

HOW TO HELP A STUDENT IN DISTRESS

STATISTICS

1/2 of Vassar students seek services at VCCS before they graduate

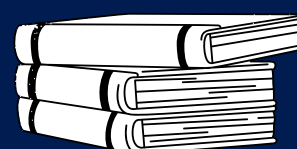


Primary Reasons for seeking help include:

- Anxiety 58%
- Relationship concerns 34%
- Depression 28%
- More than 25 percent of college students have been diagnosed or treated by a professional for a mental illness
- 34.2% of students with a mental health condition said their college did not know about their crisis.
- 64% of students are no more pursuing their college due to mental health issues.
- 73% of college students with mental health conditions have experienced, on campus, a mental health crisis.
- Before the COVID-19 pandemic, 67% of college students who felt suicidal reported telling a friend.
- 21.6% of college students said depression impacted their studies.
- 95% of college counselors report that mental health concern is growing on their campus.
- 50% of college students reported their mental health to be below average or poor.
- 72% of 400 university presidents reported in a 2019 American Council on Education survey that they were spending more funds now on mental health

Source: Taylor Covington, The Zebra

SIGNS OF POSSIBLE DISTRESS: ACADEMIC INDICATORS



- Uncharacteristic changes in academic performance
- Not handing in work or handing it in late
- Failure to turn in or attend exams
- Repeated absences at class, labs, or meetings
- Extreme disorganization
- Requests for extensions or special considerations of accommodations
- Overblown or disproportionate reaction to grades and indications of perfectionism
- Written or artistic expressions with themes of unusual violence, morbidity, and despair; papers or art pieces that target themes around suicide or murder

SIGNS OF POSSIBLE DISTRESS: EMOTIONAL/BEHAVIORAL INDICATORS



- Direct statements about distress, family problems, or loss
- Depressed mood
- Hyperactivity and/or rapid speech
- Social withdrawal
- Irritable, agitated, angry, or anxious behavior
- Expressed hopelessness or worthlessness
- Attempts to avoid you
- Unusual or exaggerated emotional response to events
- Shake, trembling, pacing

SIGNS OF POSSIBLE DISTRESS: PHYSICAL INDICATORS

- Marked change in dress, hygiene, or weight
- Repeatedly falling asleep in class or having difficulty paying attention
- Noticeable cuts, bruises, or burns
- Frequent or chronic illness
- Disorganized speech, rapid or slurred speech, or confusion
- Suspicions of a student being under the influence of substances in class

SIGNS OF POSSIBLE DISTRESS: OTHER



- A "gut-feeling" that something is wrong
 - Other students/peers and professors expressing concerns about this student to you
-

DIFFERENTIATION OF A CRISIS VS NOT A CRISIS

- If a student:
 - Is feeling at risk
 - Is having thoughts of hurting themselves or others
 - Does not think they can keep themselves safe
 - Is seeing or hearing things that are not real
 - Is delusional
- Then a crisis visit is warranted and they should be seen at VCCS that day
- You can walk them over or call the CRC to ask for the student to be escorted. Tell us the nature of the emergency.
- If a student is feeling distressed, but is not in crisis, scheduling an appointment with the VCCS is the most appropriate step

HOW TO APPROACH A STUDENT IN DISTRESS

- Find a private location
- Use a direct approach with the student and express your concern
 - Ex: "I'm worried how you are doing. I wanted to talk so I can understand what is going on for you..."
- Describe your **OBSERVATIONS**
- Be specific regarding the behaviors that have raised your concerns. It is important that you describe your observations in a non-judgmental way
 - Ex: "I notice that you have been missing our meetings, that when I do see you, you seem very tense and don't really want to talk."
- Express your **FEELINGS**
 - Ex: "I'm concerned about you."
- **LISTEN** to what they tell you about what is happening
- Don't be afraid to ask them directly if they are thoughts of hurting themselves
- Offer your **RECOMMENDATIONS**
 - Ex: "I think it is a good idea for you to talk to someone at the Counseling Service who can help you to figure out what is happening for you and how to help."

TIPS TO CALM STUDENTS WHO ARE DISTRESSED

- **Remember to remain calm yourself**
- **Listen deeply and validate their experience**
- **Breathing exercise**
- **Introduce "Just one thing at a time" as a mantra**

Grounding exercise for anxiety:

- Look around you. Identify and name:
 - **5** things you see
 - **4** things you feel
 - **3** things you hear
 - **2** things you smell
 - **1** thing you taste

MONITORING OUR OWN REACTIONS

- It's normal to feel anxious or stirred up when others are sharing their emotional pain
- There is no expectation that you have to fix their problem
- The goal is to be present, calm, and to deeply listen to the student
- Provide validation, normalize their feelings
- Use calming strategies for yourself or the student as needed
- If they are interested, you can assist them in brainstorming solutions
- Then refer as appropriate

REFERRALS FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS

Alert the Student Support Network

- Call the Dean of Students or the Dean of Studies offices
- File a report: <https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?VassarCollege>
- If a student may be at risk, do not leave them alone. Call the CRC for help.

WHEN TO REFER:

- A student presents a problem or requests information that is outside your range of knowledge
- A student is reluctant to discuss a problem with you
- You do not believe your contact with the student around the issue has been effective
- You don't have the time
- A student is becoming over-reliant or dependent on you
- You begin to feel that the advising relationship is crossing a boundary into a counseling or therapeutic relationship

CONSULTATION

- If you are unsure about how to handle a specific situation with a student, we encourage you to consult with the Dean of Studies office or one of the mental health professionals on our staff
- If you are not comfortable talking with a student directly or a student is unwilling to follow your referral recommendations, it is important that you share your concerns with others
- If you want assistance when sitting with a student in distress, please feel free to call the CRC at (845) 437-7333 and request that the Administrator on Call (House Advisor) join you