



# Saint Xavier

## UNIVERSITY

## Students of Concern: A Guide for Faculty and Staff

Counseling Center ♦ Saint Xavier University

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### INTRODUCTION

College is a time of growth, excitement and personal discovery. For some students, it can also be a time for unforeseen problems and challenges. While most students successfully cope with the demands of the college experience, they may prove overwhelming and unmanageable for others. A significant number of college students have their education and personal lives disrupted by psychological problems that, if left untreated, may result in academic failure and even withdrawal from the University. SXU is committed to the health and safety of all members of our community, and being aware of distress signals, methods of intervention and on-campus resources can help you assist students.

Faculty and staff have an important role in identifying and responding to students who are potentially at risk. Through observation of students both in and out of the classroom it may be you who gets the first glimpse of warning signs or you may be the first person a student turns to in a time of need. This guide is designed to be used as a reference and resource for helping faculty and staff interact with students who are in various levels of distress. It provides information about recognizing behavioral signs that warrant concern, managing difficult situations, reporting distressing behaviors, and tips for helping students access on-campus resources and services.

### SPECTRUM OF ISSUES

There are several behaviors that faculty/staff may encounter that might be cause for concern or discomfort or that may interfere with your work and the education of students. It is helpful to think about these behaviors as falling across a spectrum ranging from general concerns for a student to serious alarm for a student who poses a direct threat to himself/herself or to the campus community.

While the levels we have identified are not always clear cut and do not necessarily unfold in a clear progression, it is helpful to conceptualize behaviors as falling into two levels of concern.

1. Mild-Moderate Distress
2. Severe Distress

Faculty and staff can play an invaluable role in helping students in all levels of distress. Your expression of interest, concern and compassion is an important factor toward a student seeking the assistance they need. How you go about helping a student will depend upon several factors: the student's level of distress, the nature of your relationship, the type of setting you are in and your own comfort level. The following sections include what to look for and how to help.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

Although it may be you who is the first to notice a student who is experiencing difficulty, remember that you do not have to take on the role of counselor with a student. You need only to listen, care and offer resource referral information.

It is possible to notice only one indicator and decide that something is clearly wrong. Or you may have a gut feeling that something is amiss. A simple check-in with the student may help you get a better sense of his/her situation. One indicator, by itself, may simply mean that a student is having an "off" day. However, any **one serious sign** (i.e. a student writes a paper expressing hopelessness and thoughts of suicide) or a **cluster of smaller signs** (i.e. emotional outbursts, repeated absences and noticeable cuts on the arm) indicates the need to take action on behalf of the student. When in doubt, please do not hesitate to consult with a counselor in the Counseling Center. Here are some suggestions that might make the situation more comfortable for you and more helpful for the student.

- **Talk to the student in private** when both of you have the time and are not rushed or preoccupied. Give the student your undivided attention. Just a few minutes of effective listening on your part may be enough to help the student feel cared about as an individual and more confident about decision-making.
- **If you have initiated the contact, express your concern** in behavioral, non-judgmental terms. For example, "I've noticed you've been absent from class lately and I'm concerned," rather than "Where have you been lately? You should be more concerned about your grades."
- **Give hope.** Assure the student that things can get better. It is important to help the student realize there are options and that things will not always seem hopeless. Suggest resources: friends, family, clergy or professionals on campus. Recognize that your purpose is to enable the student to consult appropriate resources, not to solve the student's problem.
- **Avoid judging, evaluating and criticizing** even if the student asks your opinion. Such behavior is apt to push the student away from you and from the help he or she needs. Respect the student's value system, even if you disagree.
- **Maintain clear and consistent boundaries and expectations.** It is important to maintain the professional nature of the faculty-student or staff-student relationship and the consistency of academic expectations, exam schedules, etc. If students express interest in a withdrawal, please refer to his/her academic advisor.

- **Refer.** In making a referral, it is important to point out that help is available, and seeking help is a sign of strength and courage rather than a sign of weakness or failure.

It may be helpful to point out that seeking professional help for other problems (medical, legal, car problems, etc.) is considered good judgment and an appropriate use of resources. For example, "If you had pneumonia, you would go to a doctor rather than trying to tough it out." If you can, prepare the student for what he or she might expect if your advice is taken. Tell the student what you know about the Counseling Center.

- **Follow-Up.** Arrange a follow-up meeting with the student to solidify his or her resolve to obtain appropriate help and to demonstrate your commitment to assist in the process. Later check with the student to see if the referral appointment was kept and to hear about the experience. Continue to provide support while the student takes the appropriate actions.

Due to confidentiality laws, the Counseling Center cannot confirm or deny that the referred student has met with us unless the student has given us a release of information. Therefore, it is best for the faculty or staff member to follow-up with the student.

- **Consult.** You may call the Counseling Center at Ext. 4045 for a consultation about the student. We will be glad to talk with you about your hunches, worries and concerns. Please be aware that confidentiality prevents us from sharing information about a student that is already a client.

## LEVELS OF CONCERN and INDICATORS OF DISTRESS

### **Mild Distress and Moderate Distress**

Students in mild-to-moderate distress may exhibit behaviors that do not disrupt others but may indicate that something is wrong and that assistance is needed. More often, the majority of students that arouse concern will fall into this category. Students in moderate levels of distress may be those who come to you either after class or during your office hours and report significant personal issues that may be disrupting their lives. Students in moderate distress may exhibit behaviors that indicate significant emotional distress. Students experiencing the death of a loved one, a bad break up with a significant other, a reported sexual or physical assault may be considered moderate levels of distress. While students at this level of concern might not warrant an immediate assessment with a counselor, we recommend that you encourage the student to seek help through the Counseling Center.

