

Responding to Disturbing Content in Student Work

Faculty and teaching assistants sometimes find disturbing comments in the written work of students, such as:

- Disclosure of personal trauma or abuse
- References to suicidal thoughts or severe depression
- Violent or morbid content that is disturbing or threatening
- Sexual content that is disturbing or excessively graphic
- Bizarre or incoherent content
- Disclosure of severe problems with alcohol or drug abuse

Such writing may simply indicate a dramatic or unusual style, but may also suggest:

- Psychological or emotional problems
- Possible danger to self or others
- A bid for attention
- A “cry for help”

The following guidelines may help determine whether there is reason for concern and how best to respond.

In your written comments,

- Acknowledge the content with comments like, “That must have been hard for you.”
- Invite discussion with comments like, “Sounds like that was difficult for you- do you have someone to talk with about this?” or, “If you would like to talk about this, stop by after class.”

Consider the student’s behavior in class and whether that reinforces or decreases your concern. For example, writing about suicide is more concerning if the student appears sad and withdrawn.

Consult with your department Chair or supervisor and/or CAPS staff. The CAPS Urgent Care counselor and others are available for consultation to determine if referral, immediate intervention, or outreach to the student is indicated. The counselor may also provide suggestions about how to talk with the student. The counselor can review a copy of the written material if it is faxed to CAPS.

Consult after hours or on the weekend if the situation is urgent. Simply call the usual CAPS number (530-752-0871) and follow the prompt to press “5-5” and you will be connected with a mental health professional affiliated with CAPS.

If you feel threatened or uneasy do not meet with the student alone. Consult your department supervisor, the Police and/or CAPS and consider having another person attend the meeting or other options to ensure safety.

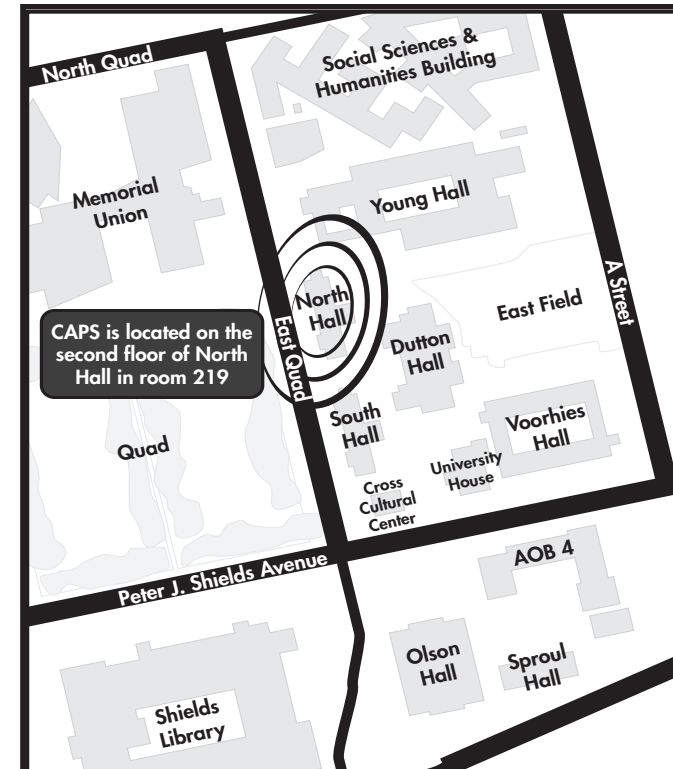
When meeting with the student, ask about the inspiration for the work, to provide a context and see if the student has been influenced by similar writings (e.g., Stephen King). Consider the student’s behavior in class and whether that reinforces or decreases your concern. Consider asking the student directly if he/she is thinking about suicide or other self-destructive behavior.

Know your limits. Remember your role is teacher not therapist. Even a brief acknowledgement or expression of concern can be very meaningful and helpful to a student; however, the conversation does not need to be lengthy or repeated if that is beyond your limits.

Refer to CAPS or other resources. If you refer to CAPS, the student may immediately see a CAPS Urgent Care counselor during CAPS hours, or can schedule a regular appointment.

www.caps.ucdavis.edu

Information and resources are available on the CAPS website.



PROVIDING YOU WITH...

- Urgent Care Assessment
- Crisis Intervention
- Individual Counseling
- Couples Counseling
- Group Counseling
- Psychiatry
- 24 Hour Consultation
- Behavioral Health Clinic
- Stress & Wellness Clinic
- Eating Disorder Management Team
- Applied Sports Psychology Program
- Referrals
- Workshops
- Consultations
- Peer Counseling
- Online Resources, www.caps.ucdavis.edu

TO HELP YOU WITH...

- Personal Development
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Stress Management
- Academic Problems
- Performance Anxiety
- Athletic Concerns
- Identity Concerns
- Loneliness
- Relationship Concerns
- Career Concerns
- Family Problems
- Sexual Assault
- Problems with Intimacy
- Eating Disorders
- Concerns with Alcohol/Drug Use
- Conflict Resolution

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Cowell Student Health Center
530-752-2300

Campus Violence Prevention Program
530-752-3299

Suicide Prevention
530-756-5000

**Sexual Assault/Domestic Violence
Center Crisis Line**
530-662-1133

**Alcohol & Drug Abuse Prevention
and Treatment (ADAPT)**
530-752-6334

County Mental Health: Mobile Crisis
(Nights/ Weekends)
530-666-8515

CAPS HOURS

Monday through Friday, 8:00 am - 4:45 pm.

FOR AN APPOINTMENT

Call CAPS at 530-752-0871
during regular office hours.

FOR 24-HOUR CONSULTATION

Call CAPS after hours
and follow the prompts.



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