

Staff and Faculty Guidebook



The University of Texas at Austin

Counseling and Mental Health Center

Division of Student Affairs

Creating a Caring Culture

The prevalence of mental health concerns on college campuses have grown in recent years (Lipson et al., 2019; Oswalt et al., 2018). It is vital as faculty and staff that we understand how to support our students in meaningful ways and connect them to clinicians and resources that can help them succeed.

This guidebook is designed to assist you in that journey. It emphasizes a variety of resources that will guide you in having conversations with students, recognizing students in distress, identifying possible symptoms of anxiety and depression and familiarizing yourself with resources for student concerns. By using collaborative approaches to support and promote student mental health, we can create a community that cares.

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Normalize the Need for Help

According to an [Active Minds](#) survey (2019), the number one thing students say they value most in a professor is approachability. Below are ways you can be supportive to students:

- Share with students at the start of the semester that they can come to you if they are struggling for any reason. Include mental health resources on your syllabi (see sample syllabi statement below).
- Encourage students to get sleep and engage in self-care practices.
- Check-in with students you're concerned about and ask how they're doing.

Sample Syllabi Statement

Consider including a statement like the following in your syllabi to help normalize help-seeking for mental health issues and ensure students have the resources they need.

I urge students who are struggling for any reason and who believe that it might impact their performance in the course to reach out to me if they feel comfortable. This will allow me to provide any resources or accommodations that I can. If immediate mental health assistance is needed, call the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC) at 512-471-3515. Outside CMHC business hours (8a.m.-5p.m., Monday-Friday), contact the CMHC 24/7 Crisis Line at 512-471-2255.

Well-being in Learning Environments (WBLE)

Research suggests that the mere absence of a mental-health disorder in students does not indicate flourishing mental health and that positive factors such as social connection, emotional well-being and psychological health can help protect students from academic impairment.

WBLE provides guidance and strategies to help faculty and college/departmental administrators make small shifts in in- and out-of classroom conditions and in teaching activities and practices that can make major differences in students' mental health and well-being.

Find information about the whole student, conditions for well-being, creating effective learning environments (including virtual environments), collaborating faculty and additional resources at cmhc.utexas.edu/wellbeing.

Ask, Listen, Help

During the course of your work, it is likely that you will encounter students who are in distress. Signs of distress include a pattern of changes in behavior such as:

- Missing class
- Failing to turn in assignments
- Changes in classroom participation
- Disengaging socially
- Odd behavior
- Changes in mood

Having options for responding can help decrease both the student's distress and your own. A student may say something like, "I'm feeling overwhelmed at home. It's hard to concentrate on my classes. I don't know what to do."

ASK: Avoid close-ended questions (e.g., "Do you want to drop this class?"). Instead, use open-ended and student-centered questions.

- "Can you tell me more about that?"
- "How can I help?"

- “What would make things better for you?”
- “What might be the first step?”

LISTEN: Reflect and validate the student’s feelings.

