

NOTICING SIGNS OF DISTRESS

As faculty and staff at Colorado College, you may be the first to notice a student who is in distress or experiencing difficulties. Early identification and response to potential mental health concerns is very important. Below are some signs of mental health issues. Any one sign by itself does not necessarily indicate a serious concern. However, the more signs you notice, the more likely it is that the student needs help.

- Repeated absences
- Missed assignments
- Deterioration in the quality of work, or erratic performance
- Direct statements of distress, family problems or loss
- Angry or hostile outbursts
- Change in presentation style (i.e., more withdrawn or animated than usual)
- Expression of hopelessness or worthlessness
- Tearfulness, shakiness, fidgeting or pacing
- Deterioration in physical appearance/personal hygiene
- Fatigue, falling asleep in class
- Visible changes in weight
- Noticeable cuts, bruises or burns
- Confusion
- Disorganized, rapid or slurred speech
- Difficulty making eye contact
- Coming to class smelling of alcohol, or seeming hung over

RESPONDING TO A STUDENT IN DISTRESS

Once you've identified that a student may be in distress, there are 2 options: you can speak with the student directly, or you can refer the student to the appropriate resource for a conversation.

Speaking Directly with the Student

This is often the best option, especially if you have an established relationship or good rapport.

- Meet privately and set aside time to engage in a full conversation
- Express your concern for them
- Share concern about specific observations (i.e., "I've noticed . . .")
- Ask how things are going for them
- If you have concerns about their safety, ask directly if they are considering suicide.
- If the student shares a difficult situation, ask without judgment what problems that situation may have caused for them
- Ask them what they think might be helpful
- Suggest resources and referrals. Be specific and provide them with the name, phone number and location of the services

Unless the student presents a danger to themselves or others, it is ultimately their decision whether to access resources.

Students may be more likely to access resources if you can provide them with information about the referral or the people in the office. For instance, "I know the counselors have been really helpful to other students in working through these kinds of situations." OR "I know the Dean and she's very approachable." OR "I think you might really connect with so-and-so."

Referring the Student

If you don't feel comfortable speaking directly with the student, you can always contact the Student Life Office to share your concerns and ask for follow up through the Associate Dean of Students.

FOLLOW UP

Whether you speak with the student directly or refer the student to another resource for a conversation, follow up either with the student or with the referral source within the next couple of days.

If you spoke directly with the student:

- ask how they are doing
- ask if they decided to make contact with a referral; if they did, ask how that went
- let the Student Life Office know about your concerns for the student

If another campus resource was going to have the conversation:

- ask whether they did make contact with the student
- ask if there are things you should know or ways you can be helpful to the student



SAFETY RISK FACTORS REQUIRING IMMEDIATE RESPONSE:

Some indicators warrant immediate response:

- Written or verbal statements about suicide or death
- Severe hopelessness, depression, isolation or withdrawal
- Statements about "going away for a long time," or "wanting this to end"
- Physical or verbal aggression directed at self, others, animals or property
- The student is unresponsive to external environment
- The student is incoherent, disconnected from reality
- Highly disruptive behavior

If a student is exhibiting any of these signs, you should stay with them and contact the Counseling Center, Campus Safety or 911. If you are concerned about immediate threats to safety, call 911.

BEING PREPARED

The American College Health Association has identified stress, anxiety and depression as among the top 6 impediments to academic success for college students in the U.S. It is therefore quite likely that you will interact with students impacted by mental health concerns.

There are often indications that a student is in distress long before the situation escalates to a crisis. Familiarizing yourself with the signs or indicators of mental illness and distress puts you in an excellent position to be able to intervene early and help students maintain their health and academic success.

Additionally, being familiar with the campus resources in advance makes responding to a student in distress more comfortable. Staff members in the Counseling Center, Dean of Students' Office, Dean of the College's Office and Wellness Resource Center are happy to talk with you about the services and programs that they offer to students. These offices are also available to consult about specific student concerns.

Get to know the campus resources. In trying to encourage students to access help, it's useful if you can share your own positive experiences with offices or individual staff members.

CAMPUS RESOURCES

Colorado College Counseling Center
719-389-6093

Press 2 after hours to be connected to a Counselor On-Call available 24/7

Sexual Assault Response Coordinator
719-227-8101

SARC Advocate On-call is available 24/7:
719-602-0960

Chaplains' Office
719-389-6638

Student Opportunities & Advising Hub
Director of Student Support
719-389-6141

Associate Provost of the College
719-389-6686

Campus Safety
719-389-6707

Residential Life
719-389-6618

Accessibility Resources
719-227-8285

Wellness Resource Center
719-389-6211

Identifying & Responding to Students in Distress

Creating a
Community of Care



**A Guide for
Faculty and Staff**