

WS2 Handout 6 (Slides 38 and 143): Identifying and Responding to Emotionally Overwhelmed Students

Signs of Emotionally Overwhelmed Students

- Appear glassy eyed and vacant, disoriented, or incapacitated by worry.
- Do not respond to questions or commands.
- Demonstrate extreme emotional reactions (e.g., uncontrolled crying or hyperventilation), uncontrolled physical reactions (e.g., shaking or trembling), or frantic searching behaviors.
- Engage in dangerous or risky activities.

The Initial Response to Emotionally Overwhelmed Students

- If a primary caregiver is available and is capable of supporting the student, help them be reunited immediately.
- If a primary caregiver is physically unavailable or not capable of supporting the student, consider doing the following:
 - Address any immediate concerns that are the focus of the student's distress.
 - Provide the student with a safe, calm, and private environment where he or she can calm down.
 - Remain calm, quiet, and available to the student, but do not force conversation (doing so may contribute to cognitive or emotional overload).
 - Remain nearby; let the student know you are available to help, if needed, by engaging with other nonthreatening tasks in the vicinity; for example, engage in small talk, talk to other students, or complete paperwork.
 - Once the student has regained some emotional control, let him or her know you are available to discuss crisis-related challenges or problems.
 - Provide factual information that helps orient the student to the current situation and to what has been done and is being done to address the crisis.

Note. Adapted from *Psychological First Aid: Field Operations Guide* (2nd ed., p. 50), by M. Brymer et al., 2006, Los Angeles, CA: National Child Traumatic Stress Network and National Center for PTSD. Adapted with permission.