How to Help a Student: Faculty and Staff Guide

Counseling Services has developed this informational handout to guide faculty and staff with identifying, supporting, and responding to students experiencing emotional distress and/or disruptive behavior. It is important to note that you are not expected or encouraged to act outside of your role and that we are available to help if you have questions or need consultation. Thank you for being a part of our collaborative campus of care!

At OWU Counseling Services, we are considered a confidential resource for clients and do not provide any client information without written client/legal guardian consent. Limitations to confidentiality exist by law and include imminent threat of harm to self and others, court orders, and alleged abuse/neglect of children under 18yo, elderly persons 65yo and older, and persons with disabilities.

We offer the following free services to currently enrolled OWU students:
- Individual Counseling*
- Group Counseling*
- Crisis Intervention*
- Consultation (to students, faculty, and staff regarding mental health-related questions and topics)
- Referrals (to on and off-campus resources)
- Outreach Programming (such as tabling, events, presentations, etc.)
*During the academic year

Of note: We recognize that students may be in need of more specialized and intensive services than we can provide. In these cases, we work with students to refer them to other treatment resources off-campus. We also cannot duplicate ongoing counseling services if a student is already seeing a mental health counselor licensed in the state of Ohio.

Our office also offers mental health and wellness educational resources, massage chairs, and a quiet place to decompress, if needed.

As another free option for currently enrolled students, OWU offers the Virtual Care Group for virtual appointments with mental health counselors and medical providers (*fees may apply for medications and psychiatry). To schedule an appointment, have students access this link to create an account and schedule an appointment. For 24/7 phone access to a counselor for as-needed support and crisis intervention, have students contact 1-855-522-1226.

Who Seeks Our Services?
Here are just a few of the concerns that bring students to our office:
- Depression, mood swings
- Anxiety, panic attacks, phobias
Adjustment to college life  
Academic stress, procrastination, low motivation  
Sleep problems  
Low self-esteem  
Eating and body image concerns  
Difficulties or concerns related to sexual and gender identity  
Suicidal thoughts  
Self-injury  
Grief and loss  
Sexual assault, sexual harassment  
Relationship concerns  
Social anxiety  
Family issues  
Concentration and attention difficulties  
Concerns related to unexpected pregnancy  
Coping with medical illness  
Out of control thoughts/behaviors

IDENTIFY

It is common for people to encounter stressors and situations that lead to upsetting emotions and reactions. Consequently, people are equipped (or learn to be equipped) with skills and strategies needed to address these concerns and move forward. In these situations, you are more than likely able to provide effective support. Other times, students may be in need of professional help to address worsening, persistent symptoms and improve overall functioning. Any of the following signs (listed on the next page) could indicate that a student may be struggling and in need of mental health counseling, especially if these signs are not consistent with a student’s typical mood or behavior.

It is also not unusual for students experiencing significant emotional stress to also be struggling with suicidal thoughts. The severity of these thoughts can range from more passive thoughts of death (without plan or intent to harm oneself) to more active thoughts (having a plan, access to means, and/or intention to harm oneself). Regardless of severity, any reference to suicide should be taken seriously. Any judgments about safety risk should also not be made without consulting with a mental health professional.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic</th>
<th>Physical</th>
<th>Psychological</th>
<th>Safety (Emergency)</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Sudden decline in quality of work and grades</td>
<td>• Marked changes in physical appearance (i.e., decreased hygiene, sudden weight changes)</td>
<td>• Self-disclosure of personal distress</td>
<td>• Verbal, written, or implied references to suicide, homicide, assault, or self-harm behavior</td>
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<td>• Disturbing or hopeless content in writing or presentations</td>
<td>• Strange or bizarre behavior indicating loss of contact with reality</td>
<td>• Unusual or extreme emotional responses to events</td>
<td>• Unprovoked anger or hostility</td>
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<td>• Classroom disruptions</td>
<td>• Visibly intoxicated or smelling of substances</td>
<td>• Excessive tearful, panic reactions</td>
<td>• Physical violence (i.e., shoving, grabbing, assault, use of a weapon)</td>
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<td>• Consistently seeking personal rather than professional advice</td>
<td>• Rapid speech, hyperactivity, grandiosity</td>
<td>• Verbal abuse (i.e., taunting, badgering, intimidation)</td>
<td>• Stalking or harassment</td>
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<td>• Multiple requests for extensions or special considerations (a change from prior functioning)</td>
<td>• Depressed mood, decreased energy and motivation</td>
<td>• Expression of concern from other students</td>
<td>• Communicating threats or disturbing comments in-person or via email, text, phone, call, or social media</td>
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<td>• Does not respond to outreach/meeting requests</td>
<td>• Signs of injury (bruising, cuts)</td>
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<td>Reference: CU Boulder Division of Student Affairs</td>
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**SUPPORT**

