Reaching Out to Students in Distress Frequently Asked Questions
Date: 2015/2016

1. What educational opportunities and resources are available to UWM faculty, staff, and students?

   **Reaching Out to Students in Distress Presentation:** A 15-20 minute presentation offering guidance and support for faculty and staff to reach out to students in distress. The presentation provides an overview of the enclosed Quick Guide, developed in collaboration with the Dean of Students Office, and campus resources to support faculty and staff in reaching out to students. To schedule a presentation for your department please contact Kelley Tipton (tipton@uwm.edu or 414-229-3001).

   **Reaching Out to Students in Distress Video:** A brief video that details the importance of connecting with students in distress, a role-play, and words from UWM’s Chancellor, Mark Mone. The video can be found in the UWM Mental Health Resources website home page (uwm.edu/mentalhealth/).

   **UWM Mental Health Resources Website:** The information presented on this website is intended to assist members of our campus community who are experiencing emotional distress and to aid those who provide support for these individuals. Population specific resources are included (uwm.edu/mentalhealth/).

   **Campus Connect Training:** An interactive, experientially-based 2.5 hour workshop that will provide you with skills to recognize the signs of suicidal and/or emotional crisis, and to take action to provide an effective referral to help. Register online at uwm.edu/campusconnect/.

   **Campus Connect Booster Training:** An interactive, experientially-based 1.5 hour follow-up workshop for individuals who have previously participated in Campus Connect. The training briefly reviews Campus Connect’s key points and additional topics (e.g. establishing boundaries). Register online at uwm.edu/campusconnect/.

   **Life Happens. STUDENTS CONNECT! College SOS:** An interactive program that teaches students to recognize the signs of depression and suicidal thinking, and empowers them to intervene when confronted with a friend who is exhibiting these symptoms. Additionally, the program provides action steps that students can take to effectively respond to these symptoms. To schedule a presentation for your group or class of 20-25 students please contact Kelley Tipton (tipton@uwm.edu or 414-229-3001).

2. What mental health services exist for students studying exclusively on-line? (i.e they are not able to access Norris Health Center)

   Although students exclusively taking on-line courses do not have access to Norris Health Center, there are several resources that can be helpful for a student in distress. National resources can be accessed 24/7 and have the ability to identify local resources for the student:

   - National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1800-273-TALK (8255); TTY Accessible – 1800-799-4TTY
   - Trevor Lifeline (LGBTQ) – 1-866-488-7386
   - Veterans Crisis Line – 1-800-273-8255, Press 1
   - National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence – 1-800-622-2255
   - National Domestic Violence Hotline – 1-800-799-7233
   - National Sexual Assault Hotline – 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)
3. **How can I best help an on-line student who e-mails me regarding their mental distress?**

Express care and concern for the student’s well-being and gratitude for the student’s willingness to share this information.

Direct statements expressing intent to harm self (“I am going to kill myself”) must be taken seriously and potential immediacy of the statement and circumstance must be assessed. If, upon further direct questioning, the statement indicates an imminent threat (i.e. potential for suicidal act in the immediate future), either you or the student must call 911 and report this to the authorities where the student lives or make plans with the student to immediately get professional help (e.g. be taken by friends/ambulance to a hospital ER. (If the students address is not known, ask the student for their address and phone number.) Local police can then intervene to take the student to a hospital for an evaluation of safety.

Sometimes students may convey distress less directly, which can include some of the following warning signs for suicidal thinking. Indirect statements may suggest hopelessness, demoralization, or a sense of giving up (“I can’t take this anymore” or “I give up”). Students may also disclose stressful situations (financial stress, relationship break-up, death of a loved one), increased use of alcohol or drugs, and/or behaviors that suggest increased impulsivity, recklessness, anger, or anxiety. It is a good idea in these instances if there is no imminent risk to reach out to a student who expresses (hopelessness and other more indirect omit?) these warning signs (for suicide omit?) and ask if they would like a referral for support through the difficult time.