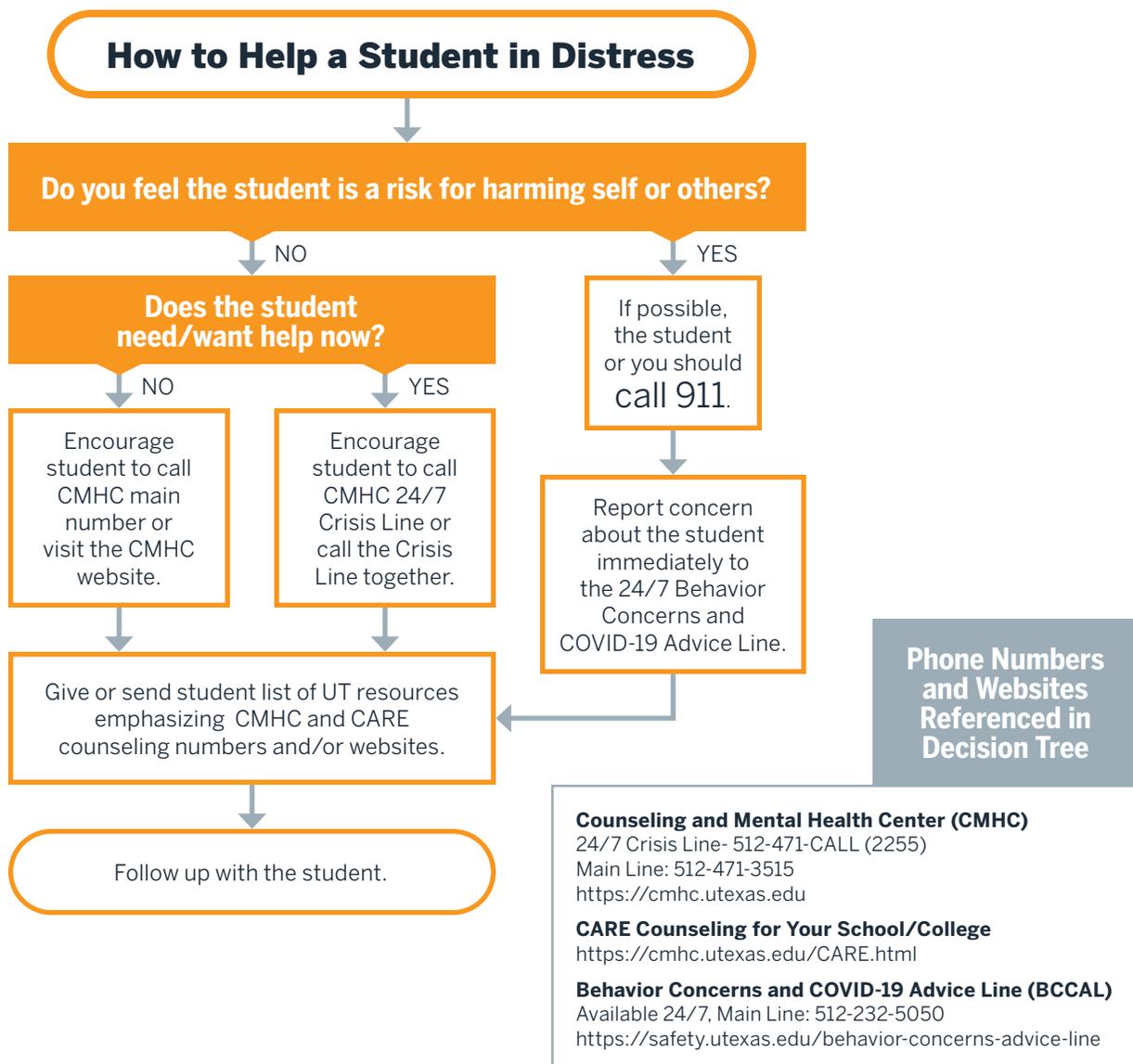
- Reflect -“That sounds overwhelming.”
- Validate -“I’m glad you shared that with me.”

Avoid jumping to giving advice, making judgments, or minimizing their feelings or concerns (e.g., “That doesn’t sound so bad.”).

HELP: Offer resources (below); check in with the student.

- “How do you feel about reaching out to this service?”
- “What might get in the way of you connecting with your CARE counselor?”
- “Can we check in next week about how that went?”

The Ask, Listen, Help model was adapted from the Vancouver Crisis Centre.



Assisting a Student in Distress

Sometimes a student may be so distressed that you become concerned for their safety. These situations and conversations can be stressful and anxiety producing. Be aware that your emotions may also be elevated in these moments.

It is imperative to know that if a student communicates to you that they want to hurt themselves, attempt suicide or hurt others the situation is an emergency and requires immediate action. Call 911.

If you are not worried about a student's imminent safety, but have concerns about classroom or other behavioral issues, you may file an online report via the [Behavior Concerns and COVID-19 Advice Line](#) (BCCAL) or call 512-232-5050 (24 hours/day). You can reference the flowchart below for how to proceed in a mental health crisis.

