

Students in Distress

A Guide for Faculty and Staff

Introduction

As Carleton College faculty and staff, you may find that students look to you for help during times of distress. This brochure is meant to familiarize you with the counseling services offered at Student Health and Counseling and how we might assist you in helping students. The following may help you 1) recognize signs of distress, 2) determine which signs require immediate action, and 3) decide on an appropriate course of action.

About Us

Counseling services provided by Student Health and Counseling include brief psychotherapy, support related to incidents of sexual misconduct, alcohol and drug screening, and crisis intervention. We also contract with a dietician and a psychiatrist to provide nutrition therapy and medication management services. All counseling services are available to currently enrolled students of Carleton College. We also provide consultation to faculty and staff as well as information about off-campus and community resources.

There is no cost for our counseling services and all services are confidential. Information regarding the student's counseling cannot be released without the written consent of the student except under limited legally-mandated circumstances. No record of the student's visit is placed on a transcript or academic record. Faculty are mandated to report sexual misconduct concerns that students share with them, so faculty cannot assure confidentiality regarding this issue.

Signs of Distress

You may notice some of the following signs of distress:

- Marked changes in academic performance or behavior such as:
Dramatic decreases in quality of performance, careless mistakes, inattention, lack of concentration
- Excessive absence from class or falling asleep in class
- Unusual or markedly changed patterns of interaction (avoiding or dominating class participation)
- Frequent absences, tardiness, or missed assignments
- Repeated requests for special consideration, (deadline extensions, especially if the student appears uncomfortable or highly emotional while disclosing the circumstances prompting the request)
- Highly disruptive behavior (e.g. hostility, aggression, violence, etc.)

- Irritability, restlessness, angry or tearful outbursts, excessive anxiety, sullen or depressed mood
- Strange or bizarre behavior, possibly indicating a loss of contact with reality
- Inability to communicate clearly (garbled, slurred or very rapid speech; disconnected, disjointed, or rambling thoughts)
- Stalking behaviors
- Inappropriate communications (including threatening letters, e-mail messages, harassment)
- References to suicide, homicide, or death in conversations, class discussions, or papers
- Threats to harm others
- Marked changes in appearance such as: Diminished personal dress and hygiene, swollen or red eyes, dramatic weight loss or gain

Is This An Emergency?

Much of the student distress you will encounter is associated with normal age-related developmental factors; some will be situational, and some will be of a more serious psychological nature. Not every instance of distress requires an immediate response of emergency proportions.

Emergency situations include those in which a person's life or health is significantly endangered (i.e., a suicide threat or a threat of harm to someone else). Other urgent concerns include sexual or physical assault, recent death of a loved one, significant impairment due to alcohol or drug use, aggressive or threatening behavior, mental disorientation, or hallucinations. These situations require immediate attention. If the student is unwilling or unable to seek help, faculty or staff members may call 911, Student Health and Counseling (x4080) or Carleton Security (x4444). Psychologists from Student Health and Counseling are on call 24 hrs/day, 7 days per week. They can be accessed after hours by calling Security and asking for the psychologist on call.

How You Can Help

Many distressed students are not aware of the resources available to them. Your role can be a positive and crucial one in identifying students who may benefit from counseling and assisting them in finding help.

If you have noticed changes in a student's appearance or behavior that may signal some distress, you are in an excellent position to use those observations to express concern for the student. You do not need to work with the student to fix the problem. You can assist, however, by helping the student focus attention on the problem and referring the student to an appropriate resource.

Another way of helping is to normalize the student's distress and the process of seeking help. Some students are reluctant to or ambivalent about seeking help. By de-stigmatizing counseling, you can help take the anxiety out of seeking help.

Reassure the student that counseling is here for students because college is a time for growth and development which can sometimes be painful. You can affirm that seeking professional help is a positive and responsible thing to do, a sign of strength in reaching out for available resources. In addition, you can reassure the student that problems do not have to be of crisis proportions to benefit from exploration with a counselor. Encourage "consultation" with a counselor, as students need not make a commitment to ongoing therapy and may benefit from seeing a counselor once or twice.

Other Administrative Support

Staff in the Dean of Student's Office are usually involved in emergency responses to students in distress and are an excellent resource both for consultation and for immediate assistance. They can arrange medical withdrawals for students as needed.

What You Can Do When a Student is Distressed

- Stay calm.
- Attempt to talk with the student in private.
- Express care, concern, and a willingness to assist the student in getting help. Give concrete examples of specific behaviors or changes that concern you.
- Listen without judging.
- Don't try to fix the problem for the student; instead, listen to the student's concerns.
- Help the student put the distress in context and perspective.
- Encourage the student to talk with other caring resources, perhaps the student's parents, siblings, advisor, RA, SWA or close friends.
- Encourage the student to seek professional help if he or she feels friends or family are unwilling or unable to assist, or if the student would benefit from a professional, objective listener.
- Offer to escort the student to Student Health and Counseling or the Dean of Students Office.

Who to Call

If the student wishes to talk to a counselor, the student may call Student Health and Counseling (x4080). If the student is in your office, you can offer the student the use of your phone to make the call. To speak with a counselor after hours, the student can call Security Services, x4444, and request the on-call psychologist.

Other Useful Phone Numbers

Carleton Security	x4444
Dean of Students Office	x4075
Title IX Coordinator	x 4028
Chaplain's Office	x4003

How to Follow Up

Asking the student about the referral to counseling, even if the student has appeared to refuse the referral, is an excellent way to express continuing concern. Students generally appreciate having a faculty/staff member follow up on a previous conversation, especially one in which the student has expressed some distress.

Location

Student Health and Counseling Ground Floor Davis Hall

Hours

Monday – Friday: 9 am – 6 pm. Extended evening clinic for medical appointments on Mondays until 8 pm. Urgent/Crisis counseling appointment daily at 11 am.
(Psychologists on-call accessible after hours through Security x4444)

Student Health & Counseling Phone Numbers

Appointments: x4080
FAX: 507-222-5038