Making a Referral to CAPS

If your friend is struggling with an issue that may be best explored with a professional mental health clinician, you may suggest that he or she seek help at Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). Assure your friend that resolving issues through counseling is a sign of strength and courage, rather than weakness or failure. Share your own positive counseling experiences if applicable. Offer to walk with your friend to CAPS or sit with your friend when he or she calls CAPS for an initial consultation. 215-898-7021.

CAPS is FREE and CONFIDENTIAL. CAPS is a free and confidential service available to undergraduate and graduate students of the University of Pennsylvania.

Counseling and Psychological Services

CAPS

3624 Market Street
First Floor, West

Monday, Tuesday, Friday
9a – 5p

Wednesday and Thursday
9a – 7p

Call for an Initial Assessment
215-898-7021

Emergency After Hours
215-349-5490
How to Help a Friend

College friends learn how to deal successfully with stressors associated with college life such as balancing academic workload, extracurricular activities, and developing a personal identity away from home. They also see each other through difficult times such as the break-up of a relationship, challenges with peer connections, family matters, and academic concerns.

This brochure is designed to provide some general guidelines for you to keep in mind when helping your friends through a difficult time.

WHEN TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT A FRIEND
At one time or another, everyone feels depressed or upset. When symptoms of distress are persistent or when they interfere with academic responsibilities and social relationships, it may be a cause for concern. If your friend exhibits any of the following physical or psychological signs, your friend may need help:

- Deterioration in physical presence or hygiene
- Excessive fatigue or sleep difficulties
- Visible increase or decrease in weight
- Exaggerated personality traits or behavior (i.e. agitation, withdrawal)
- Excessive use of alcohol or other drugs
- Unprovoked anger, hostility, tears
- Marked changes in concentration
- Overly suicidal thoughts (statements about hopelessness, finality, referring to suicide as an option)
- Frequently missing classes

Ways to Help

Whether a friend approaches you about a problem or if you want to initiate a conversation with a friend about a concern you are having, keep in mind the following important general guidelines:

Find a place that is private and comfortable. Also, make sure that you and your friend are not rushed or preoccupied.

Be specific if you are speaking with your friend about a concern. Tell your friend what you have observed recently such as his or her missed classes, eating habits, substance use etc.

Listen to your friend. Do not rush to fix, correct, or disagree with what your friend is saying; be an active listener.

Validate what your friend is telling you. Acknowledge your friend’s current distressing situation and how she or he feels.

Avoid judging, evaluating, and criticizing. Communicate that you are appreciating your friend’s distress from his or her perspective.

Don’t make promises about “keeping secrets”. You may need to talk to a professional about very serious concerns.

Help develop options about possible ways of resolving the issue. Suggest various resources for help such as family, clergy, RAs/GAs, or campus resources.

Take Care of Yourself

Remember to know your limitations and take care of yourself. Your role is to provide support; it is not to be a hero. In your desire to show a friend that you care, you may begin to feel stress because you are taking on too much responsibility. Do not let your friend’s situation overwhelm you to the point of doing poorly in school, disrupting your sleeping and/or eating habits, or preventing you from having enjoyment in your own life.

Remember that there are many resources for you and your friend at Penn including CAPS.

Emergency After Hours
215-349-5490

www.upenn.edu/CAPS

CAPS
215-898-7021