



Resources for Faculty: Recognizing Mental Health Concerns

College years are characterized by multiple transitions. Stress is a normal and expected reaction to these transitions. Students may experience stress associated with academic demands, family problems, social relations, work, financial concerns, and cultural experiences. Resources that students had while living at home are altered, and students may find themselves isolated, lonely, and frustrated. Although most students cope appropriately with the emerging demands of college life, for some the pressures become overwhelming and unmanageable. The inability to cope effectively with emotional distress can lead to disruptions in a student's overall functioning and pose a serious threat to academic success. As a member of Murray State's faculty or staff, you are in a unique position to show concern and care. Proactive, timely, and at times reactive expressions of concern can be helpful in regulating and maintaining a student's emotional equilibrium, which can lead to a successful college career.

The purpose of this guide is to provide you with information that will assist you in identifying students in distress and specific options for intervention and for referral to campus resources.

Tips for Recognizing a Serious Mental Health Crisis (Emergency Situation)

A crisis is a situation where a student's usual coping style becomes overwhelmed and the emotional and physiological responses escalate. With increasing emotions, coping becomes less effective until the person may become disoriented, non-functional, or attempt harm. If a student is in a serious mental health crisis, one might see the following:

- Highly disruptive behavior (physical/verbal aggression)
- Overt suicidal threats (written or verbal)
- Homicidal threats (written or verbal, attempted suicide or assault)
- Inability to communicate clearly (incoherent, garbled, slurred speech)
- Loss of contact with reality (seeing/hearing things that are not there)

What to Do When You Suspect a Mental Health Crisis

For consultation in assessing the situation, call the Counseling Center at 809-6851 during our open hours (Monday-Friday 8-4:30). If the student is willing, offer to walk them to the Counseling Center (C104 Oakley Applied Science Building). Students in crisis will be seen immediately by the on-call counselor.

If immediate assistance is needed, call Public Safety at 2222. If the emergency is after hours or on a weekend or holiday, contact Public Safety at 2222, and they will determine whether to transport the individual to the 24-hour crisis center or contact the counselor on-call.

While Waiting for Aid to Arrive:

DO provide a safe, secure, quiet place
DO ask them to stay until help arrives
DO listen actively and show empathy
DO maintain a supportive attitude

DON'T leave the student alone
DON'T try to restrain him or her from leaving
DON'T challenge or confront the student
DON'T minimize the student's distress

Tips for Recognizing Distressed Students (Not in Crisis/Emergency)

Everyone experiences symptoms of distress at one time or another. However, if symptoms persist over time and/or increase in severity, this may indicate a need for assistance.

Marked Changes in Attitude towards Academic Performance:

- Poor preparation for class
- Drop in performance
- Expressions of non-caring about classes
- Excessive absences or tardiness to class
- Excessive anxiety about class work
- Strong reactions to class material
- Exaggerated emotional responses that are obviously inappropriate to the situation
- Exaggerated need to oppose the teaching or discussions
- Inability to communicate clearly
- Perfectionism and excessive worry

Changes in Behavior:

- Depressed or lethargic mood
- Avoiding participation in class activities
- Changed pattern of interaction with others
- Apathy or "in a daze"
- Oversleeping or not sleeping enough
- Disruptive behavior
- Consistently avoiding eating with others
- Marked increase or decrease in energy level
- Marked increase in irritability
- Low tolerance for frustration

Unusual Appearance:

- Changes in personal hygiene
- Dramatic changes in hair style or clothing style
- Dramatic weight loss or gain
- Swollen or red eyes

What Can You Do? (Not in Crisis/Emergency)

If you choose to approach a student, or if a student comes to you for help with personal problems, the following suggestions are recommended:

TALK with the student in private. You may need to schedule a time to talk so that neither of you are rushed or preoccupied. Express your concern by referring to the student's behavior in non-judgmental terms. Ask open-ended questions. Express empathy. Avoid asking "why" questions.

LISTEN actively and give the student your undivided attention. Communicate understanding by your verbal response, facial expression, and body posture. Reflect feelings back to them to make sure you understand what they are telling you.

INSTILL hope. Most situations have options. Assist the student by moving away from focusing exclusively on the problem. Suggest resources and support the student's desire to move beyond the problem toward a solution.

AVOID judgmental statements, evaluations, or criticism. Avoid comparisons that place the student at a disadvantage. Respect the student's value system even if it is different from your own.

MAINTAIN clear professional boundaries. The focus of the contact is on the student. Avoid unnecessary self-disclosures. Clarify rules and enforce them in the same manner as you would with any other student.

REFER to appropriate resources. Encourage them to believe that accessing services and following through is a sign of strength and courage rather than a sign of weakness or failure. Support a student's timetable for accessing services. If needed, assist with setting up an appointment and/or going to the appointment with them.

FOLLOW-UP with the student to see if they followed through with the referral. Allow the student to express reactions to the appointment.

CONSULT the Counseling Center if you need guidance with the intervention.

How to Get Started at the Counseling Center

The Counseling Center is open 8-4:30, Monday through Friday. Students are asked to complete the initial paperwork, which takes 20-30 minutes. If they wish, they can be seen by an on-call counselor for a brief session at that time. Students in crisis may request to speak with a counselor prior to completing the paperwork. The student will be assigned to a counselor, usually within a week of completing paperwork, and the counselor will call to schedule the first appointment.

For a full description of our services, please visit our website: murraystate.edu/CounselingCenter

Visit the Counseling Center Village for virtual pamphlets on mental health issues:
<http://ub-counseling.buffalo.edu/ccv.html>

MSU On-Campus Resources

Counseling Center	809-6851
Psychological Center	809-2504
Public Safety	809-2222
Women's Center	809-3140
Health Services	809-3809
Student Disability Services	809-5737
Student Affairs	809-6831
International Student Services	809-3089
LGBT Alliance	809-5040

Off-Campus Resources

Four Rivers Behavioral Health	270-753-0452
Purchase Area Sexual Assault Center	800-928-7273
Calloway County Health Department	270-753-3381
Campus Ministries (Ryan Boatright, Pres)	270-759-8623
Merryman House Domestic Violence Center	270-759-2373
Murray Psychiatric Associates	270-761-0043

Emergency Numbers

Ambulance	911
MSU Public Safety	270-809-2222
Murray Police Department	270-753-1621
Murray Calloway County Hospital	270-762-1100
National Suicide Hotline	800-273-TALK (8255)
24-Hour Regional Crisis Line	800-592-3980

These suggestions were adapted from Clemson University's Counseling and Psychological Service's form "Students in Distress: A Guide for Faculty and Staff."