Helping Employees in Distress

Resource Guide

Dangerous Employee
Safety is an immediate concern; Verbal or physical threats to harm others; Active threats of suicide and resists help.

Disruptive, Disturbing, or Troubled Employee
Safety is not an immediate concern; Threatens harm to self or others, but will accept help; Demonstrates bizarre behavior or communication; Disruptive to the work environment.

If employee is dangerous or threatening harm to self or others
Call 911

Mental Health Consultation or Referral
Employee Assistance Program
352-392-5787

Human Resources Consultation
Employee Relations
352-392-1072

Employee Relations Satellite Offices:
Health Science Center . . . 352-392-3786
PPD . . . . . . . . . . . 352-392-2333
IFAS . . . . . . . . . . . 352-392-4777
E&G/Auxiliaries . . 352-392-6615

When working with an employee exhibiting disruptive or troubled behaviors:

• In an emergency and safety is an immediate concern, call 911.

• For non-emergency safety concerns, call the UF Police Department at 352-392-1111.

• Consult with the HRS Employee Relations Office and the Employee Assistance Program to develop a plan to address the employee's concerns.

• Consult with your supervisor.

Emergency .......................... 911
UF Police Department ...... 352-392-1111
Employee Assistance Program . 352-392-5787
HRS Employee Relations* ...... 352-392-1072
Office of Victim Services* ...... 352-392-5648

*After office hours, call 352-392-1111

The Office of Human Resource Services (HRS) has developed this informational guide to aid in assisting employees experiencing difficulties.
Disruptive or Disturbing Employee

Warning signs of disruptive or disturbing employee behavior
Disruptive or distressed employees exhibit behaviors that signify an obvious crisis and necessitate more immediate intervention. Examples include:

- Highly disruptive behavior (e.g., verbal hostility, aggression, subversion of team work, disregard for workplace decorum and expected conduct)
- Failure to comply with corrective feedback
- Inability to communicate clearly (garbled, pressured speech, disorganized, confused, or rambling thoughts)
- Loss of contact with reality (seeing or hearing things which others cannot see or hear; irrational beliefs or fears that others may be conspiring against them)
- Stalking behaviors and inappropriate communications (including threatening letters, e-mail messages, harassment)
- Suicidal thoughts and/or threats to harm others (may be communicated orally or in written formats through e-mail or on social network or academic sites)

Response to a disruptive or disturbing employee

- If immediate safety is a concern or the person acts in a highly irrational or disruptive way, call 911
- If safety is not a concern, attempt to decrease the situation; offer to find someone to assist in problem-solving; meet and work on a solution
- Consult with the HRS Employee Relations Office and notify your supervisor
- If needed, consult with the Employee Assistance Program
- Work with your supervisor and the HRS Employee Relations Office to develop a plan
- Implement the plan and follow up with recommended resources and your supervisor
- Document your actions and conversations

Recognizing and helping the person who has thoughts about not wanting to live
Supervisors sometimes find themselves talking to someone who appears to be very sad, hopeless, and in despair. If the person's conversation or behaviors suggest suicide may be a concern, here are some suggestions for how to help:

- Listen and take time to understand the scope of his or her concerns
- Ask the question – Based on what you are saying about how things are for you, I am wondering... Are you thinking about not wanting to live? Are you thinking about killing yourself?
- Be persistent; if after further conversation you are still concerned, ask again
- Offer hope and promote the idea of getting help
- Refer to campus and community mental health resources: Employee Assistance Program (352-392-5787) or Alachua County Crisis Center (352-264-6789)
- Consult with HRS Employee Relations Office and develop a follow-up plan
- Communicate with your supervisor

Troubled Employee

Signs that an employee may be troubled
Employees in distress may not be disruptive to others, but may exhibit behaviors that indicate something is problematic. They may also be reluctant or unable to acknowledge a need for personal help. Behaviors may include:

- Marked changes in performance
- Tardiness and excessive absences inconsistent with prior history
- Changes in emotional states; e.g., sadness, crying, lethargy, irritability, rapid speech, preoccupied, increased and more intense disagreement with peers, sense of confusion
- Changes in physical well-being: e.g., swollen eyes from crying, increased illnesses, poor self-hygiene, rapid weight loss/gain
- Repeated requests for special consideration; e.g., deadline extensions, changes in job requirements
- Communication in either oral, written, or electronic formats that may suggest a threat to self or others

Response to troubled employees

- Consult the Employee Assistance Program and Employee Relations
- Address the situation directly and how it relates to the position; have someone else in the meeting with the two of you
- Do not make promises of confidentiality
- Refer employee to campus and community mental health resources

This publication adapted with permission from the University of Florida Division of Student Affairs (Helping Students in Distress) and the University of Central Florida (911 Guide). (updated 2010)