

WHAT CAN I DO?

HELPING A
STUDENT IN DISTRESS

A GUIDE FOR
PENN FACULTY AND STAFF

COUNSELING AND
PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES
UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA

215-898-7021

(including nights/weekends to reach CAPS counselor on call)

3624 MARKET STREET, FIRST FLOOR WEST
Philadelphia, PA 19104

MON | FRI 9 am - 5 pm
TUES | WED | THURS 9 am - 7 pm
SAT 10 am - 3 pm

www.vpul.upenn.edu/caps



A GUIDE for

PENN FACULTY AND STAFF

The college years can be very stressful. Faculty and staff are often the first to witness signs of distress and are in a unique position to offer resources and support. CAPS staff can consult with you about the various ways to help a student in need.

ACADEMIC SIGNS OF DISTRESS

- Deterioration in quality of work
- Missed assignments or appointments
- Repeated absences
- Continual seeking of unusual accommodations (late papers, postponed exams)
- Written assignments expressing hopelessness, isolation, rage, or despair
- Lack of engagement in classes or labs
- Inappropriate disruptions, monopolizing classroom time

PHYSICAL OR PSYCHOLOGICAL SIGNS OF DISTRESS

- Deterioration 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
- Unprovoked anger or hostility
- Irritability, constant anxiety, tearfulness
- Marked changes in concentration and motivation
- Overtly suicidal thoughts, such as referring to suicide as a current option

OTHER FACTORS TO CONSIDER

- Direct statements indicating problems such as death of a family member or friend, break-up, academic failure
- Written or verbal statement of hopelessness or finality
- Friends or classmates expressing concerns for a student

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 undivided attention; a few minutes of effective listening may help the student feel comfortable deciding what to do next
 - Ask if the student has ever talked about her/his concerns with 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 make a referral when the student is so upset and confused that he/she cannot listen or understand. Wait until the student is calm enough to respond to your suggestions.

Suggest in a caring, supportive manner than the student could benefit from meeting a CAPS counselor. Provide the CAPS # (215-898-7021) and encourage the student to call from your office. Offer to accompany student to CAPS if you are able.

Keep in mind, and mention if necessary:

- CAPS services are free and confidential to all Penn students, including those in graduate and professional school
- CAPS does not limit therapy sessions. Length of counseling is determined by the student and the clinician to meet the student's needs
- Students need not inform parents or insurance about visiting CAPS
- Inform student they can reach a CAPS counselor on call 24/7, at night and on weekends, at 215-898-7021

STUDENTS in CRISIS

When individuals are not coping well, they may become disoriented, dysfunctional and even attempt harm. If a student is in a serious mental health crisis, you may see or hear:

- Suicidal statements or suicide attempts
- Violent or homicidal actions, attempts, or threats (written or verbal)
- Destruction of property or other criminal acts
- Extreme anxiety, panic reactions
- Difficulty communicating (garbled or slurred speech, disjointed thoughts)
- Loss of contact with reality (seeing or hearing things that aren't there)

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU SUSPECT A SERIOUS CRISIS

If you believe a student may be in imminent danger of harming him/herself or others,
CALL Penn Police
215-573-3333 or 511 on campus

If you need help assessing the situation,
CALL CAPS 215-898-7021
(including nights/weekends to reach CAPS counselor on call)
or accompany the student to CAPS

Penn RESOURCES

CAPS

(including nights/weekends to reach CAPS counselor on call)

215-898-7021

OFFICE OF THE CHAPLAIN

215-898-8456

HELP LINE

215-898-HELP (4357)

RAP LINE

(Reach A Peer, 9PM - 1AM)
215-573-2RAP (2727)

SPECIAL SERVICES

215-898-6600

STUDENT HEALTH SERVICE

215-746-3535

OFFICE OF THE VICE PROVOST FOR UNIVERSITY LIFE/ STUDENT INTERVENTION SERVICES

215-898-6081

WEINGARTEN LEARNING RESOURCES CENTER

215-573-9235

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