Depending on the intensity and duration of the indicators below, you have a variety of options to help a student. You may simply make a recommendation to the student to seek counseling, or, if you feel it necessary, accompany the student to our office to fill out the paperwork. In addition, students can be brought to the attention of the Care Team by completing the online [submission form](#):

#### **Academic Indicators of Mild-Moderate Distress**

- Changes in behavior such as repeated absences from class or missed assignments
- Deterioration in quality of work
- Continual seeking of special provisions
- Patterns of perfectionism (i.e. can't accept themselves if they don't get an A+)
- Overblown or disproportionate response to grades or evaluations

#### **Behavioral/Emotional Indicators of Mild-Moderate Distress**

- Direct statements indicating distress, family problems or loss
- More withdrawn or more animated than usual
- Expressions of hopelessness or worthlessness, crying or tearfulness
- Expressions of severe anxiety or irritability
- Excessive demanding or dependent behavior
- Lack of response to outreach from faculty or staff
- Shakiness, tremors, fidgeting or pacing

#### **Physical Indicators of Mild-Moderate Distress**

- Deterioration in physical appearance or personal hygiene
- Excessive fatigue, exhaustion; falling asleep in class repeatedly
- Visible changes in weight; statements about change in appetite or sleep
- Noticeable cuts, bruises or burns
- Frequent or chronic illness
- Unusual inability to make eye contact
- Coming to class bleary-eyed or smelling of alcohol

#### **Other Indicators of Mild-Moderate Distress**

- Concern about a student by his/her peers or teaching assistant
- A hunch or gut-level reaction that something is wrong

#### **Severe Distress**

Students in severe distress exhibit behaviors that signify an obvious crisis and that necessitate emergency care. Students falling within this category might have a potential for harm to self, harm to others or severe psychotic symptoms that drastically impair a student's ability to function and be successful on campus. If a faculty or staff member learns that a student has been talking about harming him/herself or others and/or engages in any type of self-destructive or psychotic behavior, he/she should consult with the Counseling Center about mandating a referral to counseling. Feel free to walk the student to the Counseling Center office right away; if preferable, a counselor can meet you at your current on-campus location. Please do not wait to contact the Counseling Center about your concerns. The sooner a counselor can assess a student's potential for harm, the sooner that student will connect with the appropriate level of care and support.

**\*If a student poses an immediate direct threat (i.e. being violent in class, has a weapon, etc.), please call Public Safety immediately at Ext. 3911.**

#### **Academic Indicators of Severe Distress**

- Extreme disorganization or erratic performance
- Written or artistic expression of unusual violence, morbidity, social isolation, despair, confusion; essays or papers that focus on suicide or death

#### **Behavioral/Emotional Indicators of Severe Distress**

- Angry or hostile outbursts, yelling or aggressive comments

#### **Physical Indicators of Severe Distress**

- Disorganized speech, rapid or slurred speech, confusion

## **REFERRAL PROCESS**

There are two main ways to connect a student with the Counseling Center. To initiate the counseling process, a student must complete the online [Request for Services Form](#), which can be completed in our office or online. Once a student completes the form, he/she will receive a call from a counselor within three business days to schedule an initial intake appointment.

If you have an urgent concern about a student or feel that the student is in severe distress, stay with the student and notify the Counseling Center (Ext. 4045) or walk the student to the Counseling Center. If preferable, a counselor can also meet you at your office. If a student poses an **immediate direct threat** (i.e. being violent in class, has a weapon, etc.) please call Public Safety immediately at Ext. 3911.

## OUTSIDE REFERRALS

Visit our list of outside referrals at our [Counseling Center web page](#).

## EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Off-Campus Emergency	911
Public Safety	
Emergency	(773) 298-3911
Non-Emergency	(773) 298-3541
CPD (District 22)	(312) 745-0570
Counseling Center	(773) 298-4045
Dean of Students	(773) 298-3121
Health Center	(773) 298-3712

## FAQ

### **How can the Counseling Center help?**

We can help you approach the student, and we can offer services to the student. We are here to help students solve developmental or personal problems to get all they can from their University experience.

We offer free and confidential psychotherapy for students, and we offer assessment and referral for alumni. Depending on demand, we also may offer psychoeducational groups and workshops on a variety of topics.

### **How can I connect a student with the Counseling Center?**

We try to make scheduling an appointment as easy and convenient as possible, and there are multiple ways a client can initiate the counseling process. Please see section "Referral Process" for more details about how to help a student schedule an appointment. Our office hours are Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

### **There is a student I'm concerned about. Should I approach him/her?**

If you are wondering about how to address the problem, feel free to call the Counseling Center. Faculty and staff have used us to answer specific questions and to be a sounding board for developing a plan of how to approach a student. Should you decide to approach a student, view the suggestions under the section "What You Can Do."

### **What if it seems to be an emergency?**

If a student is threatening him/herself or another person and there is an imminent danger of harm, call Public Safety (Ext. 3911) and 911. If the student is in another kind of crisis or a lower level of distress and you would like some help, please call us. The Counseling Center can also be reached through Public Safety.

**Can on-campus services really be kept confidential?**

The Counseling Center cannot release information about who is or has been seen to anyone within the University unless given the client's written permission. This means that under most circumstances, to find out if a student has followed through with a referral, you must ask the student him/herself. There will be times you will not know what happened as a result of your conversation.

**Does the Counseling Center provide counseling for faculty and staff?**

No, but counseling services are available through the employee assistance program (EAP). The EAP is a confidential service offered through Metropolitan Family Services that provides support, counseling, referrals and resources for issues that impact your life. Metropolitan Family Services can help address concerns such as:

- Financial or legal
- Child/Elder care
- Work-life balance
- Depression and stress
- Alcohol and drug abuse

Contact the Human Resources Department at Ext. 3450 for more information about the EAP.

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