acknowledge concerns for the distressed student, express sincere interest in their welfare, explore viable support options, and “check in” with the student when possible while trusting that each referred office will do everything possible to assist the distressed student. Thank you for your time, effort, and investment in the wellbeing of our student population!

**University Resource List**

[Kean University Police Department](https://www.kean.edu/offices/university-police)

[Kean University Behavioral Intervention Team](https://www.kean.edu/kubit-cares)

[Kean Counseling Center](https://www.kean.edu/offices/counseling-center)

[Cougar Connections Center of Social Work](https://www.kean.edu/cougar-connections)

[Kean Wellness Center](https://www.kean.edu/wellness-center)

[UWill Mental Health and Wellness](https://uwill.com/)