

# Supporting a Friend or Classmate in Distress



Sometimes you may feel concerned about a friend or classmate at ResU. During these times, it can be helpful to know how to offer support. While the personal counselors at Counseling & Wellness Services (CWS) recognize that each person and situation is unique and requires a personalized touch, some general ideas to keep in mind are provided in this guide.

**Counseling & Wellness Services**



## Goals of This Guide:

- Spread knowledge about how to identify signs of distress before they become critical.
- Offer ideas about how to effectively respond to and approach someone of concern.
- Increase awareness of campus resources.

### First of all, you are not alone!

You are always welcome and encouraged to consult with the personal counselors about your concerns and the various ways you can support a friend or fellow student.

### Secondly, remember to also take care of yourself!

## Identifying Indicators & Signs of Distress

The presence of one indicator alone does not necessarily signal an underlying mental health issue or escalating crisis. However, the more signs you notice, the more likely the person could benefit from help and support. Remember, you can always feel free to consult with the personal counselors at CWS!

Academic	Behavioral or Emotional	Physical
Frequent lateness to class	Sadness, crying, or depression	Excessive fatigue
Repeated absences from class, lab, or clinical	Severe anxiety, worry, or stress	Deterioration in personal hygiene
Not completing assignments	Anger outbursts or significant irritability	Changes in speech (disorganized, rapid, excessive)
Missing group project meetings	Situationally inappropriate or unusual behavior or emotions	Signs of injury (e.g., bruises, cuts, burns)
Falling asleep during class	Changes in personality	Dramatic changes in appetite, eating, and/or sleep
	Extreme mood swings	Smelling of alcohol or signs of other drug use
	Apathy	
	Irrational thinking or suspiciousness	
	Social withdrawal	

## Severe Distress\*

If someone exhibits any of the behaviors listed below, it signifies a **potential crisis** and necessitates **immediate intervention and care**. Share your concern with a faculty or staff member you trust and the personal counselors at CWS.

### Indicators of Severe Distress:

- Overt references to suicide, such as:
  - ◆ Written or verbal mentions of despair, suicide as an option, or death.
  - ◆ Expressions of severe hopelessness, depression, isolation, and withdrawal.
  - ◆ Statements to the effect of “I’m going away for a long time,” “I’m a burden to others,” or “I’m trapped and in unbearable pain.”
- Highly disruptive and/or threatening behavior (e.g., hostility; aggression; violence directed at self, others, animals, or property).
- Unclear communication (garbled, slurred speech; unconnected, disjointed, or rambling thoughts).
- Unresponsiveness to external environment.
- Loss of contact with reality or exhibiting psychosis (seeing or hearing things that others cannot see or hear; beliefs or actions greatly at odds with reality or probability).
- Inappropriate communications (including threatening letters, e-mail messages, or harassment).

\*If you are worried about the **immediate health or safety of someone on campus**, please call **Campus Security** at **ext. 8888** from a campus- or hospital-based phone, **312-770-2457** from a mobile device, or dial **911**.

## Approaching a Friend or Classmate in Distress

If you choose to approach someone you are concerned about or if they seek your help, here are some suggestions that might make the encounter more comfortable and effective:

- Show care and kindness.
- Express your concern and include specific observations. For instance, you might say something like, “I’m concerned about you because I noticed you’ve seemed [sad, angry, withdrawn, worried, etc.] lately.”
- Ask them what they think is going on. You could simply ask, “What’s going on?” or “How are you doing?”
- Ask what they believe will help.
- Listen carefully, sensitively, and respectfully.
- Ask direct, open-ended questions.
- Avoid judgments, criticism, or making diagnoses.
- Encourage them to seek support. Offer to help connect them to CWS or call a support helpline together, if appropriate.

## Referring a Friend or Classmate to CWS

If you think a friend or classmate would benefit from counseling services, feel free to contact CWS. Remember, the personal counselors are happy to consult with you!

You may also request for a personal counselor to reach out to your classmate based on your referral and/or concern. Personal counselors will ask for your permission to inform your classmate of your referral as their reason for contacting them.

## Counseling & Wellness Services

For general counseling questions and scheduling, please email [counseling@resu.edu](mailto:counseling@resu.edu).

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(773) 252-5120

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**Office:** 6s35

**Hours:** Monday – Friday (morning through evening)

**Website:** [www.resu.edu/student-resources/counseling](http://www.resu.edu/student-resources/counseling)

### 24/7 Support Helplines

**Presence Behavioral Health Crisis Line**  
**(708) 681-HELP (4357)**

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**  
**(800) 273-TALK (8255)**

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