The best way to respond is to communicate with the student honestly (e.g., "I'm feeling worried about you based on the email you sent." or "I'm concerned about your safety and need to report this information to someone to make sure you are okay.").

Common Symptoms of Depression and Anxiety

While you are not expected to determine whether a student is depressed or experiencing anxiety, common symptoms of these conditions include:

Depression

- Trouble concentrating, remembering details and making decisions
- Fatigue
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness and helplessness
- Pessimism and hopelessness
- Insomnia, early-morning wakefulness or sleeping too much
- Loss of interest in things that were once pleasurable
- Overeating or appetite loss
- Persistent sad, anxious or empty feelings
- Suicidal thoughts or suicide attempts

Anxiety

- Nervousness, restlessness or being tense
- Feelings of danger, panic or dread
- Rapid heart rate
- Increased or heavy sweating
- Difficulty focusing or thinking clearly about anything other than the concern you worried about
- Insomnia

Mental Health Conversations

A Simulation Platform to Practice Having Conversations with Students in Distress

[Mental Health Conversations](#) is a simulation platform that allows faculty, staff and students to practice having important and life-saving conversations with students who are experiencing distress and/or suicidal ideation and to learn when and how to make a referral to campus mental health resources. Practicing simulated conversations allows participants to develop confidence about having these discussions in real life. While this training does not replace healthcare from a licensed mental health professional, everyone can learn how to respond to student mental health concerns in a caring and appropriate way.

The simulation takes an hour or less to complete, and participants can stop and pick up where they left off. Participants will:

- Complete a pre-survey
- Learn about mental health, how it impacts students and methods for responding to someone who is struggling.
- Participate in scenarios to practice applying these methods
- Get feedback about the choices made during the scenarios
- Complete a post-survey

The program is offered for faculty and staff through UT Learn. It is also available to graduate students who work in a student-supporting capacity such as TAs, AIs, GRAs and GAs.

For questions or comments, contact Thea Woodruff at thea.woodruff@austin.utexas.edu.

Campus Resources for Students

Mental Wellness Resources

Counseling and Mental Health Center

Individual and group counseling, wellness workshops, psychiatric services and crisis counseling
<https://cmhc.utexas.edu/>

My Student Support Program (My SSP)

App and web-based 24/7 real time chat and phone support, virtual single session and short-term counseling and access to a digital content library.
<https://cmhc.utexas.edu/>

Counseling and Mental Health Center 24/7 Crisis Line

512-471-CALL (2255)

<https://cmhc.utexas.edu/24hourcounseling.html>

Anxiety and Stress Clinic

Individual and group therapy for anxiety and stress-related disorders
<https://clinics.la.utexas.edu/anxiety-and-stress-clinic/>

Be That One

Suicide prevention resources

<https://cmhc.utexas.edu/bethatone/bethatone.html>

CARE Counselors

Counseling services in each college and school

<https://cmhc.utexas.edu/CARE.html>

Center for Students in Recovery
Resources for students in recovery and in hope of recovery for drug and alcohol use disorders
<https://recovery.utexas.edu/>

Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
Counseling services available to academic employees (e.g., TAs, AIs and GRAs)
<https://eap.utexas.edu/>

Services for Survivors of Sexual Assault - Voices Against Violence
Counseling, advocacy, support and an emergency fund
https://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/vav/vav_referrals.html

Services for Survivors of Interpersonal Violence and Stalking - Voices Against Violence
Counseling, advocacy, support and an emergency fund
<https://cmhc.utexas.edu/vav/index.html>

Additional Wellness Resources

Counseling and Mental Health Center Self-Care Activities
Resources for engaging in self-care at UT Austin
<https://cmhc.utexas.edu/selfcare.html>

Division of Diversity and Community Engagement
Cultivates an inclusive campus culture, connects with the community and offers academic support
<https://diversity.utexas.edu/>

Gender and Sexuality Center
Resources and education responsive to the needs of women and the LGBTQIA+ community
<https://diversity.utexas.edu/genderandsexuality/>

Longhorn Wellness Center
Contributes to a culture of well-being at UT through evidence-informed health promotion, resources, skills development and support that are responsive to needs of the community
<https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/healthpromotion.html>

