

STUDENT DISTRESS RESPONSE TIPS

For Instructors and Staff

This quick reference guide is meant to provide faculty and staff with some tools to help students who may be in distress.

HOW TO HELP A STUDENT IN DISTRESS

- Allow the student to speak freely about what is going on.
- Really listen to the student: Accept* and respect what is said.
- Try to focus on an aspect of the problem that is manageable.
- Ask the student what they think would help. "What do you need to do to get back on a healthy path?"
- Avoid easy answers such as "Everything is going to be alright."
- Help identify resources needed to improve things.
- Help the student identify healthy methods used in the past to cope; get the student to agree to do something constructive to change things.
- Trust your insight and reactions.
- Do not promise secrecy or offer confidentiality (in a high risk situation confidentiality cannot be guaranteed).
- Encourage the student to seek additional help.
- Respect the student's value system, even if you don't agree.

* Accept means to validate how they feel, not to condone, endorse or agree with their statements

Useful Resources:

Academic Success Center
313-577-3165
success.wayne.edu

Campus Health Center
313-577-5041
health.wayne.edu

Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS)
313-577-3398
313-577-9982 (after hours)
caps.wayne.edu

Dean of Students Office (DOSO)
313-577-1010
doso.wayne.edu

Mental Health & Wellness Clinic (MHaWC)
313-577-1620
education.wayne.edu/mental-health-and-wellness-clinic

Office for Teaching & Learning (OTL)
313-577-0001
otl.wayne.edu

Public Safety
313-577-2222 (Emergency number)

Psychology Clinic
313-577-2840
clas.wayne.edu/psychclinic/

Student Mental Health is Your Concern

You may be the first to find out that a student is having personal problems that are interfering with their academic success or daily life. The student may come to you for academic advising, visit during office hours, send you an email, and share personal concerns with you.

Your exposure to students increases the likelihood that a student will ask you for help, or that you will identify signs of distress in a student. The risk in electing not to help outweighs the risk in trying to help.

General Tips

- Discussions about mental health can be awkward, but if the student can tell that you care, you have been helpful!
- Allow for silences, the student may need time to get comfortable.
- Reaching out to the student by email can be a good option.
- If you do not really know the student, you may prefer to report the concern. Contacting CAPS for consultation is never a bad idea. One of the counselors can help you determine who else may need to be notified of the situation and/or coach you through making a referral to a student with whom you have never interacted.
- And/or, consult with colleagues, chair, supervisor, etc.
- Unless the student is suicidal or may be a danger to others (see more on suicide under Moderate distress below), the ultimate decision to access resources is the student's. If the student says, "I'll think about it," when you offer referral information, it is okay. People in varying levels of distress sometimes deny their problems because it is difficult to admit they need help or they think things will get better on their own. Many times they do.



Assessing the Level of Stress and Acting on it

Mild Stress

Behaviors that do not disrupt others, but may indicate something is wrong and that assistance is needed.

- Reports of serious grade problems or declining grades
- Excessive absences
- Signs of trouble managing stress:
 - Depressed, lethargic mood
 - Very rapid speech
 - Swollen, red eyes
 - Poor hygiene
 - Sleepiness



What to do if Mild Stress:

- If none of the more serious signs (below) are present, the student may not need immediate help, but assistance is recommended.
- Suggest Let's Talk (nonclinical drop-ins offered by CAPS), counseling at CAPS, Academic Success Center, Campus Health Center, CAPS afterhours (313 577-9982), Crisis Text Line (741-741), RA if they live in Housing.

Moderate Stress

Behaviors that indicate significant emotional distress, perhaps with reluctance to seek help.

- Behavior that pushes the limits of decorum and disrupts the immediate environment.
- Unusual or exaggerated emotional response that is inappropriate to the situation.
- Reports of unusual patterns of eating, not eating, or excessive eating.
- Shows signs of self-injury (cuts, bruises, burns).
- Reports substantial alcohol or other drug use.
- Passive statements (not threats) about suicide, homicide; feelings of hopelessness, helplessness.

What to do if Moderate Stress:

- You will not be taking the role of a counselor.
- Suicide prevention is a shared responsibility among all campus community members: If there are signs of safety risk, ask if the student is considering suicide. A student who is considering suicide will likely be relieved that you asked. If the student is not contemplating suicide, asking the question will not "put ideas in their head."
- Ask student to call CAPS (577-3398) or CAPS afterhours (577-9982).
- Or, during business hours (and post-pandemic) you can walk the student over to CAPS.
- Ask student to use Crisis Text Line (741-741).
- Follow up with the student in a day or two to see if they accessed help.
- If student declines help, consider filing a CARE report so the Behavioral Intervention Team can monitor or intervene.

Severe Stress

Behaviors that signify an obvious crisis and that necessitate emergency care.

- Extremely disruptive behavior (hostility, aggression, violence, etc.).
- Inability to communicate clearly (garbled, slurred speech; unconnected, rambling thoughts).
- Loss of contact with reality (seeing or hearing things that are not there, beliefs or actions greatly at odds with reality).
- Extreme suspiciousness.
- Menacing, stalking behaviors.
- Threatening harm to others.
- Overtly suicidal thoughts (referring to suicide as an option or planned action).

What to do if Severe Stress:

- Remember that it is NOT your responsibility to provide the professional help needed for a severely troubled/disruptive student. You need only to make the necessary call and request assistance.
- Call WSU Police 313 577-2222.