

# FACULTY AND STAFF GUIDE

FOR HELPING DISTRESSED STUDENTS



## CONTENTS

- Anxiety
- Depression/Suicide
- Disability Resources and Services
- Substance Abuse
- Angry Students
- Grieving Students
- Multicultural Issues
- Consultation, Referrals, and Workshops

# INTRODUCTION

The ever-increasing complexity of our society is reflected in the changing needs of the students who attend college today. Every year the staff at the University Counseling Center sees students seeking help with concerns such as depression, anxiety, relationship problems, family issues, and academic difficulties. In recognition of the new demands this places on those who work directly with students, the University Counseling Center has prepared this handbook. It is a guide designed to provide a tool that might be employed as a first step when a problem or question arises in working with a student. It provides some initial steps that might be helpful in managing a problem until a referral or consultation can be arranged.

This guide is not intended to be all inclusive, nor does it attempt to provide all possible answers to a given situation. In many cases the satisfactory resolution of a problem may only be arrived at after careful consideration of all the circumstances of a particular case. **The staff of the University Counseling Center is available to consult with you on any concern that might arise from your work with students. In case of an emergency or a situation in which an individual's health, safety, or welfare of others is threatened, contact the University of Pittsburgh Police Department immediately at 811 on campus or 412-624-2121.**

## ANXIETY

Anxiety is the most common mental health concern reported by University of Pittsburgh students. Anxiety is the feeling of worry, apprehension, fear, and/or panic in response to situations which seem overwhelming, threatening, unsafe, or uncomfortable. Anxiety can be generalized across a range of situations, or it may be situation specific (e.g., test anxiety, social anxiety, performance anxiety).

**Symptoms of anxiety include:** agitation, panic, avoidance, irrational fear, fear of losing control, excessive worry, sleep disturbance, or eating problems.

### **What to do:**

Talk to the student in private and in a soothing manner. Remain calm. Try to help the student develop an action plan to address their immediate concerns. Refer the student to the Counseling Center by calling 412-648-7930, while the student is with you, to set up an appointment. If the student refuses, consult with a Counseling Center staff member to follow up and explore other intervention strategies.

## DEPRESSION/SUICIDE

Depression is one of the most common problems to affect college students. It has been reported that about one-third of college students will demonstrate some symptoms of depression in a given year, and almost half of them will seek help for their depression. While the incidence of depression is about average on this campus, it is an issue that warrants everyone's attention. As with most problems, it is helpful to intervene as soon as possible. If you are better able to recognize symptoms of depression in your students and know which course of action to take, depressed students will be helped sooner.

**Signs of depression:** flat affect (inexpressive face), slow speech, sighing, difficulty concentrating, not attending class, expressions of hopelessness or worthlessness, agitation, or irritability. Another indicator of a student's depression may be whether YOU feel depressed or somewhat hopeless when speaking with the student.

*This guide also can be found on our Web site: [www.counseling.pitt.edu](http://www.counseling.pitt.edu)*

**Warning signs of suicide:** comments suggestive of wanting to die and of feeling hopeless. Active signs include direct statements about wanting to kill oneself or behavior such as giving away favorite possessions. Passive signs may include statements such as: “I just want to sleep forever,” “I don’t care if I’m assaulted,” or “I don’t care if my car hits a tree.”

**What to do:**

- **Directly ask** the students if they are feeling depressed or hopeless.
- **Directly ask** the students if they feel like hurting themselves.

**If the answer is yes to either of these questions, refer the student to the University Counseling Center** by calling 412-648-7930 immediately, while the student is still with you, to set up an appointment. If the student refuses, spend some more time examining his or her objections and if resistance is still present, contact the Counseling Center or the University of Pittsburgh Police Department (to access the Counseling Center) immediately. Do not hide your concern for the student, and allow the student to remain present when you make the call. Explain why you are concerned and how you feel professionals can be helpful. Be caring, honest, and direct in your communications.

**Do not** ignore the expressions of depression or wishes to be dead. People often reach out directly or indirectly to those they think will take them seriously, particularly people older than themselves (professors). Friends may be minimizing their feelings by telling them everything is “all right” or “everything will get better.”

**Try not** to threaten, admonish, or reproach a depressed student for not attending class or for falling behind in course work. Attempt to find ways of working out the problem with the student (i.e., alternate projects, incomplete, G grades) while making the appropriate referral to the counseling center.

