



## **Mental Health Concerns Impacting Students: Guidelines for Faculty and Staff**

### **Purpose:**

This document is intended to assist faculty and staff in the event they encounter a student experiencing emotional distress and/or mental health issues. As key members of UW-Milwaukee's caring community, faculty and staff are encouraged to be supportive of students experiencing emotional distress and/or mental health issues. The wellbeing of UWM students is every faculty and staff member's concern. These guidelines provide options for faculty and staff to support students in distress, and to help students connect with appropriate resources and services.

### **Definitions:**

**Mental Health:** Mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community. In this positive sense, mental health is the foundation for individual well-being and the effective functioning of a community. Multiple social, psychological, and biological factors determine the level of mental health of a person at any point of time. (World Health Organization)

**Mental Health Issue:** A concern that affects the state of well-being of an individual, as noted above. This concern may be caused by individual or combined social, psychological, and biological factors.

**Emotional Distress:** A negative emotional reaction that may include fear, anger, anxiety, and suffering. (Emotional distress. (n.d.). Retrieved April 5th, 2012, from <http://law.yourdictionary.com/emotional-distress>)

### **General Signs of Emotional Distress:**

May include infrequent class attendance, dramatic decrease in academic function, lack of enthusiasm for various aspects of student life, lack of energy or falling asleep in class, sadness, tearfulness, marked change in personal hygiene, alcohol and/or drug use, high levels of irritability, including undue aggressive or abrasive behavior, bizarre or strange behavior, expressed thoughts of death/suicide, or suicide attempts.

**Support:** Providing encouragement, reassurance, and/or help or additional information in a caring and sympathetic manner.

**What should faculty/staff do to show they care when they experience students who show emotional distress or mental health issues? There are a number of options:**

**1. For Students who are ACUTELY DISTRESSED and/or SUICIDAL:**

**Is there an imminent risk of self-harm?**

*(The individual is threatening immediate harm to self; and/or the individual has engaged in a behavior that requires medical attention)*

**IF YES –**

**CALL** University Police at 9-911 from a University phone or (414)229-9911 from a cell or other phone. Stay with the student until the police arrive.

**Is this student acutely distressed or suicidal?**

*(In non-emergency but urgent situations, there is a clear risk but no evidence that suggests the student will be taking action at that moment)*

**IF YES–** This student requires immediate assistance

**Act Now and Refer** the student to one of the following resources:

- University Counseling of the Norris Health Center at (414)229-4716
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 800-273-8255
- Columbia-St. Mary's Hospital Emergency Room (414)291-1200
- Milwaukee County Crisis Line (414)257-7222

If you are uncertain about how to proceed or need further consultation:

- Consultation services are available through University Counseling at (414)229-4716
- After business hours, you may call one of the referral numbers above for further consultation

**Take responsibility to ensure that the link is made between the student and an appropriate resource for help.**

- Connect the student in crisis with the University Counseling crisis counselor (414)229-4716, or another mental health professional
- If the student is agreeable to meeting with someone at the counseling center, consider walking the student to University Counseling.

- If the student is reluctant to get help, consider calling the University Counseling crisis counselor, or other crisis line in the student's presence, and put the student on the phone with a mental health professional.

**Immediately following emergency and urgent situations, faculty or staff members should:**

- Share the information regarding the suicidal student with someone, which could be a mental health consultant (e.g. Crisis Counselor at University Counseling), a supervisor, Dean, etc.
- Document the details of the interaction with the student and the disposition of the student. Submit a follow-up report to the Dean of Students Office at [uwm.edu/reportit/](http://uwm.edu/reportit/)

### **MORE INFORMATION on SUICIDAL BEHAVIOR**

*(In instances when the faculty or staff member is unsure about the suicidal intent of the student, or the student expresses non-urgent thoughts of suicide, the following information can be helpful)*

Warning Signs for Suicide include the following:

- Statements indicating suicidal thinking
- References indicating a desire to die
- Depression or other mood changes
- Withdrawal from friends/family
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Impulsiveness or recklessness
- Anger and/or anxiety
- Feeling trapped and hopeless
- Suffering a major loss or life change
- Suicidal thoughts and access to means for suicide

How to Help and Talk to a Suicidal Person:

- Take all comments about suicide seriously
- Ask directly, "Are you thinking about killing yourself?"
- Do not let anxiety of a "yes" response prevent you from asking.
- Listen to the person and acknowledge his or her pain.
- Help the person feel understood and let him or her know you care.
- Avoid judging or inducing guilt
- Avoid being pledged to secrecy
- Do not leave an actively suicidal person alone

- Refer the individual to professional help
- If help is refused, consult with a professional.

