

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

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:
<http://www.counselingcenter.uiuc.edu/files/suicideReportForm.pdf>



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
 - 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*

