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STUDENTS IN DISTRESS: A GUIDE FOR FACULTY AND STAFF

College years are characterized by multiple transitions. Stress is a normal and expected reaction to these transitions. Students may experience stress associated with academic demands, family problems, social relations, work, financial concerns and cultural experiences. Resources that students had while living at home are altered and they may find themselves isolated, lonely, and frustrated. While most students face stress and cope with the emerging demands of college life, for some, the pressures become overwhelming and unmanageable. The inability to cope effectively with emotional distress can lead to disruptions in a student's overall functioning and pose a serious threat to academic success. As faculty/staff, you are in a unique position to show concern and care. Proactive, timely, and at times reactive expressions of concern can be helpful in regulating and maintaining the emotional equilibrium that can lead to a successful college career.

The purpose of this guide is to provide you with information that will assist you in identifying students in distress and specific options for intervention and for referral to campus resources.

Tips for Recognizing a Serious Mental Health Crisis (Emergency Situation)

A crisis is a situation where a student's usual coping style becomes overwhelmed and the emotional and physiological responses escalate. With increasing emotions, coping becomes less effective until the person may become disoriented, non-functional, or attempt harm. If a student is in serious mental health crisis, one might see the following:

- Highly disruptive behavior (physical/verbal aggression)
- Overt suicidal threats (written or verbal)
- Homicidal threats (written or verbal, attempted suicide or assault)
- Inability to communicate clearly (incoherent, garbled, slurred speech)
- Loss of contact with reality (seeing/hearing things that are not there, paranoia)

What to Do When You Suspect a Mental Health Crisis

For consultation in assessing the situation, call CAPS at 656-2451 during 8-5 Monday-Friday. If the student is willing, offer to walk the student to CAPS. Students in crisis will be served immediately to stabilize their safety. If emergency is after hours/weekends, contact 656-2222 and request that the CAPS counselor on-call be contacted.

If immediate assistance is needed on site, contact 911 or CUPD 656-2222.

While Waiting for Aid to Arrive:

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| DO-Provide a secure, safe, quiet place | DON'T-Leave student alone |
| DO-Invite to stay until help arrives | DON'T-Try to restrain if he/she wants to leave |
| DO-Listen actively and show empathy | DON'T-Challenge or shock student |
| DO-Maintain a straightforward, supportive attitude | DON'T-Minimize student's distress |

Tips for Recognizing Distressed Students (Not in Crisis/Emergency)

Everyone experiences symptoms of distress at one time or another; however, if symptoms persist over time and/or increase in severity, this may indicate need for assistance.

Marked Changes in Attitude towards Academic Performance

- Poor preparation for class
- Drop in performance
- Expressions of non-caring about classes
- Excessive absences or tardiness to class
- Excessive anxiety about class work
- Strong reactions to class material
- Exaggerated emotional responses that are obviously inappropriate to the situation
- Exaggerated need to oppose the teaching or discussions
- Inability to communicate clearly
- Perfectionism and excessive worry

Changes in Behavior

- Depressed or lethargic mood
- Avoiding participation in class activities
- Unusual or changed pattern of interaction with others
- Apathy or “in a daze”
- Oversleeping or not sleeping enough
- Disruptive behavior
- Consistently avoiding eating with others
- Marked increase or decrease in energy level
- Marked increase in irritability
- Low tolerance for frustration

Unusual Appearance

- Changes in personal hygiene or dress style
- Dramatic weight loss or gain
- Swollen or red eyes

What Can You Do For Distressed Students? (Not in Crisis/Emergency)

If you choose to approach a student, or if a student comes to you for help with personal problems, the following suggestions are recommended.

TALK with the student in private. You may need to schedule a time to talk so that both of you are not rushed and preoccupied. Express your concern by referring to student’s behavior in non-judgmental terms. Ask open-ended questions. Express empathy. Avoid asking “why” questions.

LISTEN actively and give the student your undivided attention. Communicate understanding by your verbal response, facial expression and body posture. Reflect feelings to make sure you understand.

