



How to Help a Friend: Bystander Intervention for Wellbeing

Holistic wellbeing, encompassing all facets, is critical for students to achieve their goals and overcome obstacles they may face. The University of Chicago provides resources to support our students' wellbeing. Additionally, we understand the important role students play in supporting each other.

To that end, we are providing Bystander Intervention techniques for students who find that a friend or colleague may be experiencing a crisis and is unable to access help for themselves in the moment.

Important Steps for Bystanders

- **Keep yourself safe. Never put yourself in harm's way to help anyone. If you do not feel safe, enlist the help of professionals, such as a Dean on Call, UChicago Student Wellness, or the University of Chicago Police Department (UCPD).**
- **Take notice.** If something seems off with a friend, don't be afraid to ask them if they are okay. You might be the only person who notices there is a problem, and you can provide help before the situation becomes an emergency.
 - Signs that something may be wrong include if your friend is: tired, sad, worried, having difficulty concentrating or focusing, indecisive, withdrawing from family and/or friends, or feeling hopeless.

Language Do's and Don'ts

What to Say to a Friend in Crisis

- *I'm sorry you are having this experience.*
- *Thank you for telling me.*
- *I'm always here if you want to talk.*
- *Can I do anything for you?*
- *Have you experienced this before? (If so) What supports helped you that we may be able to use now?*

What You Should Not Say

- *You could have avoided feeling like this if you had just _____.*
- *What's wrong with you? You have no motivation!*
- *Lots of people feel bad, you need to get over yourself.*
- *You used to be so much fun to hang out with. What happened to you?*
- *This is how everyone feels. You just need to push through.*



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- **You might be the only one who intervenes.** If you see there is a problem, don't ignore it. Intervene in a situation you think might be problematic before it becomes an emergency.
- **Know how to access information and resources to assist your friend.** There is a list of University resources provided at the end of this document.
- **Approach your friend respectfully and with an earnest desire to help.** Let them see and hear your compassion by being a good listener and by not being antagonistic. Be sensitive, understanding, and nonjudgmental.
- **Challenge misperceptions about mental health and express healthy feelings/beliefs to your friend.** Give reassurance and information. Remind them that mental health challenges are common and there is potential for recovery.
- **If you feel your friend's needs are beyond the help you can give or if you need to recruit additional help, be honest and direct with your friend about what you will do.** Connect them with a staff member from one of the offices or departments listed below who can support them and connect them with further resources.
- **If your friend does not want your assistance and support, remember that you cannot force them to access resources.**
 - If you feel that your friend is in crisis and/or poses a risk to themselves or others, contact emergency services, such as the UCPD or Dean on Call.
 - If they don't pose a risk to themselves or others, provide information about supports and resources (see list below) and self-care strategies that are available to them. Remind them that you care and are available to help.
- **Be sure to follow up with your friend.** If you are able, offer continued support, or offer to help connect them with a support resource.
- **Remember that setting healthy boundaries is vital.** This will help you to support your friend without sacrificing your own wellbeing, and it will help your friend to receive support without becoming dependent in an unhealthy way. Setting and maintaining boundaries requires practice. Establish what you are comfortable with and never worry about what others think of your boundaries.



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Taking Care of Yourself

As you support your friend, you may also be affected by their experience. You may experience a range of emotions yourself, including frustration (with the incident or your friend), confusion, guilt, and anger. These feelings are rational and justified. It is just as important for you to practice self-care, to seek support, and to talk about your own feelings as it is for you to support your friend. If you feel you need additional help, use the resources listed below to support your own wellbeing.

UChicago Resources/Support Mechanisms

- **UChicago HELP**
 - 773.834.HELP
- **UChicago Student Wellness** (medical, counseling, health promotion)
 - 773.834.WELL
 - **How to access mental health services at UChicago Student Wellness**
 - **UChicago Student Wellness Mental Health Resource Guide**
 - **Options for medical care at UChicago Student Wellness**
- **UChicago Medicine Emergency Room**
 - 773.702.6250
 - 5656 S. Maryland Ave.
- **University of Chicago Police Department**
 - 123 from on-campus phones
 - Press the red button on an emergency phone
 - 773.702.8181 from other phones
- **College Advisers**
 - Make a same-day appointment with a College Adviser on Call or a general appointment
- **Housing and Residence Life** (Assistant Directors, Resident Heads, and Resident Assistants)
- **Dean of Students**
- **UChicago GRAD's Sounding Board**
 - Grad and post-docs with a licensed psychotherapist