Helping 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 students
  – Common issues
• How the community can engage with individuals in distress
• What to do when a student is distressing to others
Goals for the Community

1) Identify an individual in distress
2) Consult a professional
3) Engage the individual or community in a solution
   a) How to handle threats/acts of suicide
   b) How to handle threats to others
College Student Mental Health Concerns

- Trends in university counseling centers
  - Increased demand for services
  - Increased severity of problems
    - Depression
    - Anxiety
    - Eating concerns
    - Alcohol/drug use
    - Attention Deficit – Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
    - Severe academic distress
    - Self-harming behavior (e.g. cutting)
    - Roommate conflict, relationship breakups, identity development, etc.
    - Cultural concerns
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.)
Attention Deficit – Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

• What to watch for?
• Observable behaviors:
  – Difficulty managing schedule
  – Frequent interruptions in class
  – “Underfunctioning” with life tasks (eating, paying bills, time management, erratic sleep schedule, etc.)
  – Chronically late assignments
  – Poor test-taking abilities seemingly incongruent with intelligence
  – Appearance of “laziness” (excessively playing video games, arriving late to class, etc.) with a stated intention of completing tasks
Cultural Considerations

- Under represented student populations
- Social environment
- Language
- Religion
- Financial resources/S.E.S.
- Gender issues
- Sexual orientation concerns
- Sexual assault
- First-generation college student
- Others
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
Common Questions

• Should I be concerned about my friend/employee/fellow student?
• How can I get help for someone I know?
• I’ve seen someone cutting/vomiting/crying (etc.), but they don’t want help. What should I do?
• I’m nervous about some bizarre emails I’ve been getting, and I don’t feel safe. Who can I talk to?
• I know someone who told me in confidence about hurting him/herself. Can the Counseling Center call them?

– What are some other questions?
Engaging Distressed Students

• **Keep it simple.**
  – Be clear, concise, and direct in your communication.

• **Hear the problem.**
  – Listening to a person non-judgmentally can be an important part of helping.

• **Be honest.**
  – It is important to share your concern.

• **Ask to help.**
  – Invite the student to continue the conversation and to ask for help from others.

• **Follow up.**
  – “Continuity of care” is extremely beneficial for all involved: the student, the mental health professional, and you.
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 can 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 the Community

• 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
Threats to the Community (cont.)

- **UIUC Threat Response Protocol – What to do?**
  - If a student is perceived as a threat, do not approach
  - Seek consultation from:
    - Supervisors
    - Campus security
    - Police
    - Any mental health professional
  - The Counseling Center can assist in reporting the distressing behavior
  - The Threat Response 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.couns.uiuc.edu/CCP/tuesday7.htm](http://www.couns.uiuc.edu/CCP/tuesday7.htm)
  – Inner Voices
  – Power Reading and Study Skills
  – Program on Intergroup Relations (PIR)
  – 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

• Champaign County 24-hour Crisis Line
  – (217) 359-4141
  – For use by an individual in immediate distress

• UIUC Psychological Emergencies
  – (217) 244-P911 (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
Considerations for Employers

• Power dynamic between employer-employee
  – Stigma of receiving mental health assistance/counseling/therapy

• Confidentiality
  – What are the considerations/limits within your unit?
  – What are the considerations/limits for the university?
  – What are the considerations/limits of the Counseling Center?
  – What are the legal and ethical requirements?
Counseling Center Mission

• Counseling Center values its culturally competent counselors and diverse staff
• Many cultures may associate mental health services with a sense of shame, secrecy, or avoidance
• The Counseling Center has several groups that are “culturally specific”
• Some cultures may not utilize or be interested in “traditional” therapy practices as known in our community
Resources for YOU

• Consult with a counselor at the Counseling Center about a student:
  – (217) 333-3704
  – Student Services Building, 610 E. John St., 2nd Floor

• Mental health resources for your own concerns/self-care:
  – Employee Assistance Program
  – Large number of private practitioners in Champaign-Urbana
    • Counseling Center can provide referrals