



Identifying Stress, Distress, and Crisis

- If you are debating between two levels (stress vs. distress or distress vs. crisis), seek more information. If you cannot obtain more information, assume the more severe.
- Call CAPS (215-898-7021) to consult with a clinician if you are uncertain.
- Involve others (friends, house staff, faculty and staff) if you are concerned.

Stress

- Bad mood (irritability, impatience, sadness)
- Lacking energy
- Difficulty sleeping
- Inability to relax
- Lack of enjoyment
- Physical complaints (headaches, muscle tension, digestive discomfort)

Distress

- Sudden changes from regular behavior patterns (sociability, talkativeness, eating, sleeping, partying, emotionality, capacity for work, substance abuse)
- Deterioration of work
- Multiple absences
- Expressions of intense emotions (rage, anxiety, hopelessness, loneliness...)
- References to suicide
- Deterioration in appearance or hygiene
- Significant weight change
- Self-disclosure of distress
- Upsetting events (family problems, death of a loved one, end of a relationship)
- Concern expressed by close others
- Your instinct

Crisis

- Suicidal statements or attempts
- Homicidal threats or attempts
- Extreme emotions (uncontrolled rage, anxiety to the point of panic attacks)
- Inability to communicate (garbled speech, making no sense)
- Loss of contact with reality (seeing/hearing things that aren't there, bizarre troubling beliefs)
- Experiencing trauma (experiencing injury, rape)
- Previous suicide attempt(s)
- History of mental disorders, particularly clinical depression
- History of alcohol and substance abuse
- Impulsive or aggressive tendencies
- Easy access to lethal methods

Crisis Intervention

DO'S

- If you are concerned for anyone's safety, call 911 or Penn Police (215-573-3333 or 511 from any campus phone).
- Call CAPS (215-898-7021) to consult with a clinician if you are uncertain.
- Ask the other person if they are thinking about hurting or killing themselves or someone else (you will not "give them the idea").
- Communicate your concern and desire to keep them safe.
- Develop a plan, call others in to help.
- Focus on reducing immediate danger and connecting to a higher level of care.
- Send a clear message: "You are not alone."

DON'TS

- Don't leave the other person alone (unless your safety is threatened).
- Don't attempt to resolve longstanding issues.
- Don't make promises of confidentiality.
- Don't debate the other person's choices or challenge for shock effects.
- Don't minimize the other person's problems.
- Don't assume you know the person.

