

The intersection of mental health and student behavior is an important issue that affects each member of our community and is integral in most professional roles at Columbia University. Identifying and addressing a distressed student is an important part of keeping our University community safe and thriving. We all know that student distress can present itself in many ways. Therefore, having the tools to **identify**, **address**, and **refer** will help you be a part of the various campus resources to support our students.

While this resource is intended to provide tips on how to address concerns that arise, further training is always recommended. We encourage all faculty and staff to contact Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (4-2878) to obtain additional information, resources, and training.

IDENTIFY

PERSONAL & PHYSICAL FACTORS

- Deteriorating personal hygiene
- Visible signs of hangover or intoxication
- Falling asleep in class
- Exaggerated behavior straying from the student's typical baseline
- Withdraw from interactions with peers or classmates

ACADEMIC FACTORS

- Missed assignments or repeated absences with or without notice
- Reduction in the quality of student's work
- Work contains disturbing content (violent images, references to suicide)
- Erratic behavior

OTHER FACTORS

- Peers express concerns about a student
- Direct knowledge that a student has experienced loss or trauma
- References to harming oneself or others (veiled or unveiled)
- Online postings that seem threatening or concerning

In an emergency (student creates significant disruption, or poses harm to themselves or others), it is always appropriate to contact Public Safety (4-5555) or 911.

For situations not requiring immediate emergency response, you may consult with CPS (4-2878) or Student Conduct and Community Standards (SCCS) (4-6872). SCCS addresses a wide range of behaviors and aims to help connect community members to campus services so that the needs of the distressed student are met in an efficient manner and so that a record is preserved for reference.

ADDRESS

Our instincts often tell us to stay away when we see someone upset or in distress. Instead of stepping away, we encourage you to step-in and intervene.

Addressing the concerning behavior or mentioning what you have observed can be the needed intervention to keep students safe.

If a student gives you any indication that they may harm themselves ask the following question: *“have you thought about harming yourself?”*

Asking this question WILL NOT PROMPT A STUDENT TO COMMIT SUICIDE.

In fact, it could prevent suicide, and it gives you an opportunity to get them to appropriate resources.

Don't be afraid of the answers you will get from the student; rather, think of the outcome that could happen if you don't ask.

DO	DON'T
Speak to the student in private.	Don't promise confidentiality.
Listen, ask open-ended questions, and reflect on what you hear.	Don't leave a student alone if you are concerned about their safety. Call Public Safety or take the student to CPS.
Express concern in behavioral non-judgmental terms (e.g., what you have observed that concerns you).	Don't offer reassurance before you've heard the student out.
Ask how he/she has tried to cope, and what else he/she thinks might help.	Don't rush into problem solving. Don't underestimate the power of listening.
Exercise willingness to help.	Don't involve yourself beyond the limits of your time or skill.
Help him/her explore options for help and sources of support.	Don't argue or debate with a frustrated, desperate, or angry student; often after having a chance to vent, students will be more open to help.
If able, offer to follow up with the student, plan a time to check in.	Don't meet in an isolated place if you have any concern for the student's safety or your own.
Give the student time to talk. Know that you don't have to fill silence.	

REFER

Connecting students to appropriate resources is one of the best ways you can support a student in distress. Referring doesn't mean you need to know all of the answers or be the expert.

Knowing these three resources, which are accessible to all students, will be all you need to get the student to the right place for help:



OTHER USEFUL CONTACTS

Columbia Health	212-854-2284
Residential Life On-Call	917-882-0648
Ombuds Office	212-854-1234
Office of Disability Support	212-854-2284
Sexual Violence Response	212-854-4357
Gender-Based Misconduct	212-854-1717