



UChicago Student Wellness

What Can I Do? Supporting a Student in Distress and Crisis *A Guide for UChicago Faculty and Staff*

The college/graduate school years can be very stressful. Faculty and staff are often the first to witness signs of distress in students and are in a unique position to offer resources and support. Students commonly experience stress, but if you notice any of the following, the student may be in mental health distress:

- You have low level but ongoing concerns about a student.
- The student suddenly changes regular behavior patterns (sociability, talkativeness, eating, sleeping, partying, emotionality, capacity for work, substance use).
- The student discloses distress or upsetting events, such as the death of a family member, a break-up, or academic failure.
- Your instinct leads you to feel concerned about student, even if there isn't an overt reason.
- The student makes a written or verbal statement of hopelessness or finality.
- Friends or classmates express concern for a student.

In addition, the following can be specific warning signs of mental health distress.

| Academic Signs of Distress | Physical or Psychological Signs of Distress |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Deterioration in quality of work• Missed assignments or appointments• Repeated absences• Continual seeking of unusual accommodations (late papers, postponed exams)• Written assignments expressing hopelessness, isolation, rage, or despair• Lack of engagement in classes or labs• Inappropriate disruptions, monopolizing classroom time | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Deterioration of physical presence or hygiene• Visible increase or decrease in weight• Excessive fatigue or difficulty sleeping• Exaggerated personality traits or behaviors (agitation, withdrawal)• Excessive use of alcohol or other drugs• Unprovoked anger or hostility• Irritability, constant anxiety, tearfulness• Marked changes in concentration and motivation |



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What You Can Do

If you identify a student in distress or the student approaches you with a problem:

- Talk to the student in private with no distractions, giving your undivided attention.
- Ask open-ended questions to learn more about your observations and the student's concerns.
- Listen sensitively; a few minutes of effective listening may help the student feel comfortable deciding what to do next.
- Communicate understanding by repeating back what the student has shared.
- Express concern. Be direct, specific, and non-judgmental.
- Ask if the student has ever talked about their concerns with anyone else, including a counselor. If appropriate, encourage the student to talk to a professional. If you feel that they can best be helped by seeing a professional, be straightforward about conveying your honest reaction to their situation. *"I can support you with this, but I think that a clinician at UChicago Student Wellness can be most helpful to you in solving this problem."*
- Refer to specific resources and emphasize that seeking help is a sign of strength.

Sometimes, it can be hard to discern if a student is in distress or how best to support them. If you are unsure of how best to help the student, you can reach Dr. Meeta Kumar, Director of Student Counseling, at kumarm@uchicago.edu for a consultation.

Making a Referral

- Do not attempt to make a referral when the student is so upset and confused that they cannot listen or understand. Wait until the student is calm enough to respond to your suggestions.
- Suggest in a caring, supportive manner that the student may benefit from meeting with a UChicago Student Wellness counselor. You can encourage the student to make an appointment at UChicago Student Wellness, or to call the 24/7 Therapist-on-Call. Or you may consider connecting the student with their Dean of Students.

**Student Wellness Center:
840 E. 59th Street**

**Phone: 773.834.WELL (Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m.)
24/7 Therapist-on-Call: 773.702.3625**



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Responding to a Mental Health Crisis

A mental health crisis is any situation in which a person's actions, feelings, and behaviors can lead to them hurting themselves or others, and/or put them at risk of being unable to care for themselves or function in the community in a healthy manner.

If a student is in a serious mental health crisis, you may see or hear:

- Suicidal statements or suicide attempts
- Verbal or written threats or attempts to harm another or put their safety at risk
- Highly disruptive behavior (ex: hostility, aggression, violence)
- Extreme anxiety, panicked reactions
- Inability to communicate (ex: garbled or slurred speech, disjointed thoughts)
- Loss of contact with reality (ex: seeing or hearing things that aren't there, expressing beliefs or actions at odds with reality)
- Signs of trauma, including concerns about personal injury, rape, assault, or victimization concerns

What to do when you suspect a crisis:

If you believe a student may be in imminent danger of harming themselves or others,

- The [Dean-on-Call](#) is a 24/7 resource for students needing immediate assistance or referrals to campus resources in the event of an emergency or crisis situation. The Dean-on-Call can be reached by calling UCPD at 773.702.8181 and requesting that the Dean-on-Call be paged. If preferred, the Dean-on-Call can be reached directly via the [UChicago Safe Mobile Safety App](#)
- Do not leave the student alone (unless your safety is threatened).

Sometimes, it may be difficult to discern if a student is in crisis. If you need help assessing the situation, call the Therapist on-Call (available 24/7) or walk the student to the Student Wellness Center during business hours.

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UChicago Student Wellness Programs and Services

Therapy (Individual and Couples): UChicago Student Wellness provides short-term individual and couples therapy for students to discuss and address personal and relationship concerns related to mental health and well-being. Specialty evaluations for substance use and eating concerns are also available.

Psychiatric consultations: UChicago Student Wellness psychiatrists can monitor medical cases, assess the need for psychiatric medication, or make referrals for long-term psychiatric care.

ASAP: The Academic Skills Assessment Program (ASAP) assists students with improving academic performance through assessment, short-term coaching, and referrals.

Let's Talk (drop-in consultation sessions): Let's Talk is a program that provides easy access to informal and confidential sessions with therapists from Student Wellness. There's no need for an appointment and no cost to students.

Referrals: Student Wellness may refer students to an outside provider if they can provide the most appropriate treatment for the student's concern.

Visit the [UChicago Student Wellness website](#) for more information.