

Guide to Helping a Distressed Student

As a faculty or staff member, you may be the first person that a student turns to for help or you may be one of the first people to notice behaviors that are concerning.

This guide is designed to assist you in:

- 1) knowing some common causes of distress;
- 2) identifying possible warning signs of distress;
- 3) helping a student in distress;
- 4) referring a student to the Office of Personal Counseling.

COMMON CAUSES OF EMOTIONAL DISTRESS:

- Relationship breakup
- Loss of a loved one
- Feeling lonely
- Serious illness or injury
- Not fitting in with peers
- Religious conflicts
- Physical abuse or assault
- Depression
- Disordered eating
- Loss of a goal or a dream
- Family conflict
- Divorce of parents
- Academic pressure or failure
- Difficulty adjusting to the university
- Unplanned pregnancy
- Sexual abuse or assault
- Identity confusion
- Drug and/or alcohol abuse
- Career indecision
- Perfectionism

COMMON WARNING SIGNS OF STUDENT DISTRESS:

INTERPERSONAL PROBLEMS:

- Asking instructor for help with personal problems
- Dependency on advisor/instructor/staff member
- Hanging around office
- Disruptive behavior
- Inability to get along with others
- Complaints from other students
- Student isolating self from others

ACADEMIC PROBLEMS:

- Excessive procrastination
- Uncharacteristically poor preparation or performance
- Repeated requests for extensions or special considerations
- Disruptive classroom behavior
- Excessive absence/tardiness
- Avoiding or dominating discussions
- References to suicide, homicide, or other violence in verbal statements or writing

BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS:

- Change in personal hygiene
- Dramatic weight gain or loss
- Frequently falling asleep in class
- Irritability
- Unruly behavior
- Impaired speech
- Disjointed thoughts
- Difficulty concentrating
- Tearfulness
- Intense emotional reactions
- Inappropriate responses
- Physically harming self

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

If you have noticed any of these warning signs, or any other signs that have you concerned, you are faced with the decision of whether or not to intervene. Your interest in your student's well-being can make an important difference to a person in distress and may help the student to be successful at Maryville. The Office of Personal Counseling is always available to talk with you if you are concerned about a student and would like to discuss possible ways to help. We also highly encourage all faculty and staff to complete the "Ask, Listen, Refer" online suicide prevention training program available at: www.asklistenrefer.org/maryville.

If you decide to intervene:

- 1) Talk to the student privately to help minimize embarrassment and defensiveness.
- 2) Do not promise the student confidentiality regarding what he or she shares.
- 3) Listen carefully and respond to both the content and the emotions of the situation.
- 4) Discuss your observations and perceptions of the situation directly and honestly.
- 5) Express your concern in a non-judgmental way. Respect the student's value system, even if you do not agree with it.
- 6) Assist the student with problem solving: identify options for action and resources available for help.
- 7) Let the student know the limits on your ability to help him or her.
- 8) It often helps to remind the student that most successful people have used some sort of counseling or coaching at some point in their lives and that it can be an important tool to help you reach your full potential.
- 9) Encourage your student to take a look at the Personal Counseling website at www.maryville.edu/counseling. The website provides helpful information about various mental health concerns and services. Also, there is an excellent anonymous mental health assessment available through the ULifeline website at: www.ulifeline.org.

WAYS TO REFER TO THE OFFICE OF PERSONAL COUNSELING:

- The Office of Personal Counseling offers individual, couples, and group counseling to any enrolled student.
- Call us at 529-9556 to reach a counselor and/or help the student schedule their first appointment.
- Call us and see if a counselor is available to walk over to your office to meet with you and the student.
- You may offer to accompany your student to their first appointment with the counselor as a support person if desired.
- In case of after-hours mental health concern, assist the student in contacting the Office of Personal Counseling After-Hours Support Line at 529-9500 and press "0" to be immediately connected with a licensed counselor. These counselors are an extension of the Office of Personal Counseling and can talk with the student to provide crisis intervention, stabilization, and assist if a hospitalization is necessary.
- If the student needs emergency assistance, contact the Office of Public Safety at 529-9500. They will be able to facilitate the emergency response.

OFFICE OF PERSONAL COUNSELING STAFF:

Jennifer Henry, Director

Caitlin Layer-Gaskell, Personal Counselor

Verne Wilson, Personal Counselor

* Please remember that based on confidentiality requirements, the Office of Personal Counseling staff cannot share any information regarding student counseling attendance or any other student information without a signed "release of information" from the student.