



Recognizing and Responding to Concerning Student Behaviors

Everyone within a school and community plays a role in maintaining safety and supporting the wellbeing of students. This guide was developed to help **recognize** student behaviors which may indicate a cause for concern or that a student may be experiencing a crisis, and provide guidance on how to **respond** when these behaviors are observed.

Recognize: Student Behaviors That May Indicate Cause for Concern or Imminent Crisis:

	Concern	Crisis
General student behaviors	Student is withdrawn	Student expresses thoughts of suicide or self-harm
	Student is overly impulsive	Student is believed to be a risk or safety concern to others
	Student shows noticeable changes in normal routines	Student appears to be under the influence of a substance
	Student appears anxious and/or aggressive	Student acts extremely distressed or agitated
	Student shows unusual communications such as concerning writings, social media posts, and/or verbal statements	Student shows a preoccupation with death, dying, or extreme violence
Student mental health	Student appears sad or upset	Student mood is very depressed or student expresses hopelessness
	Student is suspected of, or confirmed to be, misusing substances	Student displays odd, illogical, or paranoid thinking
	Student has disclosed personal issues of concern	Student is experiencing extreme fear or anxiety; student is experiencing a panic attack
	Student shows a change in appearance and/or personal hygiene	Student shows lapses in ability to control his/herself
	Student feels personally attacked or humiliated by another student or adult	Student appears to have lost touch with reality
Student academic performance	Student shows changes in work completion	Student does not participate in class and is unresponsive
	Student is struggling to progress academically	Student causes disruptions and cannot manage behaviors
	Student shows difficulty concentrating, maintaining attention, or demonstrating knowledge	The writings, artwork, or journals of the student contain themes of death or suicide
Student attendance	Student is frequently tardy or absent	Student left class in a state of distress
	Change in normal attendance	Student is missing and reported to be in distress

Respond: What You Can Do To Support Students

Responding to concerning behaviors:

- Talk with the student: Ask open-ended questions, summarize what the student is saying without minimizing or placing blame, and show empathy with the feelings and experiences of the student
- Contact the student's parent or other trusted adult that has a positive relationship with the student
- Talk with the school counselor or seek additional guidance from other support staff
- Refer the student for an appropriate assessment to gather further information

Responding to crisis behaviors:

- Stay with the student
- Call an administrator or other support staff for additional assistance
- Call 911 for any emergency or life-threatening situation

Remember, while this guide is intended to provide helpful tips to recognize and respond to concerning student behaviors school staff and others should always be encouraged to follow their own instincts if they are concerned about a student, regardless of the information included on this guide.

Recognizing and responding to concerning student behaviors can prevent students from escalating to a state of crisis.

For more information please visit the OPI's [Coordinated School Health website](#).