

HARVARD
UNIVERSITY



The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

GSAS Crimson Folder

Guidance and resources to assist students in distress

RECOGNIZE | RESPOND | REFER | RESOURCE

GSAS Crimson Folder

WHAT IS THE GSAS CRIMSON FOLDER?

GSAS students often encounter challenges during school and may not recognize that they need help. As an administrator, faculty, or staff member, you are in a prime position to guide GSAS students in distress to support services. The GSAS Crimson Folder is designed to help you prepare to support students by learning how to recognize signs of distress, respond to a student's needs with attentiveness and empathy, refer the student to others who may be best equipped to help, and by becoming familiar with resources.

STUDENT PRIVACY, FERPA, AND CONFIDENTIALITY

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) permits communication about a student in connection with a health and safety emergency. Observations of a student's conduct or statements made by a student are not protected by FERPA. Consideration for student privacy should always be given before information is shared. When communicating with a student, it is important to use the language "private and discrete" rather than "confidential," as you may need to share information with those listed in this document.



RECOGNIZE

When observing potential signs of distress in a student, 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. However, together they may indicate the student needs or may be asking for help.

MILD DISTRESS

Students in mild distress may exhibit behaviors that do not disrupt others but may indicate something is wrong and that assistance is warranted.

Many of these behaviors may also indicate a greater level of distress.

Behaviors may include:

- Change in coursework or grades to poor performance
- Excessive absences, especially after prior consistent attendance
- Unusual or markedly changed patterns of interaction (e.g., goes from being actively involved to quiet and withdrawn, or goes from being quiet to more agitated or demanding)
- Other characteristics that suggest trouble managing stress (e.g., low mood, very rapid speech, swollen or red eyes, marked decline in hygiene, falling asleep during class, crying)

MODERATE DISTRESS

It is important to keep in mind that students may be reluctant to, emotionally unable to, or uncertain of how to ask for help. Behaviors may include:

- Repeated requests for accommodations, such as deadline extensions
- Unusual or exaggerated emotional responses that are clearly inappropriate to the situation
- Aggressive behavior to self or others or excessive risk-taking
- Signs of memory loss
- New signs of hyperactivity (e.g., unable to sit still, difficulty maintaining focus, gives the impression of going "too fast," appears agitated)
- Signs of depression (e.g., appears emotionless or lethargic, weight change, looks exhausted or complains of sleeping concerns, displays feelings of worthlessness or self-hatred, is apathetic about previous interests)
- Talks about or shows unusual patterns of eating, not eating, or excessively eating
- Shows signs of injury to self (e.g., cuts or scratches, bruises, burns)
- Deteriorating academic performance (e.g., incapacitating test anxiety, sporadic class attendance, extended absences from class)
- Begins or increases alcohol or other drug use

SEVERE DISTRESS

Students in severe distress exhibit behaviors that signify an obvious crisis and that necessitate emergency care. Behaviors may include:

- Aggressive behavior to self or others or excessive risk-taking
- Signs of memory loss
- Shows loose or incoherent thought patterns, has new difficulty focusing thoughts, or displays nonsensical conversation patterns
- Exhibits behaviors or emotions that are markedly inappropriate or disruptive to the situation
- Displays extreme suspiciousness or irrational fears of persecution; withdraws, does not allow others to be close; irrationally believes they are being watched, followed, etc.
- Shows signs of depression (e.g., appears emotionless or lethargic, weight loss, looks exhausted or complains of sleeping poorly, displays feelings of worthlessness or self-hatred, is apathetic about previous interests)
- Shows signs of injury to self (e.g., cuts or scratches, bruises, burns)
- Inability to communicate clearly (e.g., garbled, slurred speech, unconnected, disjointed, or rambling thoughts)
- Loss of contact with reality (e.g., seeing or hearing things that others cannot see or hear, beliefs or actions greatly at odds with reality or probability)
- Stalking behaviors
- Inappropriate communications (e.g., threatening letters, email messages, statements, harassment)
- Overtly suicidal thoughts (e.g., referring to suicide as a current option or in a written assignment)
- Threats to harm others



RESPOND

Responding to students in distress can feel unfamiliar and uncomfortable. It is important to engage the student and relay your concerns. **Be mindful of the student's background, identity, and culture, as well as your own.** Listen patiently, withhold judgement, and allow for silences if the student is slow to respond. The tips below and questions outlined on the next page can help guide a difficult conversation.

STAY SAFE

If there is imminent danger to you, the student, or someone else, call HUPD 617-495-1212 or 911.

TAKE YOUR TIME

Actively listen to the student's concerns and consider how you might be able to help. Choose an appropriate place or situation for having this conversation.

STAY CALM

Take a few deep breaths to calm yourself. Use a calm voice when talking and asking questions.

USE ACTIVE LISTENING

Make eye contact and give your full attention. Restate what the student says to make sure you understand what is causing the distress (e.g., "As I listen to you, I hear you saying...").

ASK DIRECT QUESTIONS

Don't be afraid to directly ask the student if they are having thoughts of harming themselves or others. By asking questions you are not instilling the thought.



Respond Tips

SAY WHAT YOU SEE. Be direct. Let the student know that you've noticed a change and you want to talk.

“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.”

HEAR THEM OUT. Be there to listen and be fully present. As an active listener, be curious and ask appropriate follow-up questions.

“Wow, 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 hard, how is that affecting you?”