After identifying a student who may be struggling, you can determine how best to support them. As an instructor, advisor, etc., you already have a working relationship that may help students feel more comfortable disclosing sensitive information. Having these conversations may be difficult for you and especially for students due to mental health-related stigma, personal beliefs, assumptions, and/or uncertainty as to how to have these conversations. The following information may help you communicate effectively:

- Use active listening skills and be mindful of your eye contact, body language, and facial expressions. Conveying a sense of concern and being present can be just as effective as the words you use.
- Similarly, maintain a calm and collected demeanor throughout the conversation.
- Ask the student if they have time to speak privately (however, safety concerns warrant a conversation as soon as possible).
- Approach the conversation with respectful curiosity (“Help me understand…”) and express concerns from your point of view (“I’m concerned about your performance in my class”) and share examples (“I’ve noticed that you’ve been quieter in class,” “I saw that several of your assignments are missing”).
- Give the student space to speak (“How are you doing?”).
- Listen nonjudgmentally and offer positive feedback for the student’s willingness to share (“I know this is difficult, thank you for sharing that with me”).
- Encourage the student’s self-efficacy by asking for their feedback regarding what they need, within reason (“How can I help?”). Follow through with your part in order to reinforce your commitment to their wellbeing.

**REFER**

As the conversation progresses, you will obtain more information regarding what the student needs and what next steps should be. The following information provides further guidance on what that can look like:

- Ask the student directly if they have been having any thoughts to harm or kill themselves (or others, depending on the situation)- **Refer to the section below regarding suicidal/homicidal thoughts**
- Encourage appropriate help and offer resources (campus offices, off-campus supports) to the student depending on their needs and what they have shared with you (have knowledge of these resources beforehand), including ways to contact these resources. The student will ultimately choose whether they follow through with these recommendations.
- Answer any questions the student may have and collaborate with the student on potential next steps (as appropriate), such as addressing concerns related to your class.
- If needed, suggest that the student may benefit from speaking with someone in Counseling Services. It is ok for students to be hesitant or disinterested, though you can continue to be caring and direct with your belief that counseling may be helpful. Showing that you are familiar with our office and trust our services can also help students feel more comfortable. The student ultimately decides whether they link with Counseling Services, though you can offer to walk the student over to the office or...
call our office directly while the student is with you. **Of note, we maintain confidentiality by law/ethical codes and will not be able to release information to you without the student’s written permission.**

- You can also communicate your concerns to the OWU Student Care Team at the following [link](#).