As the student has made initial contact with you, feel free to contact the student again by email after an appropriate amount of time to follow up on referral suggestions made, re-emphasize your concern and care, and underscore the need for further help, as indicated.

4. **What should I do if I get involved in helping a student who has a high level of distress (but is not suicidal), and the student doesn't want help, but really needs it?**

Continue to show support, care, and concern for the student as there may be a barrier for the student in pursuing the referral. Recognize that for many of us taking difficult steps for the first time, it often takes some time to gain the courage or inner strength to take that next step. Practice patience, yet caring persistence with the student; but also try to know when to “back off” and leave it in the hands of the student. Oftentimes openly asking the student if they want your continued involvement in the situation will not only convey a respect but will also let you know more clearly how you can best proceed.

If you remain worried but are unable to convince the student to seek help, you are welcome to seek further guidance by calling the Crisis Counselor at Norris Health Center at 414-229-2927 M-F during business hours.

5. **What can I do if a student is in acute distress during a program that takes place out of town? (i.e. athletic team away game, study abroad)**

If the program is one in which UWM faculty or staff members are present, they should directly intervene with the student and attempt to determine the nature of the problem, its severity and attempt to problem solve with the student. Directly questioning if the student has suicidal thoughts and intention can help determine if more immediate professional help is needed (at that location or upon return to Milwaukee) or if a referral to Norris will suffice. If needed, the staff member can later
contact the Crisis Counselor at Norris Health Center at 414-229-4716 to discuss the problems and devise a follow-up plan.

If the program is without UWM faculty or staff, and the student is communicating distress, attempt to assess the level of distress. If the student is indicating imminent risk, you or the student should contact emergency personnel in that area (e.g. police, hospital ER) that can immediately intervene. If there is no immediate risk, offer support, problem solve with the student, and develop a plan that would include accessing their personal support system and/or getting professional evaluation and follow-up in a timely manner. This plan should include steps the student would take if their condition would deteriorate. The student or the staff member may also call the Crisis Counselor at Norris 414-229-2927 M-F during business hours for options if the student will be away from campus for an extended period of time.

6. What mental health resources are available to help UWM employees?

Empathia LifeMatters is UWM’s Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and is an employee benefit to all permanent employees and their immediate families/household members. Empathia can assist with family, marital, alcohol, drug, financial, stress, emotional, and other personal problems. Help is immediately available by calling LifeMatters directly at 1-800-634-6433 or accessing on-line information at [http://www.mylifematters.com](http://www.mylifematters.com) (Company password: SOWI)

UWM’s Mental Health Resources website ([uwm.edu/mentalhealth](http://uwm.edu/mentalhealth)) lists Greater Milwaukee Community resources on the ‘Resources’ tab of the website. Employees can review this page and available community resources. UWM employees may also wish to contact their own medical and/or mental health providers for assistance.

7. What if I am still not comfortable with reaching out to students in distress?

Reaching out to a student in distress is a bit uncomfortable and is the main reason for the new resources. We want to encourage faculty and staff to reach out to students in a caring and supportive way and know that the University supports these efforts.

To increase your comfort level, we recommend attending a Campus Connect Suicide Prevention Training ([uwm.edu/campusconnect](http://uwm.edu/campusconnect)) to learn the necessary skills to support students and others that are in distress. While this training is aimed at suicide prevention, general skills about conveying support to people in distress are practiced. If you are still uncomfortable with supporting students in this way, we encourage you to identify a person in your office or department that is comfortable with reaching out to students and ask them if they are willing to be the “go-to” person for any concerns you may have of the students you work with.

8. How can I receive additional Quick Guide folders and/or folder contents (guideline document, resource cards, and magnets)?

Contact Kelley Tipton via email ([tipton@uwm.edu](mailto:tipton@uwm.edu)) or phone (414-229-3001).