KNOW YOUR ROLE. Set clear boundaries and connect students to those who can meet their needs. You are the bridge. Remember you are not a confidential resource but honor their privacy as best as possible.

“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 CAMHS or local disability coordinator who may be helpful to you.” | “I may need to share information with the GSAS Office of Student Services in order to figure out how best to help you/get you the resources that would be helpful.”

CONNECT TO HELP. Determine whether the student needs immediate support and refer them to the appropriate resources. Recognize that it may take time for a student to build trust and accept help. Follow-up with them, if welcomed.

“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 Harvard who can help.” | “I am not sure, let me find out.” | “How are you doing since we last spoke? Was that resource helpful?”



Identify What the Student Needs

Listen to the student to determine their immediate needs. Review the options below to guide the student to the appropriate resource.

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



REACT



Call HUPD 617-495-1212 or 911

Any report made to HUPD involving a GSAS student will be brought to the attention of GSAS's Office of Student Services.

The student shows signs of distress, but it is not clear how serious it is. I feel uneasy and very concerned about the student.



CONSULT



During Business Hours:
Contact GSAS Student Services 617-495-5005 to strategize and triage student support.

After Hours:
Contact CAMHS Cares 617-495-2042 to connect the student to mental health support.

I am not concerned for anyone's immediate safety, but the student is having significant academic or personal issues and could use some support.



REFER



Review the resources listed on page 8 and offer to connect the student to the office that will best support them.

If you are unsure, refer the student to meet with GSAS Office of Student Services.



Wellness Checks

A wellness check is a consultative process that exemplifies the partnership between the GSAS Office of Student Services and faculty and staff in responding to student needs. If you have not heard from a student for some time and you or others are concerned about their safety or well-being, it may be necessary to initiate a wellness check. This process typically begins with contacting the student's emergency contact and may involve enlisting the assistance of HUPD or local police.

Once you recognize that it has been some time since you have heard from the student, it is helpful to ask yourself the following questions:

- Is it typical that the student would not reply to emails for some time?
- When was the last time you heard from or physically saw the student?
- Does the student have a history of being out of contact?
- Are there other community members (peers, colleagues, etc.) that might be in touch with the student?
- Have others expressed concern about the student?
- What outreach have you tried already—emails, calls, leaving notes, using department means (Slack, messaging app, etc.)? Have you tried multiple means to connect?
- Are there any mental or physical health concerns that you are aware of?
- Does the student live alone or with others?

Initial outreach to the student may come from a member of the department or GSAS. If a student does not respond to faculty or departmental outreach, it may be necessary to consult with GSAS Office of Student Services for support and to initiate a wellness check.

Contact GSAS Office of Student Services

Departmental staff, faculty, or other community members may email The GSAS Office of Student Services at stuserv@fas.harvard.edu or call 617-495-5005 to request a wellness check for a student. The GSAS Office of Student Services is available to assist a faculty or staff member to send a message that expresses the urgency and initiates the wellness check process.



EMERGENCY

Medical or Public Safety Emergency 911
Harvard University Police 617-495-1212
Harvard University Police Longwood 617-432-1212
Medical Urgent Care at HU Health Services
 617-495-5711
For urgent but not immediately life threatening issues
Refer to your department's internal emergency protocol

COUNSELING AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

CAMHS Cares Line 617-495-2042
24-hour access line that allows students (or those concerned about a student) to speak with a licensed counselor

SUPPORT FOR FACULTY & STAFF

HUHS Behavioral Health 617-495-2323
Clinical care for Harvard employees
Employee Assistance Program
Offers free, confidential help for Harvard employees
Office of Faculty Affairs
Office of Postdoctoral Affairs
Support for faculty, research scholars, postdocs, fellows, and RAs in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences

GSAS

Office of Student Services 617-495-5005
Primary resource for general GSAS student support
Office of Student Affairs 617-495-1814
Academic policy clarification and issues regarding students' academic status, progress, and conduct
Office of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging 617-495-5315
Supports diversity, inclusion, and belonging efforts
Office of Financial Aid
Guidance regarding financial obligations and support
Title IX Resource Coordinators
 Seth Avakian avakian@fas.harvard.edu
Address issues of sexual and gender-based harassment
The Advising Project
Initiative focused on improving the advising experience
Engage
Centralized resource for GSAS student groups and social events
Student Resources
Comprehensive collection of offices, initiatives, groups, and programs that serve GSAS students

UNIVERSITY

Global Support Services
Resources for Harvard students traveling and living abroad
Harvard Chaplains
Supports religious, spiritual, and moral engagement
Harvard International Office
Support for international students and scholars
Harvard Office for Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging
Coordinates equity and access efforts across Harvard
Harvard University Health Services
Multi-specialty medical practice exclusively for members of the Harvard community
HUHS Center for Wellness and Health Promotion
Workshops, services, and classes centered on wellbeing
HU Ombuds Office
Assists in managing issues affecting work or academics
LGBTQ+ Supports
Resources and information that serve LGBTQ+ individuals
Office for Gender Equity
Counseling, reporting, and policy resources to address issues of sexual harassment and misconduct

ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY RESOURCES



Suicide & Crisis Lifeline Phone Number 988
Samaritans Suicide Prevention Hotline 877-870-4673
SafeLink Domestic/Dating Violence Hotline 877-785-2020
Boston Area Rape Crisis Center 800-841-8371

Boston Food Access 617-635-3717
MA Confidential Referral Helpline 211
MA Mental Health Resources 617-580-8541
MA Department of Mental Health 800-221-0053