

## Helping a Colleague Who Is Distressed or Troubled

### When to be concerned

As members of the Boston University community, we work and study in a challenging environment and are constantly striving for excellence and high performance, a situation that can contribute to stress. We all cope with stress in different ways at different times. We might become irritable, overwhelmed, anxious, tired, depressed, or demoralized. For the psychologically vulnerable, this may be too much to tolerate without losing control, which can sometimes lead to tragic results.

While there is no clear way to predict behavior, Tom Robbins, the Executive Director of Public Safety and the Chief of the BU Police, says, "People don't suddenly 'go crazy'—there is usually an escalating pattern leading up to violent behavior that people see before the actual event. It therefore may be preventable."

### A co-worker is often the first to observe signs of distress or trouble.

Early recognition, intervention, and referral are critical to getting someone help and preventing violence. If you find yourself worried or alarmed about an individual who is distressed or troubled, you should speak with a behavioral health professional at the **Faculty & Staff Assistance Office (FSAO)**.

**Taking action can save a job, education, career, or life. If an individual's behavior appears to be an imminent threat to safety, call the BU Police Department 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year at 617-353-2121 for the Charles River Campus and 617-414-4444 for the Medical Center Campus.**

## Boston University Resources

Faculty & Staff Assistance Office	617-353-5381
Boston University Police	617-353-2121
Medical Center Public Safety	617-414-4444
Boston Medical Center Emergency Departments	
Menino Pavilion	617-414-4075
East Newton Pavilion	617-638-6240
University Chaplains	617-353-3560

## Community Resources

Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center Emergency Department	617-754-2400
Brigham and Women's Hospital Emergency Department	617-732-5636
Massachusetts General Hospital Emergency Department	617-724-4100
St. Elizabeth's Hospital Emergency Department	617-789-2666
Samaritans of Boston	617-247-0220 508-875-4500
Samaritans for Teens	800-252-8336
Boston Area Rape Crisis Center	617-492-7273
Safelink Statewide Domestic Violence Hotline	877-785-2020



### Boston University Faculty & Staff Assistance Office

270 Bay State Road, B-30  
Boston, Massachusetts 02215  
Phone: 617-353-5381  
Fax: 617-353-7970

**Faculty & Staff Assistance Office**  
at Boston University Medical Campus

General Clinical Research Center  
88 East Newton Street  
Evans 8 (Evans Building, 8th Floor)  
Phone: 617-353-5381

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## Helping a Colleague

Who is distressed or troubled

[www.bu.edu/fsao](http://www.bu.edu/fsao)



## Signs and symptoms of distress or trouble

- Extreme anxiety or panic
- Increased irritability, anger, rage, or other aggressive behavior
- Conversations, e-mails, or other written material with themes of hopelessness, social isolation, rage, or despair
- Bizarre, irrational, or paranoid thinking
- Direct suicidal thoughts or statements
- Expressing a wish or intent to injure others
- Talk of guns, bridges, or other dangerous or violent subjects
- Marked changes in personal hygiene, work performance, or social behavior
- Isolation or withdrawal, alienating members of their support systems or family
- Excessive use of alcohol or other drugs
- Increased use of sick time

## Consider other factors

- Colleagues expressing fear, concern, or worry about a co-worker
- Your "gut sense," even if vague, that something is seriously wrong or dangerous
- Actual or threatened loss of a relationship or job, or death of a family member

## How you can help: simple guidelines

A distressed or troubled person may not know how to ask for help. You can express your concerns in a caring, nonjudgmental way in a private place.

- Remain respectful, calm, and patient
- Find out if there are others with whom they have spoken about their problem. Do they have a support system?
- Express concern: "I am concerned; worried about you. . ."
- Don't feel you need to provide a solution but do offer resources such as FSAO.
- Do not make promises, especially about confidentiality.
- Do not dismiss, minimize, or rationalize your observations and concerns, thinking someone else will deal with them.

## You Are an Important Key to Safety at Boston University!

### How to make a referral

- Suggest that the individual make an appointment and express confidence that he or she will get help.
- If you are uncomfortable approaching a co-worker, you can call the **Faculty & Staff Assistance Office** at **617-353-5381** for a consultation on how best to approach a referral and how to alert staff of your concerns.
- You can help make an appointment or accompany your colleague. Write down details of the appointment, including time, location, and the clinician's name.
- If you think the situation is critical, call and say that your colleague needs urgent care.

**Remember, there is usually a pattern of escalating behaviors and distress that, in retrospect, was observed by others.**

## Services offered

The staff of the Faculty & Staff Assistance Office includes licensed clinicians with expertise in all areas affecting faculty and staff life. The University also has an interdisciplinary team that meets regularly to work on safety issues that involve faculty, staff, students, and members of the public.

The Faculty & Staff Assistance Office offers the following **to all faculty and staff members at no cost:**

- Confidential consultation
- Crisis intervention
- Brief treatment which may include individual or couples therapy

The staff at FSAO maintains an extensive network of community providers for individuals or families who need specialized services or longer-term treatment.

When you call for an appointment, a secretary will ask you if this is your first contact with FSAO. An urgent caller will be seen as quickly as possible; otherwise, you will be asked about convenient times. A clinician may also be consulted by telephone.

**All calls and visits are strictly confidential. The only exception is in situations of life-and-death emergencies when a person's safety may be at risk.**

## Emergencies

**In case of an emergency, call the BU Police Department 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year at 617-353-2121 for the Charles River Campus and 617-414-4444 for the Medical Center Campus.**

**Do not leave urgent messages on the FSAO answering machine.** The FSAO provides coverage from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday. Non-urgent calls will be answered the following morning.