MindBody Labs
Self-paced learning environment to help improve emotional and physical health
<https://cmhc.utexas.edu/mindbodylab.html>

Monarch Student Program
Services for undocumented students
<https://diversity.utexas.edu/academic-equity/monarch-student-program/>

Multicultural Engagement Center
Community development and advocacy for students with a range of identities
<https://diversity.utexas.edu/multiculturalengagement/>

SHIFT
Substance misuse prevention initiatives
<https://shift.utexas.edu/>

Thrive at UT
Free app designed specifically for UT students to enhance well-being
<https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/thrive/>

Wellness Network

Campus-wide coalition committed to assessing and addressing health and wellness needs at UT Austin
<https://www.wellnessnetwork.utexas.edu/>

Basic Needs

Recreational Sports

Facilities and programs for physical fitness and healthy lifestyle behaviors
<https://www.utrecsports.org/fitness-and-wellness>

Legal Services for Students

Consultation on many legal issues
<https://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/lss/>

Student Emergency Services

Assistance during times of emergency, including family emergencies, missing students, hospitalization, absence notifications and more
<https://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/>

UT Outpost

Food pantry and career closet
<https://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/utoutpost.php>

University Health Services

Primary care, women's health, urgent care, preventive care, sports medicine, physical therapy and more
<https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/>

Financial Support

Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid

Scholarships, loans, emergency funding and financial aid
<https://finaid.utexas.edu/>

Student Emergency Fund

Limited emergency financial support
<https://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/studentemergencyfund.php>

Student Veteran Services

Assistance with state and federal veteran education benefits
<https://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/veterans/>

Texas Global Financial Services

Scholarships and emergency financial assistance for international students
<https://global.utexas.edu/isss/advising-services/financial-aid>

Academic and Professional Development

Faculty Innovation Center

Graduate student pedagogical, academic and professional support
<https://facultyinnovate.utexas.edu/>

Graduate Student Assembly

Advocate group for graduate and professional students
<https://utexas.campuslabs.com/engage/organization/graduatestudentassembly>

Ombuds Office

Assistance with university-related interpersonal difficulties, university policies and bureaucracy and conflict resolution
<https://ombuds.utexas.edu/>

Sanger Learning Center

Tutoring, learning specialists and peer academic coaching
<https://ugs.utexas.edu/slc>

Services for Students with Disabilities

Accommodations for disabilities and instructional continuity
<https://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/>

Texas Career Engagement

Undergraduate and graduate student career development support
<https://careerengagement.utexas.edu/>

University Writing Center

Help at any stage of the writing process
<https://uwc.utexas.edu/>

Reporting Concerns About a Student

Behavioral Concerns and COVID-19 Advice Line (BCCAL)

Report concerns about students, faculty and staff
 512-232-5050
<https://safety.utexas.edu/behavior-concerns-advice-line>

Departmental Advisors

Academic advising and counseling for specific undergraduate majors

Office for Inclusion and Equity

Resources to advance a diverse, equitable and supportive campus and to report bias incidents
<https://equity.utexas.edu/>

Title IX Office

Report instances of sexual harassment, sexual discrimination, exploitation and intimidation
<https://titleix.utexas.edu/>

UT Police Department

UT Austin's dedicated campus police department
<https://police.utexas.edu/>

References

Active Minds. "NSCS/Active Minds Wellness Survey." Sept 2019. <https://bit.ly/32Z5GPf>.

Lipson, S. K., Lattie, E. G., & Eisenberg, D. (2019). Increased rates of mental health service utilization by U.S. college students: 10-Year population-level trends (2007–2017). *Psychiatric Services, 70*(1), 60–63. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.201800332>

Oswalt, S. B., Lederer, A. M., Chestnut-Steich, K., Day, C., Halbritter, A., & Ortiz, D. (2018). Trends in college students' mental health diagnoses and utilization of services, 2009–2015. *Journal of American College Health, 68*(1), 41–51. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2018.1515748>

American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425596>

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