Identifying and Referring Distressed and Distressing Students

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Overview

• Mental health concerns among college students
  – Increased concerns and severity
  – Increased need for services

• How to identify distressed/disruptive students
  – Common issues

• Community engagement with individuals in distress
  – How to handle threats/acts of suicide
  – How to handle threats to others

• What to do when a student is distressing to others or disruptive to the environment
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distressing</th>
<th>VS.</th>
<th>Disruptive</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Serious grade problems or negative change in academic performance</td>
<td>• Highly disruptive behavior such as hostility, aggression, or violence.</td>
<td>• Inability to communicate clearly (garbled thoughts, slurred speech, unconnected, disjointed or rambling thoughts)</td>
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<td>• Excessive absences, especially if student has previously demonstrated consistent attendance.</td>
<td>• Unusual or markedly changed patterns in interaction</td>
<td>• Loss of contact with reality</td>
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<td>• Repeated request for special considerations</td>
<td>• Inappropriate communications or stalking behaviors</td>
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<td>• Unusual or exaggerated emotional responses that are inappropriate to situation.</td>
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<td>• Overtly suicidal thoughts</td>
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<td>• Threats to harm others</td>
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College Student Mental Health Concerns

- **Trends in university counseling centers**
  - Increased demand for services
    - Increased numbers of students arriving on campus with previously diagnosed mental health conditions
  - Increased severity of problems
    - Depression
    - Anxiety
    - Eating concerns
    - Alcohol/drug use
    - Self-harming behavior (e.g. cutting)
    - Transitions issues
Depression

• What to watch for?
• Observable behaviors:
  – Change in sleep patterns
  – Change in appetite
  – Decreased ability to concentrate
  – Irritability
  – Poor hygiene
  – Frequent crying spells
  – Social isolation
  – Self-injury
  – Verbal or written statements of a wish or intent to harm oneself
Anxiety

• What to watch for?
• Observable behaviors:
  – Persistent Worrying
  – Agitation during stressful situations such as exams
  – Avoidance of social or other situations
  – One or a combination of physical symptoms:
    • Rapid breathing
    • Increased heart rate
    • Shaking
    • Sweating
    • Headaches
    • Stomach aches
    • Muscle aches
    • Sleep difficulty
Eating Disturbance or Concern

• What to watch for?
• Observable behaviors:
  – Restricting calorie or food intake
  – “Over” exercise
  – Self-induced vomiting
  – Use of diet pills, amphetamines, laxatives, or diuretics for the purpose of controlling eating or weight gain
  – Food rituals
  – Eating alone/in secret
  – One or a combination of physical symptoms:
    • Significant weight loss or gain, swollen glands, hair loss, puffy cheeks, fainting, dizziness, fatigue, tooth decay
Alcohol, Drugs, and Addictive Behaviors

• What to watch for?
• Observable behaviors:
  – Disruption in daily functioning due to any mind-altering substance
  – Attending class or employment while under the influence
  – Legal difficulties (DUI, drinking tickets)
  – Overuse of internet/computers for:
    • Compulsive gambling
    • Compulsive pornography
    • Extended gaming (sometimes days at a time)
    • Social networking
      – Any of the above that results in neglect or harm to activities of daily living (sleep, hygiene, relationships, finances, etc.)
General Psychological Distress

• Any of the previous signs/symptoms/behaviors

• Any behavior representing a dramatic/significant change from previous lifestyle
  – Attendance record
  – Task completion
  – Life circumstance concerns (recent family death, breakup, etc.)

• Trust your instinct
  – Need to intervene and/or consult
Consultation

• If a problem is identified, what should you do?

• Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) allows consultation with mental health professionals when there is a concern about a student’s well-being
FERPA regulations apply primarily to college faculty and administration and address, among other things, disclosure of educational records within the college.

The APA code of ethics, which the Counseling Center follows, and FERPA regulations, which faculty and administration must follow, have very different rules regarding the release of information.

FERPA does not consider counseling records part of a student’s “educational record.”
Common Questions

Q: If I refer a student for counseling will I be notified when the student makes an appointment

A: It is our policy to notify you when a student you have referred makes an appointment; however we must ask the student’s permission and they can choose to refuse
Common Questions

Q: Could I inquire at the counseling center about whether a student is receiving counseling?