*If you are in doubt about the seriousness of the emergency, contact the University Counseling Center or Pitt police (to access the Counseling Center) immediately.*

## DISABILITY RESOURCES AND SERVICES

140 William Pitt Union • 412-648-7890 • [www.drs.pitt.edu](http://www.drs.pitt.edu)

The University of Pittsburgh is committed to providing equal opportunities in higher education to academically qualified students with disabilities. Students with disabilities will be integrated as completely as possible into the University experience. A student in distress also may have disability-related concerns to contend with. With that in mind, here are some points to consider.

1. Avoid assuming that you understand a student’s disability, even though you may have worked with another student with the same diagnosis. There is a wide variation of symptoms and manifestations within each diagnosis.
2. Many conditions that cause disabilities are not static; students may experience an exacerbation of symptoms due to the course of their illness, stress, changes in medications, or environmental factors.
3. If a student is having difficulties communicating with you, let the student know your level of understanding. Contact the student’s disability specialist to facilitate communication.
4. Listen to a student’s concerns but be aware that a student with a disability must adhere to the guidelines set forth in the Student Code of Conduct.
5. If students request an accommodation that is not listed on their Notification of Accommodation Memorandum, you are not required to provide the accommodation.

6. Remember that it is the student's decision whether to disclose a disability. The student may be registered with Disability Resources and Services but also choose not to disclose to faculty.
7. If you suspect a disability because of a student's attendance or performance, talk to the student about your observations without labeling. If the student continues to experience difficulties, refer the student to Disability Resources and Services for consultation.
8. Maintain confidentiality regarding all communications with students who have disabilities. Requests for information should be sent to Disability Resources and Services.
9. Always consult with Disability Resources and Services with any disability-related questions or concerns.

## SUBSTANCE ABUSE

The use of alcohol and drugs is a problem that is present at many universities. The serious problems that students can encounter with substance abuse may follow them after college and in some cases cause a student to withdraw from school. Students with substance abuse issues are often difficult to handle due to their denial of the usage being a problem. Some warning signs will present themselves in your classrooms and during advising. Any one symptom may be misconstrued as its own problem. Identifying symptoms in combination, however, allows one to view the situation as a possible substance problem. Bringing it to the student's attention may help intervene in further progression of the problem.

Following is a list of common warning signs of substance abuse:

1. Frequently late or missing classes.
2. Falling asleep in class.
3. Change in quality of work or failing grades.
4. Unexplained mood swings.
5. Manipulating or bargaining behavior.
6. Defensiveness on approach.
7. Deterioration of personal appearance and hygiene.
8. Wearing inappropriate clothing, i.e., long sleeves when hot, sunglasses when cloudy or in class.
9. Dramatic weight change.
10. Difficulty walking and talking.
11. Frequent red eyes, runny nose, and sore throat.
12. Classmates may express concerns.

Addressing the concern will require some patience and persistence, because denial of the problem is a predominant feature of substance abuse issues. A suggestion for approaching a student about substance abuse is to communicate your caring and concern for his or her well-being, while speaking honestly about your observations. Sticking to the facts of your observations will help combat the defensiveness you may be met with.

Students may be referred to the University Counseling Center for evaluation at 412-648-7930.

# ANGRY AND UPSET STUDENTS

## How to handle angry and upset students:

1. Do not physically touch the student. Respect the student's personal space.
2. Find a quiet corner away from others so you can talk with your student in private.
3. Keep your voice soft and your speech pattern a bit slower than normal so the upset or angry student will have to listen carefully to hear you.
4. Seek clarification of the problem. What is it that the student sees as the real problem? What does the student believe would be the solution to the problem?
5. Apologize if the fault is yours or if the fault is in the system (e.g., students kept waiting for their appointment). "I am sorry you had to wait to see me, but I can give you my full attention now. How can I help you?"
6. In any disagreement remember that a satisfactory conclusion has to leave both parties feeling they can accept the conclusion. It is prudent to do the following:
  - Try to see the problem from the student's point of view, as well as your own.
  - Listen carefully; do not work on counter arguments while the student is speaking.
  - Solicit suggestions from the student about a possible solution to the problem.
7. In extreme situations where it appears that no reasonable compromise can be attained, be pleasant but firm. "I am sorry that you are not satisfied with any of the options we have discussed. Since this is the case, I suggest you think about a different course of action that may meet your needs."

