What should I do if I am concerned about the well-being of one of my students?

**As always, if anyone appears to be in immediate, imminent danger, or if you think that others may be put in danger, call 9-1-1 right away.** Thankfully, however, in the vast majority of instances, student well-being concerns are not at that level.

You do not need to be a counselor to sense when one of the people around you does not seem quite themselves. When that someone is one of our students, advisees, supervisees, or mentees, we have an obligation to see if they may need assistance. This could be as simple as saying, “I noticed you seem a little distracted lately. Is everything ok? Is there anything that I can do to be helpful?” Or even, “I noticed you don’t seem yourself lately. Can I provide you with information on University resources?”

If a student needs assistance, oftentimes they will not outwardly tell you. Instead, their troubles will manifest through subtle actions.

Behaviors might include:

- Behavior has changed
- Quality of work has diminished
- Deadlines have not been met
- Communication is reduced or stopped
- Student is there, but distracted
- You hear concern from others
- Behavior reflects increased hopelessness, helplessness or despair
- Difficulties with memory and decision-making

Verbal cues might include:

- Wondering if they should stay in the program
- Expressing being overwhelmed

If you have a student exhibiting any number of these behaviors, you may choose to have a conversation with the student. It is okay to ask a student how they are doing—especially when you suspect that they need help. To the student, you might be the only person that cares enough to ask. Examples of conversation starters include:

- I have noticed you have seemed a little off lately. Are you ok? Is there anything that I can do to be helpful?
- I noticed that you don’t seem quite like yourself lately. Is there anything that you would like to talk about?
You seem distracted lately. Is there anything going on?
What does your support network look like?

As you engage in this conversation with your student, be careful to avoid making the student feel like there is “something wrong with them.” Instead, listen to them and make sure they feel heard.

Cinnamon Adams (cinnamon.adams@uconn.edu) and Karen Bresciano (karen.bresciano@uconn.edu), staff members of The Graduate School, are available both for consultation with you and/or for referral to your students. When a concern arises, Cinnamon and Karen work with students, faculty, and staff to determine the best steps to take and the most beneficial resources for the given situation. Contacting Cinnamon and/or Karen is the best starting place for any graduate student concern, especially if you are not sure where to start. Think of them as the place to go when you aren’t sure where to go.

For many graduate students, their advisor is their most significant relationship at the university. Therefore, it is critical that you are familiar with the resources available to all UConn students and employees pertaining to mental and physical health.

- The Center for Students with Disabilities works with graduate students to determine appropriate and reasonable accommodations when there is a documented disability.
- Student Health and Wellness offers free and confidential appointments at their Mental Health Resource Centers as well as an Online Suicide Prevention Training Program.
- The UConn Health Student Behavior Health Service offers professional guidance, counseling and medication management.
- The Ombuds Office provides a confidential, neutral resource for staff, faculty, professional and graduate students and trainees to express concerns, identify options to address workplace conflicts, facilitate productive communication, and surface responsible concerns regarding university policies and practices.
- Students may choose to take an Academic Leave of Absence if they need to step away temporarily from their academic studies at some point during their graduate career.

What do I do if my student appears to be in mental or physical distress?

As before, a student may display particular actions or verbal cues that cause you to suspect that they are in need of assistance for serious or troublesome circumstances. Faculty, staff, friends, and family are frequently in a position to observe student behaviors that indicate distress or potentially compromised personal well-being.
More imminently worrisome behaviors might include:
- Impulse control problems
- Expression of violence in writings and drawings
- Acts of physical aggression
- History of on-going discipline problems
- Social withdrawal or severe discomfort in social settings
- Significant substance abuse
- Fascination or preoccupation with violence or weapons
- Obsessive stalking or monitoring of others (please note that the Office of Institutional Equity should also be notified)
- Unusual changes in personality, eating, and sleeping patterns
- Increased isolation and social withdrawal
- Unkempt, irritable, or disconnected
- Inability to focus and concentrate

More imminently worrisome verbal cues might include:
- Expressions of anger/agitation/inability to cope with stress
- Expressed paranoia/mistrust
- Mention of weapons or violence as a way to solve problems
- Disclosure of suicidal thoughts or harming self or others
- Articulation of depression, hopelessness, or self-harm

If you notice a student exhibiting the above behaviors, or if you have a concern about a student who you perceive to be threatening, harming or disruptive, submit a referral to the Student Care Team at studentcareteam.uconn.edu. This includes a student whose behavior or well-being are negatively impacting those around the student. The Student Care Team is a multidisciplinary team that meets regularly to evaluate behaviors by University students that are perceived to be threatening, harming or disruptive to the student, to others or to both and coordinate an appropriate response.

When completing a referral, you will be asked for a concise, yet thorough description of the events/incidents/reasons that led you to recognize that the student might need help. You will also be asked to provide brief information about yourself, the individual(s) involved, and any other pertinent documents/photographs/emails/etc., if applicable.

After submission, a representative may contact you for further information or they will contact the student of concern directly. Do not be worried if you receive no response from the Student Care Team; this does not mean that the student of concern is not being assisted.
What do I do if a student is in immediate danger of harm to themselves or to others?

If a student appears to be in immediate, imminent danger, or if you think that the student will put others in danger, call 9-1-1 right away. If there is an emergency or if the situation requires immediate attention please call 9-1-1.

Actions indicating that an individual might be in immediate danger include:

- Making direct threats to harm themselves and/or others
- Developing the capacity or means to carry out a plan to harm themselves and/or others
- Giving away possessions and saying goodbye (in person or via social media) to family and friends

Once the student is in the care of emergency responders, then submit a referral to the Student Care Team.

In summary:

- It is okay to ask a student how they are doing. To the student, you might be the only person that cares enough to ask.
- In most cases, a student will not tell you when they need help. Instead, you might detect that they need assistance through their actions and verbal cues.
- If you have any concerns about a student and you don't know where to begin, email Cinnamon (cinnamon.adams@uconn.edu) and/or Karen (karen.bresciano@uconn.edu).
- Be familiar with the resources available to all UConn students and employees pertaining to mental and physical health including the Center for Students with Disabilities, Student Health and Wellness, and the Ombuds Office.
- If a student appears to be in severe mental or physical distress, but they are not in danger of imminent harm, submit a referral to the Student Care Team at studentcareteam.uconn.edu.
- If a student is in immediate danger, or if they might put others in danger, call 9-1-1.