

Tips for Helping Students in Distress

During the course of most college students' academic careers, it is likely they will have someone close to them experience a mental health concern and need support. Here are some general strategies for helping another student.

What You Can Do:

- Ask the student if they would like to talk.
- Talk to the student in a private place that is safe and comfortable.
- Encourage the student to discuss their feelings and thoughts, as this alone may relieve a great deal of pressure.
- Listen carefully and compassionately.
- Validate the student's feelings and experiences.
- Be supportive and express your concern about the situation.
- Maintain clear boundaries in your relationship.
- Be on the alert for signs that the student is feeling suicidal or feeling like self-harming.
- Be direct. Ask the student if they have thoughts of suicide. If so, do not leave the student alone. Call over to the UCC. If it is before/after business hours or on the weekend, access the UCC emergency crisis line by calling our on-call service via the main number @ 585-275-3113.
- Call 911 if the student (or you) is in immediate danger to themselves.
- In an emergency, call the Counseling Center. Take the student seriously. Do not just make a CARE referral.
- If it's not an emergency and you do not need to call the Counseling Center right away, still suggest to the student that going to the University Counseling Center (585-275-3113) sounds like a good idea. Consider making a CARE referral.
- Maintain contact with the student after a referral to the Counseling Center is made.
- If necessary, advise the student to contact Public Safety (585) 275-3333.
- Take care of yourself. Allow yourself to receive support from those close to you or those trained to provide it.

Don't:

- Be afraid of feelings or tears. Having feelings is normal. Tears are a natural, healthy way to release very intense emotions.
- Avoid talking about something (e.g., behavior, suicidal statements) you believe to be concerning.
- Avoid contacting the UCC if someone mentions they are suicidal.
- Leave the student alone if they are suicidal.
- Be afraid to ask whether the student is suicidal if you suspect they may be (e.g. "Have you had thoughts of suicide?")
- Be afraid of planting the idea of suicide by inquiring about it (the person will very likely feel relieved that someone has noticed and cared enough to discuss it with them).
- Allow friends to assume responsibility for the student without getting input from a professional.
- Minimize the student's feelings (e.g. "Don't worry. Everything will be better tomorrow").

- Say, “It’s not that bad,” “Things will get better,” “Crying won’t help,” or “I know exactly what you are feeling.”
- Take responsibility for the student’s emotional state.
- Overwhelm the student with ideas or advice to “fix” their problems.
- Feel obligated to take care of the student, or feeling guilty for not doing more
- Let the student utilize you as their only source of support.
- Don’t avoid contacting the Counseling Center (daytime or after-hours/weekends) if you need to and/or you’re just not feeling right about the situation.