Resources for Help and Consultation:

- Consultation services available through University Counseling at (414)229-4716
- Contact the Dean of Students Office to discuss your concerns:
  - Call (414) 229-4632 or
  - E-mail [dos@uwm.edu](mailto:dos@uwm.edu) or
  - Report your concern to [uwm.edu/reportit/](http://uwm.edu/reportit/)
- If the student lives in University Housing, contact the “Residential Professional Staff on Duty” (RPSOD) to alert housing staff about your concerns. Contact the RPSOD by calling the respective service desk in the residence hall where the student resides, and ask the service desk to contact the RPSOD. Service Desk phone numbers:
  - Sandburg: 414-229-6123
  - Cambridge Commons: 414-935-6900
  - RiverView: 414-229-3595
  - Kenilworth Square Apartments: 414-229-0512
- Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at (800)273-8255
- Call the Milwaukee County Crisis Line at (414)257-7222
- Call the Columbia-St. Mary’s Hospital Emergency Room at (414)291-1200
- Visit the UWM Mental Health Resources webpage at: [uwm.edu/mentalhealth/](http://uwm.edu/mentalhealth/)

**2. For Students who are *DISTRESSED* but *NOT Suicidal*:**

**Talk with the student about the situation:**

1. If possible, speak with the student after class and in a private setting.
2. In a caring tone tell the student what you have observed and why you are concerned about the student. Express your concerns directly and honestly.
3. Listen carefully, and try to see the issues from the student’s perspective, without necessarily agreeing or disagreeing.
4. You may want to
  - Try to focus on an aspect of the problem that is manageable

- Help the student recall constructive methods used in the past to cope; get the student to agree to something constructive to change things.
  - Attempt to address the student's needs.
  - Encourage the person to seek help
5. Do not ignore inappropriate or strange behavior
  6. Involve yourself only as far as you feel comfortable and competent

**Take action with the student, if appropriate.**

The appropriate action will vary with each situation. Options include:

1. Encourage the student to reach out to a caring adult for support, including family members, close friends, clergy, and others.
2. Refer the student to the Norris Health Center Counseling and Consultation Services website for on-line mental health resources including on-line mental health screening for depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and eating disorders. <http://uwm.edu/norris/counseling/>
3. Refer the student to University Counseling or Norris Health Center, or to the student's primary medical or mental health provider for evaluation.

Norris Health Center (414)229-4716  
(Hours of operation Mon-Thurs 8 AM-4:45 PM, Fri 9 AM-4:45 PM)

4. If the student expresses the need for and wants to pursue academic accommodations because of mental health concerns, refer the student to the Accessibility Resource Center (ARC) - (414)229-6287; Mitchell Hall Room 112.

Never unilaterally make an assumption about what academic accommodations a student may need without consulting with ARC. ARC can consult with the student and, when necessary, with others having the pertinent skills to assess the situation (e.g. a mental health or other professional, etc.).

5. Refer the student to the Dean of Students Office for further assistance:  
*Call (414) 229-4632 or*  
*E-mail [dos@uwm.edu](mailto:dos@uwm.edu) or*  
*Report your concern to [uwm.edu/reportit/](http://uwm.edu/reportit/)*

The Dean of Students Office (DOS) is able to assist students directly and also to guide faculty and staff in assisting students. DOS is a central repository for information about concerns related to students. This is an appropriate place to contact if you have concerns about a student's mental health. You do not need to explicitly tell the student that you are contacting the Dean of Students Office, nor do you have to be convinced that the student has a mental health problem. Rather, you can contact them if you have concerns and you think that others might too. DOS will coordinate concerns about students from various parties and works with several campus departments to determine how best to address the

concerns. The Dean of Students Office may follow up with you to discuss your concerns further and/or to get more information to better determine a course of action.

The Dean of Students Office is also knowledgeable regarding various resources on and off campus that may be helpful for students dealing with a variety of life circumstances (e.g., financial, academic, social, need for course withdrawals). Faculty and staff should not hesitate to contact DOS when they have concerns about a student's health and welfare. More information can be found on their website regarding student support and the CARE Team: [uwm.edu/dos/](http://uwm.edu/dos/)

6. *If the student lives in University Housing*, Contact the "Residential Professional Staff on Duty" (RPSOD) and discuss your concerns.

An RPSOD is available at all times to speak with you.

Contact the RPSOD by calling the respective service desk in the residence hall where the student resides, and ask the service desk to contact the RPSOD.

Service Desk phone numbers:

- Sandburg: 414-229-6123
- Cambridge Commons: 414-935-6900
- RiverView: 414-229-3595
- Kenilworth Square Apartments: 414-229-0512

University Housing is committed to maintaining the physical and emotional well-being of residents:

- University Housing staff members will typically follow-up with residents in cases where a concern for their mental health has been made known (whether originated by members of the community, staff members, parents and family members, or other sources).
- University Housing staff members (sometimes assisted by the UWM Police) may perform wellness checks if a parent, friend, or other community member expresses concerns for a resident's well-being or safety.

If the student declines your suggestions for action, and is NOT acutely distressed, suicidal, and/or threatening harm to others, you may want to:

1. Consult with others. Don't worry alone about a student in distress. Discuss the situation with a colleague, supervisor, Department Head, Dean, etc.
2. Consult the UWM brochure "Assisting the Emotionally Distressed Student, A Resource for Faculty and Staff" for further information.  
(Find on-line at [uwm.edu/assist-distressed-students](http://uwm.edu/assist-distressed-students))
3. Call the University Counseling crisis counselor at 414-229-4716 for further consultation.

4. After hours, contact the additional “Resources for Help and Consultation” listed above.
5. Contact the Dean of Students Office to discuss your concerns:  
Call (414) 229-4632 or  
E-mail [dos@uwm.edu](mailto:dos@uwm.edu) or  
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7. Visit the UWM Mental Health Resources webpage at <http://uwm.edu/mentalhealth/>

**Regular Review and Update:** This document will be reviewed and updated at a minimum every 3 years by the Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Mental Health.

The Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Mental Health developed this document in collaboration with the UWM Suicide Prevention Project (funded by SAMHSA). The document is currently being considered for adoption by various UWM governance groups and departments/units.

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