A GUIDE for PENN FACULTY AND STAFF

WHAT CAN I DO? HELPING A STUDENT IN DISTRESS

COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES
University of Pennsylvania

215-898-7021 (including nights/weekends in most CAPS locations on campus)
3624 MARKET STREET, FIRST FLOOR WEST
Philadelphia, PA 19104
MON | FRI 9 am - 5 pm
TUES | WED | THURS 9 am - 7 pm
SAT | SUN 1 - 5 pm
www.vpnl.upenn.edu/caps

ACADEMIC SIGNS OF DISTRESS
- Determination in quality of work
- Missed assignments or appointments
- Repeated absences
- Continuing feeling of unusual accommodations (late papers, postponed exams)
- Written assignments expressing helplessness, isolation, rage, or despair
- Lack of engagement in classes or labs
- Inappropriate descriptions, monopolizing classroom time

PHYSICAL OR PSYCHOLOGICAL SIGNS OF DISTRESS
- Determination of physical appearance or hygiene
- Visible increase or decrease in weight
- Excessive fatigue or difficulty sleeping
- Exaggerated personality traits or behaviors (agitation, withdrawal)
- Excessive use of alcohol or other drugs
- Unresolved anger or hostility
- Irritability, constant anxiety, tearfulness
- Marked changes in concentration and motivation
- Overly cautious thoughts, such as referring to suicide as a current option

WHAT YOU CAN DO
If a student approaches you with a problem, take the time to listen respectfully and without judgment:
- Talk to the student in private with no distractions
- Give the student an unbiased attention; a few minutes of effective listening may help the student feel comfortable discussing what to do next
- Ask if the student has ever talked about this concern to anyone else, including a counselor. If appropriate, encourage the student to talk to a professional
- Listen sensitively, in a non-threatening way
- Communicate understanding by repeating back what the student has shared
- Be direct, specific, and non-judgmental
- Refer to specific resources and mention that seeking help is a sign of strength

MAKING A REFERRAL
Do not attempt to refer a student when the student is not ready and confused that he/she cannot focus or understand. Wait until the student is ready to respond to your suggestions.

SUGGEST STRATEGIES OR SUPPORTIVE MEASURES that the student would benefit from receiving.
- Encourage the student to contact you, a counselor, or a CAPS counselor to speak with the student. Provide the CAPS phone number (215-898-7021) and encourage the student to contact CAPS at your office. Offer to accompany student to CAPS if the student is available.
- Keep in mind, and mention if necessary:

CAPS services are free and confidential to all students, including those in graduate and professional schools.
- CAPS does not limit therapy sessions. Length of counseling is determined by the student and the counselor. Help the student reach their goals.
- Students need not inform parents or insurance about their visits to CAPS.

OTHER FACTORS TO CONSIDER
- Direct statements indicating problems such as a death of a family member or friend, break-up, academic failure
- Written or verbal statement of hopelessness or futility
- Friends or classmates expressing concern for a student

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU SUSPECT A SERIOUS CRISIS
If you believe a student may be in imminent danger of harming himself/herself or others, CALL Penn Police 215-573-3333 or 9-1-1 on campus.

If you need help determining the situation, CALL CAPS 215-898-7021 (including nights/weekends in most CAPS locations on or after 5:00 PM) or accompany the student to CAPS.

STUDENTS IN CRISIS
When individuals are not coping well, they may become disoriented, dysphonic and even attempt harm. If a student is in serious mental health crisis, you may see or hear:
- Suicidal statements or suicide attempts
- Agitated, disorganized, or delusional behaviors, actions, or threats (written or verbal)
- Destruction of property or other criminal acts
- Extreme anxiety, panic reactions
- Difficulty communicating (gabbling or slurred speech, disturbed thought)
- Loss of contact with reality (seeming or hearing things that aren’t there)

WHAT TO DO
- Do not attempt to make a referral when the student is not ready and confused that he/she cannot focus or understand. Wait until the student is ready to respond to your suggestions.
- Suggest strategies or supportive measures that the student would benefit from receiving.
- Encourage the student to contact you, a counselor, or a CAPS counselor to speak with the student. Provide the CAPS phone number (215-898-7021) and encourage the student to contact CAPS at your office. Offer to accompany student to CAPS if the student is available.
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RESOURCES
- HELP LINE 215-898-HELP (4357)
- RAP LINE (Search A Peer, 9991 - 1AM) 215-753-7777
- SPECIAL SERVICES 215-898-6600
- STUDENT HEALTH SERVICE 215-746-3535
- OFFICE OF THE VICE PROVOST FOR UNIVERSITY LIFE/STUDENT INTERVENTION SERVICES 215-951-5001
- WELFARE TRAINING RESOURCES CENTER 215-747-7215
- July 2017