A: No. We can disclose that information to you only in those situations where you have referred the student and the student gives us permission to speak to you about the treatment.
Common Questions

Q: Can the counseling center give me more detailed information regarding a student’s treatment?

A: Generally speaking, we can only provide that kind of information if it would be of some specific benefit to the student and then only with her or his written permission.
Q: If I am concerned about a student, may I consult with a counselor about how to be helpful?

A: Yes. We encourage you to call us anytime you would like to discuss your concerns, regardless of whether the student is a client or not.
Engaging Distressed Students

- Keep it simple.
- Hear the problem.
- Be honest.
- Ask to help.
- Follow up.
Threatening or Suicidal Students

• *If you sense or understand that there may be danger in approaching an individual, do not approach.*

• Unique challenges of distressing students
  – Managing threats of harm are usually beyond the scope of many individuals

• Two distinct UIUC programs:
  – Suicide Prevention Program
  – Threat Response Protocol
Suicide Prevention Program

- Initiated in 1984 through the Counseling Center and McKinley Health Center
- Aims to reduce risk of suicide in the UIUC community
- Any individual *should* notify the Suicide Prevention Team if a student they know makes a suicidal threat or gesture
  - Threats
  - Attempts
  - Parasuicide (dangerous self-harming behavior without stated intention of suicide)
  - A pattern of significant suicide ideation
Suicide Prevention Program (cont.)

• What happens? What to do?
• Reported student is required to participate in:
  – Four 1-hour sessions of professional suicide assessment
  – Assessments conducted by a licensed mental health professional
  – Anyone can complete a **Suicide Incident Report** (SIR), available at:
Threats to Self or Others

- **UIUC Threat Response Protocol**
  - Designed to address reports of students who have made threats to harm others
  - Process of setting limits through school administration regarding threatening behavior
  - BIT (Behavioral Intervention Team)
    - *Membership*
    - *Purpose*
    - *Frequency of meetings*
Threats to Self or Others (cont.)

- **UIUC Threat Response Protocol – What to do?**
  - If a student is perceived as a threat, do not approach
  - Seek consultation from:
    - *Police*
    - *Office of the Dean of Students/Emergency Dean*
    - *Any mental health professional*
    - *Any BIT member*
  - The Counseling Center can assist in reporting the distressing behavior
  - The Behavioral Intervention Team will then pursue the appropriate action
Understanding Your Role

- You are not expected to be a mental health professional
- You are, however, on the front lines
- Referral and consultation
Counseling Center

• Clinical Services
  – Individual Short-Term Therapy
  – Group Therapy
  – Support Groups
  – Consultation Services
  – Special Screenings and Assessments
Counseling Center

• Outreach Services
  – Workshops on request
  – Tuesday@7 Workshops
    • [www.illinois.edu/goto/Tat7](http://www.illinois.edu/goto/Tat7)
  – Inner Voices
  – Power Reading and Study Skills
  – Multicultural/Diversity Liaisons
  – Interlink
  – Academic Department Liaisons
  – Cross-Campus Clinical Committees
Counseling Center

- How to refer students for services:
  - Same day appointments (333-3704)
  - Call early in the morning (starting at 7:50am)
  - Student may state concern during phone call
  - Consultations: state your concerns for student
Emergency Services

- **Community Elements 24-hour Crisis Line** - (217) 359-4141
  - For use by an individual in immediate distress

- **UIUC Psychological Emergencies**
  - (217) 244-7911 (acronym: 4-P911 – For Psychological Emergencies)
  - For use by faculty, staff, etc. for the purposes of emergency consultation or reporting an incident
Counseling Center – Online

- Self-help brochures
  - Eating Disturbances
  - First Generation College Students
  - International Students Help Page
  - Addictive Relationships
  - Adult Children of Alcoholics
  - Assertiveness
  - Perfectionism
  - Grief and Loss
  - Stress Management
  - Suicide Prevention
    • There are dozens of self-help brochures online

- http://www.counselingcenter.illinois.edu/