

Mental Health Awareness: Managing Students in Distress

As we start another fall semester and begin our academic year, it is important to remember college students typically encounter a great deal of stress during their university years (i.e., academic, social, family, work, financial). Students may feel alone, isolated, helpless, and even hopeless, which can result in: Disruption of academic performance; Harmful behaviors; Substance abuse; Attempts at suicide. Students, faculty, and staff are in a unique position to identify and help students early on before they are in crisis. Below is information on how to recognize students in distress and crisis, as well as tips to keep in mind and how we can help.

Recognize Students in Distress:

- Marked changes in academic performance or class attendance
- Withdrawal and/or lack of participation, increased anxiety around exams or deadlines, or difficulty working in teams
- Changes in emotional states (e.g., sadness, crying, lethargy, irritability, rapid speech, preoccupation, increased and more intense disagreement with peers and/or instructors, a sense of confusion)
- Changes in physical well-being (e.g., swollen eyes from crying, increased illnesses, poor hygiene, rapid weight loss/gain, sleeping in class)
- Repeated requests for special consideration (e.g., deadline extensions, changes in requirements, grade changes)
- Behaviors that may interfere with effective management of the learning environment (e.g., outbursts of anger, domination of discussion)

What you can do to help:

- Talk to the student in private when neither of you are rushed or preoccupied
- Listen to thoughts and feelings in a sensitive, non-threatening way
- Give hope by assuring the student that things can get better
- Avoid judging, evaluating, and criticizing even if the student asks your opinion
- Maintain clear and consistent boundaries and expectations
- Stress the importance of getting help before a situation exacerbates
- Suggest Counseling & Testing as a resource that is FREE and confidential

A student whose behavior has become threatening, violent, or significantly disruptive may need a different kind of approach. Consult when in doubt about the appropriateness of an intervention:

The Dean of Students Office (482-6276)
University Police Department (482-6447)
Counseling & Testing (482-6480)

Students who may be in Crisis:

The 18–25-year-old young adult population is at the highest risk and has the highest rates of symptoms and/or diagnosis:

- Anxiety, depression, psychosis, suicidal ideation and attempts
- Females are more likely to attempt suicide. However, males are more likely to complete suicide.

Mental health diagnoses are generally associated with a higher rate of suicide

Relationship between depression and suicide:

- The risk of suicide is increased to more than 50 percent in depressed individuals. On average about 60 percent of suicides were depressed.

Feelings of hopelessness are found to be more predictive of suicide risk than a diagnosis of depression.

Warning Signs:

- Talking about death, dying, or suicide
- Verbal Cues: Hopeless, Helpless, Trapped
- Withdrawal from friends, family or society
- Change in sleep patterns
- Talking, writing, or posting on social media thoughts on death, dying or suicide
- Isolation
- Dramatic Changes in mood or behavior (unexplainable calmness after a long period of depression)
- Increased substance Use
- Giving away possessions
- Looking for or obtaining necessary items (pills, weapons, or other means)

Tips for Faculty and Staff to Keep in Mind:

- Always keep safety in mind as you interact with a troubled student. If you feel that the student is a danger to themselves or others, call 911 or University Police at 337-482-6449.
- Don't assume the student is trying to get attention or relief from responsibility.
- Don't promise confidentiality to a student.
- Keep a written record, including times, dates, and interactions with the student, in case the situation escalates.
- Know your boundaries. You do not need to serve as a counselor.
- Offer to make the first call or walk the student to the Student Health Center (337-482-5464)/Counseling and Testing Center (337-482-6480).
- Uwill is available to students 24/7/365 and offers free immediate access to a Therapist, based on preferences (gender, language, ethnicity, focus area) at a time that fits your schedule. This is available to students day, night, weekend by video, phone, chat or message. Call 833.646.1526.
- For more information, please visit the [Counseling and Testing website](#).

