

Tips for Faculty and Staff

How to Support Students in Distress

Responding to a Student in Crisis

- Be calm, helpful and respectful but remain firm.
- Avoid escalation, over-reacting and sudden movements.
- Speak simply and briefly but don't condescend.
- Show a willingness to understand what they want or don't want.
- Reduce or remove threats, distractions and upsetting influences.
- Avoid forcing them to talk, continuous eye contact, touching or crowding them, expressing anger or irritation, giving false empathy or hope.
- Neither punish nor reinforce disordered thinking or behavior.
- Remember: Don't promise confidentiality

Helpful De-escalation Statements

- "Let me understand"
- "Please tell me more about that"
- "I want to understand what you are frustrated about"
- "When did that happen?"
- "Here is what I can do"
- "I understand you are upset"
- "I am really sorry; I wish I could help you to...."
- "Let me be sure I heard/understand what you are saying"

How to Intervene with a Distressed Student

- Explain your concern
- Describe specific behaviors
- Note how others are affected (if applicable)
- Listen carefully
- Do not offer confidentiality
- Discuss options, suggest strategies and services
- Document and report to supervisor/colleagues
- Alert Public Safety, Student Life and Development, Case Management and/or someone in the Counseling Center depending on level of urgency

How to Make a Referral to Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS)

- Talk privately with student
- Note specific behaviors that concern you
- Offer options (friends, family, CAPS, Student Life & Development, Medical Clinic)
- Provide CAPS brochure and ways to schedule
- Offer to walk with the student to CAPS or to make the call together
- Cue us (CAPS staff) about the urgency level and reasons for referral
- Call ahead or ask a colleague to call
- If you're concerned, sooner is better than later
- If you think the student is at imminent risk, contact 911 and don't leave the student alone

When Students are Hesitant to Seek Help

- Express referral as being part of a care and concern for your resident and part of our “caring community”
- Explain how referral can be helpful (*“I can easily see you are in pain. . . .you don’t have to continue managing this by yourself. Letting me help you connect with counseling is a great step in making this better”*)
- Make referral with optimism and without communicating doubt (*“I know anxiety doesn’t get better when it is a secret and is not actively responded to. Counseling can really make a difference”*)

Video about Caring – [Your Care and Compassion Make a Difference](#)

Additional Tips to Help Students – Source: jedfoundation.org

- **Ask them to get together or check in with you.** You could start with something like, “You don’t seem like yourself lately. Maybe it’s just everything going on right now, but I wanted to check in and see if we could sit down and catch up.” Or, “Hey, I miss seeing you in class. I’d like to check in with you.”
- **Meet up in person, or schedule a phone call or video chat.** These methods of communication are preferable to just texting or messaging because you can get a better sense of nonverbal cues, like how they look and how they react to what you say. It’s easy to say, “I’m fine” via text.
- **Choose a location that is conducive to having a talk in relative privacy.** You could offer to grab coffee, chat privately in your office, or go for a walk. A loud, crowded space is not the right venue.
- **Start the conversation from a place of concern and support.** For example, you could say something like, “You seem a little down lately and I just wanted you to know that I’m here for you.” Be sure to be able to give them your full attention from the outset. Put away your phone, make eye contact or, if that is too direct, position yourself in a way that shows you are fully there and ready to listen.
- **Be specific about what you’ve seen or heard that’s causing you concern.** For example, you can say things like, “It concerned me when you said...” or “I am worried about you because I have noticed that you seem – low energy, sad, angry, depressed – the last few times we’ve talked.” Being clear about what you’re noticing and making it clear that you are sharing your perception, which may or may not be in alignment with their reality, is helpful for your student and makes it easier to follow up on their behavior over time.
- **Let them know they are not alone.** Sometimes when we’re struggling, we isolate ourselves or feel like no one understands what we’re going through. It’s important for your friend to know they have a support system to lean on. This can be as simple a periodic but regular text or DM check-ins. What is most important is that your actions follow your words – do not say you care and want to be there for them and then disappear without following up.
- **Really listen to them.** Listen to details of their story, but also listen for the specific emotions they are sharing. The various events, exchanges and people that are involved in stressful situations matter, but what’s most significant is their emotional reaction to the details. It might be impossible to change the situation, but it can be possible to bear witness, validate, or even soothe their emotions. So listening to how they feel is as important as listening to the specific events that drive their feelings.
- **Be patient.** They may not be ready to tell you everything, or they may not know how to articulate what they’re going through. Be comfortable with silence if they need to take their time. But you can circle back around to your concerns if you continue to notice things that worry you.

Try To Avoid

- **Language that feels judgmental or accusatory.** For example, avoid saying things like, “I really feel like you are not holding up your end of things at work” or “You’re not contributing enough to class.” Even if those things are true, remember, it’s best to approach from a place of support and concern. This does not mean that you have to protect your student from something you need them to know, especially if it is adversely having an impact on you or others. In many instances, you can share your perceptions by framing them differently. For example, you can say, “I notice that your mind seems to wander when we are meeting and when it does, you look a little sad or worried,” or “I remember you saying that you were looking forward to our class, but I notice that you have had a hard time making it to class or participating when you are here.”
- **Being combative or defensive.** Avoid interrupting them while they’re speaking, minimizing their concerns, or defending someone who’s hurt them.
- **Diagnosing the problem or trying to fix it for them.** It’s not on you to know all the answers or give them advice on how to handle their situation. If they are struggling with an issue like depression, addiction, or grief, they may need a different kind of support than you can offer.