December 12, 2011

Dear Vice Presidents and Deans,

Recently Vice President Lampkin forwarded the deans a letter for faculty and TAs (Nov. 28, 2011) about supporting students through the stress that comes at the close of the academic year. Faculty and staff also feel considerable personal and professional pressure at this time of year. It is our responsibility to be proactive, reach out to those in need, and provide assistance before difficulties reach a crisis point. Attached are some tips and resources for dealing with difficult situations; feel free to share these with anyone in your organization who would find it helpful.

There is no single set of signs that indicate a person is in acute distress or at risk for aggressive behavior, but the attached information may be helpful in identifying potentially serious situations that merit assessment. You also can learn more about signs of distress and available resources in the safety training video, Hoos Making a Safer Community at the University of Virginia, available at www.virginia.edu/safercommunity/training. Don’t hesitate to consult with professionals if you have concerns about the health and well-being of a colleague.

Faculty and staff have a couple of options for seeking help on their own. First, Human Resources has consultants trained to help with Faculty and Staff Relations; call the Service Center at 982.0123 for a referral. The Faculty and Employee Assistance Program (FEAP) offers confidential assessments, short-term problem solving, and community referrals as necessary. For more information, visit: http://www.uvafeap.com or call 243.2643 (866.950.0159 afterhours and on weekends). Employees also may seek services under the UVa Health Plan from either a primary care physician or mental health provider. For information on primary care and mental health providers visit Aetna at www.aetna.com to use the “DocFind” tool.

There are some situations that are so serious they call for immediate intervention. If an individual expresses the intent to harm someone or harm him or herself, directly or indirectly, seek immediate assistance by contacting the University of Virginia Police by calling 911. Our law enforcement officers are trained and prepared to help in emergency and urgent situations.

Thank you for your assistance in maintaining the health and wellbeing of our community and best wishes during the holiday season.

Sincerely,

Susan Carkeek
Vice President & Chief Human Resources Officer
RESOURCES

General tips for having difficult conversations, such as dismissal/non-renewal:

- Understand the emotional impact of hearing bad news and allow the time for the affected employee to talk. Hopefully, they were aware of this potential outcome based on previous feedback; that will help them cope with the information.
- Consider having two individuals present the news. This takes pressure off the single person giving the bad news, and provides a witness and source of support. Those present should offer to help the individual make future plans at a later date.
- Talk with colleagues who have gone through this process before.
- Look for signs listed below that the person is not coping well.

Recognizing and Assisting Employees in Distress

- **Trust your instincts.** If you experience any sense of unease about a colleague, it is important to pay attention to those inner signals. If someone talks about painful feelings or suicide, even if it seems like a joke, it is important to express concern for the person’s welfare and then to consult with professionals in order to assess the seriousness of the situation (suggested resources appear at the end of this memo).
- **Listen carefully.** Many people will have trouble articulating what their real difficulties are. Be available. Show interest and offer support. Try not to get upset or communicate your own personal judgments. Be calm, receptive and serious as you listen.
- **Help them get help.** The most effective means of suicide and violence prevention is a referral for professional help. Call the Faculty and Employee Assistance Program.

What to look for:

**Workplace indicators may include:**
- Deterioration in quality of work
- A negative change in demeanor
- Repeated requests for extensions
- Missed deadlines
- Repeated absences
- Disorganized or erratic performance

**Communication indicators may include:**
- Direct statements indicating distress, family problems, or other difficulties
- Unprovoked anger or hostility
- Exaggerated personality traits; more withdrawn or more animated than usual
- Excessive dependency
- Tearfulness
- Expressions of hopelessness, fear, or worthlessness
**Physical indicators may include:**
- Deterioration in physical appearance
- Lack of personal hygiene
- Excessive fatigue
- Visible changes in weight

**Safety risk indicators may include:**
- Any written note or verbal statement that has a sense of finality or a suicidal tone to it
- Written communications that focus on despair, suicide, violent behaviors, or death
- Statements to the effect that the faculty member is "going away for a long time"
- Giving away prized possessions or similar acts of finality
- Self-injurious or self-destructive behaviors

**Indicators of Potentially More Serious Behavior**

Below is a list of actions and attitudes that may be indicators of disruptive, threatening, or violent behavior. If you observe a *pattern* of such behaviors and attitudes, please call the Faculty and Employee Assistance Program for a consultation.

**Behavior:**
- Upset over recent event(s) [work or personal crisis]
- Recently has withdrawn from normal activities, family, friends, co-workers
- Intimidating, verbally abusive, harasses or mistreats others
- Challenges/resists authority
- Blames others for problems in life or work; suspicious, holds grudges
- Use/abuse of drugs and/or alcohol
- Unwelcome obsessive romantic attention
- Stalking
- Makes threatening references to other incidents of violence
- Makes threats to harm self, others, or property
- Weapons - has or is fascinated with weapons
- Has known history of violence
- Has communicated specific proposed act(s) of disruption or violence

**Attitude:**
- Is isolated or a loner
- Morally superior, self-righteous
- Feels entitled to special rights and that rules don’t apply to him/her
- Feels wronged, humiliated, degraded; wants revenge
- Believes to have no choices or options for action except violence