

Red Folder

Guidance for faculty, staff and families to support student well-being at West Virginia University.

Many times, you may not see obvious signs of distress but sometimes you may be able to sense that a student is struggling. This may occur through signs such as changes in their appearance, energy levels or mood or they may directly communicate to you their struggles.

Check in with your students whenever you can. Try to create and foster an environment of open communication and belonging. Below are some signs of distress that a student may exhibit.

Signs of Distress in Students

Reports of

- Carelessness
- Reckless driving
- Excessive risk taking
- Sexual acting out
- Excessive spending/indebtedness
- General impulsivity
- Disregard for personal safety or safety of others

Alcohol and Substance Misuse

- Overuse or increased use of alcohol or other drugs
- Use of illicit drugs, including misuse of prescription drugs
- Noticeably intoxicated or impaired

Anxiety

- Anxiety
- Feeling “panicky”
- Feeling physically “shaky”
- Excessive worry
- Excessive sweating
- Reports of rapid heart rate
- Shortness of breath
- Feeling that they may pass out or die

Distraction

- Inability or decreased ability to concentrate, focus
- Persistent memory lapses
- Restlessness
- Preoccupation

Poor Contact with Reality

- Irrational conversation
- Obsessional and repetitive thinking/worry
- Exaggerated suspiciousness or fears
- Distortions of reality (hallucinations, inability to distinguish fantasy from reality)
- Disorientation
- Bizarre or strange behavior

Feeling Helpless/Hopeless

- Feeling that everything is “out of control”
- Talks or writes about death, suicide or having the means for suicide
- Giving away belongings
- Suddenly happy, calm or complacent after period of depression
- Threats toward others

How You Can Help Students

C Check for suicidal ideation and safety.

Questions you may want to ask:

“It sounds like you are dealing with a lot right now and it can be common for people to have thoughts of suicide when dealing with so much. I’m wondering if you are having thoughts about ending your life right now?”

“Have you been thinking about how you might do this?”

“Have you had these thoughts and some intention of acting on them?”

L Listen actively, openly, empathetically and non-judgmentally.

Communication and Support

- Use your rapport.
- Acknowledge specific observed behaviors.
- Express empathy and concern.

Help Problem-Solve

“What’s worked before?”

A Response You May Want to Use

Talk to the student privately or if that’s not an option, consider sending an email to find a time to check in. “I’m reaching out because I noticed you have been distracted in class and you had missed a few assignments. I am worried that you might be struggling with something and wanted to see if you would like to meet during my office hours or if I can help you navigate some campus resources in any way.”

I Identify resources for professional help and self-care.

- Determine what resources are needed depending on the situation and what the student reports to you.
- Provide accurate information to the student regarding related services.

A Response You May Want to Use

“Thank you for sharing with me. It sounds like you have been thinking about ending your life and thought through ways you might do so. I want to make sure I get you the help you need and right now, I’m going to call the Carruth Center and get us connected to a counselor.”

P Provide reassurance of hope and information.

- Let the student know you care and want to help.
- Be direct and specific.
- Normalize mental healthcare.
- Introduce seeking help as a sign of strength and courage, not weakness.

A Response You May Want to Use

“I know it’s not easy to talk about what’s been going on but I’m grateful you did. I care about you and want to make sure we can help get you to the resources here on campus.”

EMERGENCIES — SEEK HELP IMMEDIATELY, THEN MAKE A CARE TEAM REFERRAL

- ✓ Is there a life-threatening medical emergency or an imminent threat to self or others?
 - Call 911
- ✓ Has the student expressed threats of violence toward themselves or others?
 - UPD 304-293-COPS Threat Assessment Communications Team (TACT) or law enforcement response
- ✓ Has the student allegedly broken a law?
 - UPD 304-293-COPS Threat Assessment Communications Team (TACT) or law enforcement response

Example: Student says, "I hate this class, I'm going to bomb it so I don't have to go anymore this semester."

ACTIVATE THE EXPERTS — ACT NOW, THEN MAKE A CARE TEAM REFERRAL

- ✓ Is the student exhibiting unhealthy psychological behavior, expressing suicidal thoughts or showing interest in counseling?
 - Carruth Center | 304-293-4431 (after hours press "1")
Crisis Clinic for urgent concerns | Mon. - Fri. 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.
- ✓ Was the student allegedly involved in a Title IX reportable situation?
 - Title IX | 304-293-5600, anonymous on-call line: 304-906-9930

Example: Student has an advising appointment and mentions thoughts of suicide.

FOLLOW PROCEDURES — CONSULTATION

- ✓ Is there a process within your department/office to resolve the situation?
 - Contact appropriate personnel
- ✓ Was the student allegedly involved in a violation of the Student Code of Conduct?
 - Office of Student Conduct | 304-293-8111
- ✓ Is the student exhibiting a CARE Team behavior of concern?
 - CARE Team | 304-293-5611

Example: Student is being disruptive in the classroom setting and the behavior cannot be managed by faculty.

CALL IMMEDIATELY (AFTER REPORTING TO FIRST RESPONDERS)

- ✓ Serious accident, injury or death of a student.
 - Carrie Showalter (Campus and Community Life) | 304-293-5611 or 304-906-9626

Please note that deans and directors receive a more detailed document with reporting lines sent annually in August.

Resources available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

- ✓ Carruth Center for Counseling and Psychological Services: 304-293-4431 (press 1 after hours)
- ✓ University Police Department: 304-293-2677
- ✓ Title IX anonymous on-call line: 304-906-9930
- ✓ The nearest hospital emergency department: J.W. Ruby Memorial Hospital, 1 Medical Center Drive, Morgantown, WV 26505, 304-598-4000



Submit a
CARE Team
Referral

Questions? Contact the CARE Team, careteam@mail.wvu.edu or 304-293-5611