



Mental & Emotional Well-Being

A Student's Guide

We're All Dealing with Something

There's a lot of talk about mental and emotional well-being these days. Yes, there are plenty of things to be concerned about. Yet, there are also plenty of resources to help you and your friends when things aren't going so well. You *never* have to go it alone.

As you deal with concerns, this guide can help identify various mental and emotional health issues — and where to go for help. There's absolutely nothing to be embarrassed by. We're *all* dealing with something. Luckily, you're on a campus with people who really want to help! Now it's just up to you to let them.



Behavioral Warning Signs

It's very difficult to predict who could be “pushed over the line” when it comes to violence and harm to self or others. The *American Psychological Association* offers the following warning signs that, when clustered together, *could* signal a problem:

- Repeated loss of temper
- Frequent physical fighting
- Vandalism or property damage
- Increased use of drugs and alcohol
- Increased demonstration of risk-taking behavior
- Announcing plans or threats to commit acts of violence or hurt others
- Carrying, access to or fascination with weapons, especially guns
- Enjoyment in hurting animals
- Withdrawal from friends and usual activities
- Feelings of rejection and marginalization
- Being a victim of bullying
- Poor school performance
- History of discipline problems or frequent run-ins with authority
- Failing to acknowledge the feelings or rights of others

If you suspect that someone could be a danger to themselves or others, report your observations and concerns to trusted campus staff members. Chances are that, if you are noticing worrisome behaviors, others are too. Your tip may be one of many that helps piece together a pattern of behavior and leads to people getting the help they need.

What Impacts Our Well-Being

Our mental and emotional health can be impacted by a variety of happenings, both on and off campus. It's likely that you're currently experiencing or have experienced at least one of them, such as...

- Relationships
- Family issues
- Trying to fit in
- Self-esteem problems
- Body image concerns
- Academic pressures
- Dating/ domestic violence
- Being bullied, verbally or physically
- Coming to terms with your identity
- Sexual confusion
- Peer pressure
- Death of someone you care about
- Hazing
- Addictions
- Disordered eating
- Not feeling "good enough"

We all need help coming to grips with things like these that can turn our worlds upside down. Or maybe there's a concern on that list that just keeps gnawing at you, sneaking up on you when you least expect it. Dealing with these types of concerns comes out in a variety of ways:

- Anger
- Sadness
- Depression
- Decreased energy
- Lashing out at others
- Engaging in self-destructive behaviors

The next time one of these things occurs, try to trace it back. What's triggering you to act this way?

Self-Harming Behaviors

Sometimes you may be inclined to engage in self-destructive behaviors such as...

- High risk drinking
- Experimenting with various substances
- Cutting or self-injuring
- Severe procrastination
- Over exercising
- Unhealthy relationships
- Binging, purging or avoiding food — or a combination

You deserve kinder self-treatment — and professionals on campus can help you toward healthier behaviors.



A mental health disorder is a condition that:

- "Affects a person's thought processes, emotions, and/or behavior"
- Causes emotional distress or interferes with a person's goals, lifestyle, and daily activities
- Is ongoing or chronic"

Source: Campus Mind Works, www.campusmindworks.org

Recognizing Depression

Depression is a *very* real illness that can impact your ability to sleep, study, work and enjoy life. It's more than feeling down for a few days. Instead, it's feeling low and hopeless for weeks at a time, unable to pull yourself together.

One out of four young adults will experience a depressive episode by the time they turn 24, according to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). You don't just have to live with it, though. Seeking treatment helps most people manage their depression effectively.

Signs and Symptoms

- Persistent sad, anxious or "empty" mood
- Feeling hopeless, pessimistic, guilty, worthless and helpless
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities that were once enjoyed, including sex
- Decreased energy, fatigue and being "slowed down"
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering and making decisions
- Insomnia, waking early in the morning or oversleeping
- Appetite and/or weight loss, or overeating and weight gain
- Thoughts of death or suicide; suicide attempts
- Persistent physical symptoms such as headaches, digestive disorders and chronic pain
- Restlessness and irritability

Sources: National Institute of Mental Health, American Psychiatric Association

Other Depressive Disorders

Dysthymia is a less severe type of depression. It involves long-term, chronic symptoms that can keep you from feeling good or functioning well. Many with dysthymia experience major depressive episodes at some point.

Bipolar Disorder is also called manic-depressive illness and is less prevalent. It involves cycling mood changes from severe highs (mania) to lows (depression). These mood switches are typically gradual but can occur in a rapid, dramatic manner.

Mania may include: abnormal or excessive elation, unusual irritability, decreased need for sleep, grandiose notions, increased talking, racing thoughts, increased sexual desire, markedly increased energy, poor judgment and inappropriate social behavior.

Left untreated, mania may worsen to a psychotic state.

Experiencing Anxiety

Millions of people experience anxiety disorders such as...

Generalized Anxiety Disorder. This includes consistent, exaggerated worries about everyday activities, expecting the worst even when there's no rational reason to do so. It lasts at least six months and is often accompanied by headaches, nausea, fatigue, trembling and muscle tension.

Phobias. Social phobia or social anxiety disorder is when people are disabled by an overwhelming fear of scrutiny, humiliation or embarrassment in social situations. Specific phobia causes an extreme, irrational and disabling fear of something that actually poses little or no danger. This can lead to unnecessary life limitations.

