

WASHINGTON COLLEGE
FACULTY & STAFF
HELPING RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS



helping students in distress

Tips For Faculty & Staff

Washington College Counseling Center
Queen Anne House
300 Washington Avenue
Chestertown, MD 21620

Tel: 410-778-7261

Suicide is the second leading cause of death in college-age students.

This brochure is provided to assist you in becoming aware of signs of a distressed student, things that you might do to help the student, signs of suicidal ideation, and when and how to make effective referrals for additional help.

Warning Signs of Suicide

There are basically four types of warning signs:

1. Situational: stressful or traumatic experience
2. Depressive: changes in usual behavior, inability to concentrate, socially withdrawn, easily agitated, apathy, crying, sense of worthlessness, appears sad, abusing substances
3. Verbal signs: direct or indirect; verbally or in written material (e.g., assignments, papers, etc.)
4. Behavioral: giving away possessions, writing a suicide note, acquiring means to commit suicide, organizing business and personal matters, suddenly resigning from organizations or clubs

Look for a cluster of clues. A suicidal person who gives warning signs will most often present more than one clue.

When the situation is not clear:

- Share your concerns with the student directly to find out.
- Consult a mental health professional, such as a staff member at the Counseling Center or Health Service (ext. 7261).

Tips for Recognizing Troubled Students

At one time or another, everyone feels depressed or upset. However, there are three levels of student

distress which, when present over a period of time, suggest that the problems are more than the “normal” ones.

LEVEL 1 – Although not disruptive to others in your class, these behaviors may indicate that something is wrong and that help may be needed:

- Serious grade problems
- Unaccountable change from good to poor performance
- Change from frequent attendance to excessive absences
- Change in pattern of interaction
- Marked change in mood, motor activity, or speech
- Marked change in physical appearance

LEVEL 2 – These behaviors may indicate significant emotional distress or a reluctance or an inability to acknowledge a need for personal help:

- Repeated request for special consideration
- New or regularly occurring behavior which pushes the limits and may interfere with class management
- Unusual or exaggerated emotional response

LEVEL 3 – These behaviors usually show that the student is in crisis and needs emergency care:

- Highly disruptive behavior (hostility, aggression, etc.)
- Inability to communicate clearly (garbled, slurred speech, disjointed thoughts)
- Loss of contact with reality (seeing/hearing things that are not there, beliefs or actions at odds with reality)
- Overt suicidal thoughts (suicide is a current option)
- Homicidal threats

What You Can Do to Help

Responses to Level 1/Level 2 Behavior:

- Talk to the student in private when you both have time.
- Express your concern in non-judgmental terms.
- Listen to the student and repeat the gist of what the student is saying.
- Clarify the costs and the benefits of each option for handling the problem from the student’s point of view.
- Respect the student’s value system.
- Ask if the student is considering suicide.

- Make appropriate referrals if necessary.
- Make sure the student understands what action is necessary.

Responses to Level 3 Behavior:

- Stay calm.
- Call emergency referral on the back of this pamphlet.

Do's and Don'ts in Responding to Suicidality:

- DO show that you take the student's feelings seriously.
- DO let the student know that you want to help.
- DO listen attentively and empathize.
- DO reassure that with help he/she will recover.
- DO stay close until help is available or risk has passed.
- DON'T try to shock or challenge the student.
- DON'T analyze the student's motives.
- DON'T become argumentative.
- DON'T react with shock or disdain at the student's thoughts and feelings.
- DON'T minimize the student's distress.

When to Make a Referral

Even though a student asks you for help with a problem and you are willing to help, there are circumstances when you should suggest other resources:

- You are not comfortable in handling the situation.
- The help necessary is not your expertise.
- Personality differences may interfere with your ability to help.
- You know the student personally (friend, neighbor, friend of a friend) and think you may not be objective enough to help.
- The student is reluctant to discuss the situation with you.
- You see little progress in the student.
- You feel overwhelmed or pressed for time.



How to Make a Referral

To the student:

- Be frank with the student about the limits of your time, ability, expertise, and /or objectivity.
- Let the student know that you think she/he should get assistance from another source.
- Assure them that many students seek help over the course of their college career.
- Assist the student in choosing the best resource.
- Try to help the student know what to expect if she/he follows through on the referral.

Consider these questions before making the referral:

- What are the appropriate and available resources for the student?
- With whom would the student feel most comfortable?
- Who will make the initial contact—you or the student?

Consultation is Available

If you have concerns about a student, counselors at Counseling & Health Services are available for consultation. Some of the ways we might help include:

1. Assessing the seriousness of the situation
2. Suggesting potential resources
3. Finding the best way to make a referral
4. Clarifying your own feelings about the student and the situation

The Center for Health and Counseling

All students visit the Health and Counseling Center without charge. Students are encouraged to make their own appointments if possible. (Telephone: 410-778-7261 or e-mail vanderson2@washcoll.edu) In urgent situations, we will assist any student immediately.

At the student's first visit to the Center, information and consent forms will be filled out prior to the session. During the first appointment, the counselor will begin to assess the student's needs and determine

the most effective ways of helping. Options may include counseling at the Center or a referral to another provider.

In an Emergency

Try to stay calm. Find someone to stay with the student while calls are made.

For students expressing a direct threat to themselves or others, or who act in a disruptive, bizarre, or highly irrational way, call:

Public Safety (24 hours) 410-778-7810

For transportation and/or protection and to contact counselor on call

Counseling Services

(8:30 a.m. – 12 noon; 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.)

Monday through Friday)

410-778-7261

For consultation, evaluation, treatment, and referral.

Office of the Dean of Students (8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.,
Monday through Friday)

For students who exhibit severe anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, or any other intense emotional disturbance, and for whom no immediate harm seems likely, call the Counseling Center: 410-778-7261

Crisis Line (24-hour telephone service)
1-800-SUICIDE