# GRIEVING STUDENTS

Losing a loved one is hard at any time. Losing a loved one while in college can be especially difficult because of the inherent stresses of being in school. Reactions to the loss of a family member or friend are varied. Initial reactions are often intense; the student may attempt to deny the loss or possibly "shut down" emotionally. It is important to recognize the additional support your students will need during their time of bereavement. There is no single pattern of how one will grieve. Expect each student to respond in his or her own manner.

Following are some tips on how to work with a student who is grieving over the loss of a loved one.

## Do:

1. Be willing to listen, especially if the student is talking about a lost loved one.
2. Avoid clichés and platitudes like "time will help" or other things that may minimize or invalidate someone's experience.
3. Suggest counseling or talking with one of the University chaplains as a means of obtaining help.
4. Be flexible and willing to extend deadlines, allow opportunities to make up work, or provide other support.
5. Expect that time will be required for the student to return to where he or she was before the loss occurred.



# MULTICULTURAL ISSUES

Working with students of various backgrounds can present unique challenges. International students are in the position of learning about a new country and culture, while simultaneously trying to excel academically. These students may have different ideas and goals than you normally encounter. Keeping an open mind and paying extra attention to the student's point of view will be especially helpful. Here are some things to keep in mind when working with students of backgrounds different than your own.

1. Be aware of resources offered by different campus organizations, and assist your students in utilizing them.
2. Be respectful of the students' worldview, i.e., what is important to them and what is considered taboo.
3. Understand that there may be a conflict between academic and cultural values.
4. Attempt to determine what the problem is from the student's viewpoint. Be aware of the differences in the meaning of words across various cultures.
5. Be aware that different norms may exist in dealing with male and female students.
6. Ask what might make the student more comfortable to talk with you.
7. Be aware that people from different nations may have different physical boundaries for conversation.

# CONSULTATION, REFERRALS, AND WORKSHOPS

The University Counseling Center staff is available to assist you in different ways of working with student difficulties. First, you may refer students to the Counseling Center for individual or group counseling. Either you or the student should **call 412-648-7930** to make an appointment. Second, we are available to consult with you over the phone. Phone consultations often help the faculty/staff member provide the student with the best course of action. Third, we are able to present workshops to your staff on a variety of topics. Workshops generally run about one hour and are another avenue for faculty and staff to gain valuable information about working with students. Workshops are presented to groups of 10 or larger. Possible topics include those covered in this brochure, plus stress management, working with difficult students, anxiety, crisis intervention, career issues, and gay/lesbian/bisexual issues. Don't hesitate to call us with any questions you may have!

# EMERGENCY NUMBERS

## CAMPUS RESOURCES

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH POLICE DEPARTMENT .....	412-624-2121
ON-CAMPUS EMERGENCY NUMBER.....	811
UNIVERSITY COUNSELING CENTER .....	412-648-7930
SEXUAL ASSAULT SERVICES .....	412-648-7856
STUDENT HEALTH SERVICE .....	412-383-1800
OFFICE OF RESIDENCE LIFE .....	412-648-1200
DISABILITY RESOURCES AND SERVICES .....	412-648-7890
ASSOCIATION OF CHAPLANCIES .....	412-383-7270

## NONCAMPUS RESOURCES

### RE:SOLVE CRISIS NETWORK

A crisis network providing referrals, crisis counseling,  
and mobile crisis teams for on-site emergency psychiatric  
evaluations anywhere in Allegheny County.....

1-888-796-8226

OFF-CAMPUS EMERGENCY NUMBER .....

911

### WESTERN PSYCHIATRIC INSTITUTE AND CLINIC

DIAGNOSTIC AND EVALUATION CENTER (WPIC-DEC).....

412-624-2000

CENTER FOR VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE AND CRIME .....

412-392-8582 (Hotline)

PITTSBURGH ACTION AGAINST RAPE (PAAR) .....

412-431-5665

MAGEE-WOMENS HOSPITAL OF UPMC (EMERGENCY ROOM) .....

412-641-4933

UPMC PRESBYTERIAN (EMERGENCY ROOM).....

412-647-3333

*In an emergency, University Counseling Center staff  
can be contacted after hours by calling Pitt police at 811.*



## UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH WELLNESS CENTER COUNSELING CENTER

275 Nordenberg Hall  
119 University Place  
Pittsburgh, PA 15260