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). This disorder is marked by recurrent, unwanted obsessions or compulsive rituals that feel out of control. Rituals such as counting or hand washing often provide only temporary relief, as this illness is often chronic and subject to relapses.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. People who have experienced a traumatic event such as a natural disaster, a car crash, child abuse, rape, assault or war may have flashbacks, nightmares or a numbing of their emotions. They may also feel depressed, irritable, angry and easily startled or distracted.



As a result of **Social Anxiety**, people may avoid:

- Initiating conversations
- Making presentations
- Using a computer around others
- Shaking hands
- Working, eating or drinking in front of others
- Saying a prayer
- Giving a toast
- Being in a crowd

Panic Attacks

When intense fear strikes without warning, someone may be experiencing a panic attack. Symptoms include:

- Rapid heart rate
- Sweating/hot flashes
- Trembling
- Shortness of breath/hyperventilation
- Tingling in fingers or toes
- Nausea
- Chest pain
- Headache
- Dizziness
- Abdominal distress
- A sense of impending death

Many people go to the ER after experiencing these symptoms because it can feel like a heart attack. Panic attacks start abruptly and often last about 10 minutes.

Source: National Institute of Mental Health

Warning Signs

Certain behaviors raise a red flag, alerting you to the fact that something doesn't feel exactly right. They may include...

- Hopelessness and pessimism
- Sadness and depression
- Sleep problems
- Rage, irritability and anger issues
- Swinging mood cycles
- Fear of social situations
- Self-harming behaviors
- Persistent physical symptoms
- A slowdown in energy
- Food and body image issues
- Expressions of violence in written or verbal form
- Loss of interest in things that used to bring enjoyment
- Concentration and decision-making troubles
- Inappropriate behaviors

There's something to be said for trusting your gut when things feel off. As a caring, observant individual, don't ignore any red flags you may see. Instead, reach out to trained campus professionals for guidance and support.



Suicidal Thoughts: Red Flags

Seek help right away if you or someone you know exhibits any of the following signs...

- Threatening to hurt or kill oneself, or talking about it
- Withdrawing from friends, family and society
- Feeling hopeless
- Looking for ways to kill oneself by seeking access to guns, pills, etc.
- Experiencing dramatic mood changes
- Talking or writing about death, dying or suicide when these actions are out of the ordinary for the person
- Feeling rage or uncontrolled anger, or seeking revenge
- Acting reckless or engaging in risky activities — seemingly without thinking
- Feeling trapped — like there's no way out
- Increasing alcohol or drug use
- Feeling anxious, agitated or unable to sleep, or sleeping all the time
- Seeing no reason for living or having no sense of purpose in life

If someone appears to have a plan for how to end their life, share your concerns with a staff member, a counselor or public safety immediately. You can't — and shouldn't have to — deal with this alone.

Source: National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](https://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

Assisting Others

It's natural to be concerned about others. And, when you live and go to school with them, you're bound to see actions that may lead to a concern.

An offer of help may sometimes be met with gratitude while other times the person may get defensive. In order to have things go as smoothly as possible, keep these things in mind when you're bringing up a concern...

Use "I" Statements. "I have noticed you withdrawing from friends" sounds less accusatory than "You're withdrawing from us!" As a result, the object of your concern is less likely to get defensive.

Talk About Why You are Concerned. This gives it a more personal flavor so the person can see how she is impacting others around her.

Be Supportive. Offer to walk to the counseling center or to an advisor's office with the person you're trying to help so he can share what's going on. This supportive step can lead to him getting the help he needs.

Recognize Your Limits. Don't take on big problems without professional help. It's not good for you or the person you're trying to help! Get trusted faculty or staff involved.

Don't Make Promises. If someone asks you to promise confidentiality, *don't*. That way, you can share concerns with faculty or staff members who can get that person the help she may need!

When Someone Tries to Help You

A friend may be concerned about *you* and your behaviors. This comes from a place of genuine care, so try not to get angry, defensive or mean when this occurs. Instead...

- Hear her out
- Think about if your roles were reversed
- Consider that it took a lot of courage for her to bring it up
- Don't feel like you need to "excuse away" your behaviors



Time to Talk

When bringing up a concern...

- Gather your thoughts first to think over specific things you'd like to say
- Find a time free from distractions when people aren't tired or upset
- Express concerns directly and honestly
- Avoid making judgments about the person or the behavior



Help is Out There

If you or someone you care about is dealing with mental and emotional concerns, there is plenty of help out there. You can consider talking with...

- A coach
- A counselor
- A residence life staff member
- A spiritual leader
- An advisor
- A faculty member
- A student life staffer
- A trusted family member
- A health center employee
- A county resource
- A hotline service

Seeking help is a sign of *true* strength, as it signals a desire to address a tough problem and do something about it. People both on and off campus have been specifically trained to work with college students, helping them resolve their mental and emotional concerns. And much of this assistance is often free, low-cost or covered by insurance.

Acknowledging that something doesn't seem right is an important first step in the process. Don't ignore the signs — your well-being is *so* very worth it.



How to Start Conversations with a Counselor

When you decide to start talking about what's on your mind, it's very important that you...

- Offer the truth
- Don't apologize for being there
- Realize that you're not wasting anyone's time
- Let go of thinking your problem "isn't a big deal"
- Share your emotions and thoughts
- Answer questions to the best of your ability and comfort

If you don't feel comfortable talking about mental and emotional health issues with one person, find another resource. Your comfort, safety and well-being are of utmost concern.

Resources

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 (toll-free) or suicidepreventionlifeline.org
- National Alliance on Mental Illness at www.nami.org
- National Institute of Mental Health at www.nimh.nih.gov
- Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration at www.samhsa.gov