

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the University Counseling Center (UCC) is to assist students in their academic matriculation by providing:

- Brief counseling and psychological services to enrolled students and their spouses and/or significant other.
- Psycho-educational outreach services intended to assist students in their personal developmental growth as well as teach prevention.
- Consultation services regarding emotional health issues to the SUBR university community.
- Provide mental health training opportunities for students in the helping professions.

DEALING WITH DISTRESSED STUDENTS

Any member of the SUBR community may come into contact with a difficult or distressed student. Being aware of distress signals, methods of intervention, and referral sources may help you feel more in control of the situation. The purpose of this brochure is to share information you may find useful and to inform you of assistance the University Counseling Center (UCC) staff can provide. Please feel free to contact us (x2480) for consultation and/or if you would like to discuss the following matters further.

DISTRESS SIGNALS

Below are some of the more prevalent signs of someone in distress. This list is intended to provide basic information only.

1. **Agitation or Acting Out Behavior:** This would represent a change in behavior. It might include being disruptive in class, being antagonistic, showing restlessness or hyperactivity, and an increase in alcohol and/or drug abuse.

2. **Drug and Alcohol Abuse:** Signs of intoxication during class or altercations with University officials are indicative of a problem that requires immediate attention.

3. **Depression:** While we may experience the "blues" from time to time, this usually lasts only a day or two and may involve only one or two symptoms. More importantly, we still believe in and can find HOPE. Clinical depressed people exhibit multiple symptoms for longer periods of time. Some of these symptoms are sleep disturbances, change in appetite, poor concentration, loss of interest in pleasurable activities and people, poor hygiene, loss of self-esteem, HOPELESSNESS, and a preoccupation with death.

4. **Disorientation:** You may think some students are simply "out of it." You may witness a diminishment in awareness of what is going on around them, forgetting or losing things (missed assignments), rambling or disconnected speech, unusual penmanship, misperception of facts or reality and, behavior that seems out of context based on the situation or bizarre behavior.

5. **Suicidal Thoughts:** Most people who attempt suicide communicate early messages about their distress. These messages can range from vague, "I don't want to be here", to very serious ones, "I'm going to kill myself." Non-verbal clues could include giving away valued items, and putting legal, financial, and University affairs in order. All of the above messages should be taken SERIOUSLY!

6. **Violence and Aggression:** You may become aware of students who may be dangerous to others. Physically violent behavior or threatening behavior, verbal threats, threatening e-mail or letters, harassing or stalking behavior, and papers or exams that contain violent, bizarre, or threatening material may manifest this.

7. **Other Signals:** Poor academic performance and preparation; excessive absences or tardiness; repeated requests for special consideration especially when this represents a change from previous behavior; unusual or changed pattern of interaction, dominating discussions, and disruptive behavior.

INTERVENTION GUIDELINES

While it is not expected that you become a "watchdog" of your students, or that you provide an assessment of them, often you may be the first contact for a student in distress and in a position to ask questions and offer help. Following the guidelines below can lead to a positive outcome for all concerned.

1. **Safety First:** Always keep safety in mind when interacting with distressed students. Maintain the "personal space" distance rule and have an escape route in mind should you need one. If you feel danger is imminent for you or the student, call University Police at 771-2770.

2. **Avoid Escalation:** Remain calm. Manage your own emotions. Avoid threatening, humiliating, and intimidating responses. Talk with the student outside of the classroom if possible. Remember to always attack the behavior and never the student. Distressed students are in need of listening and support. One can always remind them of rules at a later time.

3. **Ask Direct Questions:** Take a calm and matter-of-fact approach. Ask students directly if she is drunk, on drugs (even prescription), confused or if they have thoughts of harming themselves or someone else. Do not be afraid to ask these questions. You will not be "putting ideas in their heads" by doing so. Most distressed students are relieved to know that someone has noticed and is paying attention.

4. **Do Not Assume You Are Being Manipulated:** While it is true that some students will appear distressed in order to gain sympathy, attention and/or relief from responsibility, only a thorough assessment can determine this. Attention-seekers can have serious problems and be dangerous as well.

5. **Know Your Limits:** You will be able to assist many distressed students on your own by simply listening and referring them for further help. Some students will, however, need much more than you can provide. Respect any feelings of discomfort you may have and focus on getting them the assistance they require. Avoid repeating "aged old myths" regarding who gets depressed and who does not, who has emotional/mental concerns, etc. Reinforce their strength and courage for confiding in you. Be accepting and nonjudgmental. Encourage them by indicating that seeking professional help is a positive and the responsible thing to do.