INSTILL hope. Most situations have options. Assist the student by moving away from focusing exclusively on the problem. Suggest resources and support the student’s desire to move beyond the problem.

AVOID judgmental statements, evaluations, or criticism. Avoid comparisons that place the student at a disadvantage. Respect the student’s value system even if it is different from your own.

MAINTAIN clear professional boundaries. The focus of the contact is on the student. Avoid unnecessary self-disclosures. Clarify rules and enforce them in the same manner as you would with any other Student.

REFER to adequate resources. Encourage accessing services and follow through as signs of strength and courage rather than signs of weakness or failure. Support a student’s timetable for accessing services. If needed, assist with setting up of appointment and/or going to the appointment.

FOLLOW-UP with the student and see if they followed through with referral. Allow the student to express reactions to the appointment.

CONSULT CAPS if you need guidance with the intervention.

What to Expect When a Student Arrives at CAPS

Although CAPS is open 8-5, Monday through Friday, the preferred way for students to access services is through the CU Now, Walk-in Clinic. It operates, Monday through Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Students can walk in and be seen on a first-come, first-served basis. Students are asked to complete initial forms electronically—it takes about 15 minutes—then are seen by a counselor for a session to assess needs. Emergencies will be worked in at any time.

In addition to serving as a clinical training site for emerging psychologists and counselors, CAPS offers the following Services:

Groups and Workshops: CAPS offers an extensive number of skills-building workshops with emphasis on managing anxiety, depression and overall adjustment. These can be one-time meetings or 3-4 week cycles. The general therapy groups meet all semester long.

Individual and Couple/Family Therapy: The treatment modality will be determined by the student's needs. CAPS operates on a short-term model.

Consultation and Outreach Services: CAPS has a formal liaison program with the Housing Department. CAPS conducts numerous educational programs on various topics of interest to students/faculty/staff.

ACTT Program (Assessment, Choices, Training and Transitions): This program offers education and treatment for alcohol/drug misuse, abuse and dependence. A student can access this program through CUNow. If a student is mandated to the ACTT Program, a \$75.00 processing fee is charged.

CU CARES (Counseling*Advocacy*Referral*Education*Support) Relationship and Sexual Violence Services: Program offers specialized interventions to victims of relationship and sexual violence. Strong emphasis is placed on prevention by educating both men and women through dynamic programming.

Eating Disorders Services: Program utilizes a multidisciplinary approach to the treatment of eating disorders that includes, medical, nutritional and psychological.

Psychiatric Consultation: Psychiatric consultation monitors medication regimen. There is a fee for this service.

For a full listing of all CAPS' services, please visit:

<http://www.clemson.edu/campus-life/campus-services/redfern/mental-health/>

Visit the Counseling Center Village for virtual pamphlets collection on mental health issues:

<http://ub-counseling.buffalo.edu/ccv.html>

Resources Monday through Friday, 8-5		Emergency Numbers (864 area code)	
CAPS Front Desk	656-2451	CAPS Counselor On-Call	656-2222
CU CARES	656-1294	<i>(Leave a phone number and ask for CAPS counselor on-call to return call)</i>	
Health Center Appointment Line	656-1541	CU Ambulance	911
Pharmacy	656-3562	CU Police Department	656-2222
Women's Health	656-1541	Clemson Urgent Care	654-6800
Health Promotion	656-0141	Oconee Memorial Hospital	882-3351 (Seneca)
Student Insurance	656-3561	Anderson Area Medical Center	512-1000 (Anderson)
		Cannon Memorial Hospital	878-4791 (Pickens)
Dean of Students	656-0471	Rape Crisis Council of Pickens	442-5500
http://www.clemson.edu/deanofstudents		Foothills Alliance Center	(800) 585-8952 Hotline
<i>CARE Network reports reviewed during business hours</i>		<i>(Rape Crisis in Anderson & Oconee)</i>	
		National Suicide Prevention Lifeline	(800) 273-TALK (8255)