**IF the student gives any confirmation regarding suicidal or homicidal thoughts:**

- Re-direct your attention to addressing this concern
- Ask the student further direct questions, such as whether they have a plan (method, location, time, etc.) or intention to harm/kill themselves/others, and access to any potential means (firearms, sharp objects, medications, cords/ropes, tall structures, etc.).
- Provide positive feedback for the student’s willingness to share
- Express your concern for their safety and the importance of speaking to a mental health professional as soon as possible (“I’m concerned for your safety and would like to get you help”)
- Ask the student if they would be willing to walk over to the Counseling Services office with you, or to speak with a counselor over the phone while you are present
- If the student declines to speak with Counseling Services, please contact our office directly for further consultation about how to proceed
- If you believe the student is at immediate risk of harm to themselves or others and/or they are not cooperative with speaking to Counseling Services, contact Public Safety (740-368-2222). If the student reported that they have already taken steps to end their life (such as ingesting a substance or medication), call 911.
- If it is outside of Counseling Services’ business hours, call Public Safety (740-368-2222) and/or the Virtual Care Group’s 24/7 crisis line (1-855-522-1226) to speak to an on-call counselor.

**Responding to Disruptive Behavior**

Outside of conversations you initiate, you may also encounter situations in which someone’s behavior becomes disruptive. Disruptive behavior can be any behavior that interferes with other students, faculty, or staff and their access to an appropriate educational or work environment. Examples include yelling/screaming, persistent/unreasonable demands for time and attention, words/actions that have the effect of intimidating or harassing others, and words/actions that cause others to fear for their personal safety.

If you encounter these situations, do not ignore the disruptive behavior. Attempt to remain calm and clearly and directly communicate to the person that such behavior is inappropriate. If the behavior persists, be clear with the individual about the consequences for failing to improve their behavior. Disruptive situations often involve some display of anger, so remember that the period of peak anger is usually quite brief. As a result, it is often best to “wait out” that brief period before attempting to progress. Below is more information that may be helpful:
Do:

- Listen through the anger with active listening
- Acknowledge the feelings of the individual
- Allow the person to tell you what is upsetting them
- Set limits by explaining clearly and directly what behaviors are acceptable
- Be firm, steady, consistent, and honest
- Focus on what can be done to help bring the situation to some resolution
- Make specific referrals, give the reasons for referral, and, if possible, notify the person to whom you referred in advance
- If warranted, report the behavior to Public Safety or the Dean of Students Office
- Call 911 if you feel threatened or endangered

Do not:

- Interrupt during the first 20-30 seconds of peak anger
- Minimize the situation
- Enter into argument or shouting match
- Blame, ridicule, or use sarcasm
- Touch the person
- Ignore warning signs if the person is continuing to escalate
- Ignore your limitations
On-Campus Resources

- OWU Counseling Services (Free to enrolled students; Confidential with limitations)
  Corns 316 / 740-368-3145 / counselingservices@owu.edu

- Virtual Care Group (Free to enrolled students; Confidential with limitations)
  Create an online account to schedule (https://thevirtualcaregroup.com/owu), call 1-855-522-1226 for 24/7 phone access

- OWU Student Health Center (Confidential with limitations)
  Stuyvesant Hall / 740-368-3160 / health@owu.edu

- OWU Chaplain’s Office (Faith-based, Non-clinical support; Confidential with limitations)
  HWCC 308 / 740-368-3083 / chaplain@owu.edu

- OWU Public Safety
  Welch Hall 133 / 740-368-2222 / psafety@owu.edu

- OWU Division of Student Engagement and Success
  HWCC 209 / 740-368-3135 / deansoffice@owu.edu

- OWU Office of Multicultural Student Affairs
  HWCC 225 / 740-368-3151 / omsa@owu.edu

- OWU International and Off-Campus programs
  Slocum Hall 311 / 740-368-3075 / iocp@owu.edu

Off-Campus Resources

- Emergency: 911
- Delaware Helpline: Call 1-800-684-2324 or text “helpline” to 898211 for 24/7 access to support and crisis intervention
  - Also includes the SARN- Sexual Assault Response Network (offers specialized support and resources)
- Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: 988
- Grady Memorial Hospital: 740-615-1000
- Delaware City Police: 740-203-1100
For more information regarding mental health and wellness:

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)
Mental Health America (MHA)
The JED Foundation