

Helping Students in Need

Health professions students often experience considerable personal, academic and professional stress. In addition to the pressure to achieve and work out a path to professional success, students face a variety of life stressors. Common stressors include:

- Isolation and loneliness
- Financial stress
- Loss or conflict in significant relationships
- Conflict in peer relationships
- Conflict in family relationships
- Misuse of alcohol and/or drugs
- Low motivation or inability to establish goals
- Immigration concerns
- Health concerns (self or others)
- Academic pressure, difficulties, and setbacks
- Cultural, racial, gender and other discrimination
- Death or other losses
- Environmental adjustments

Sometimes just one situation or stressor can precipitate a crisis.

Common Signs of Distress

Everyone feels overwhelmed, anxious, or stressed from time to time. However, some behaviors that continue to occur over a period of time suggest that intervention may be needed. The following behaviors may signal a need for help.

- Social isolation, withdrawal, lethargy
- Poor preparation or excessive procrastination
- Decreased attendance
- Disruptive behavior
- Abuse of alcohol or other substances
- Changes in personal hygiene or appearance
- Lack of energy
- High level of irritability or aggressive behavior
- Significant weight changes — gain or loss
- Bizarre or dangerous behaviors
- Unusual or exaggerated emotional response
- Inability to concentrate

What You Can Do

In any of these situations, your calmness, willingness to help, and knowledge of whom to call is important. You may choose to approach your student, or the student may approach you.

- Share your concern openly, directly, and with care.
- Maintain their privacy.
- Demonstrate respect for the student by talking when both of you have sufficient time and are in a private place free from disturbance by others.
- Be matter of fact — controlling your emotions may help the student to do the same.
- Clarify confusing, vague, or disturbing student disclosures. Ask, “What do you mean by...?”
- Give the student your undivided attention.

- Listen in a respectful, non-threatening and non-judgmental way.
- Let the student talk. Be an active listener.
- Suggest a referral to Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at 402.559.7276.
- Follow up. Offer and be open to the student contacting you again.

If you find you need more information and resources to be able to offer guidance to the student, remember to consult with CAPS, college/department representatives, Office of Academic Success staff, Student Affairs staff, etc. If the student has confided in you, be mindful of their privacy (provided their safety is not in question).

Referring to CAPS

CAPS is a free and confidential counseling service for enrolled UNMC students. The best way to contact CAPS is by phone at 402.559.7276, Monday - Friday, 8a.m. - 5p.m. Remind the student they have access to this resource. It can help to share or show the CAPS website www.unmc.edu/stucouns.

Some students may feel that their problems are not serious enough or are too serious to be solved. Others may be ambivalent about seeking help from a counselor, be fearful of the unknown, or be unsure about what going to counseling means.

Acknowledge that this can be a scary step to take. Please assure the student that the counselors have dealt with many types of issues and will work with them in exploring options. Assure the student that CAPS services are free and confidential.

When referring, you may:

- Suggest your student call CAPS while you sit with them, and provide the CAPS number. You might also call from your phone, inquire about speaking to a counselor, and hand the phone to the student to make the appointment. Letting them handle this part of the process affirms their positive coping capabilities.
- If you think the student needs immediate support, state your concern and tell the student you're going to call CAPS to involve counseling support. Call 402.559.7276 and let CAPS staff know you're sitting with a student who is struggling and ask how soon a counselor will be available to speak with the student – this may be in person at SLC 2031 or by telehealth. With the student's permission, you may provide CAPS staff with information about the nature of the problem and the reason for your referral.
- If a student is experiencing an immediate emergency in which they may be a threat to themselves or others, please contact Public Safety at **402.559.5555** or **402.559.5111**.

When in Doubt, Consult.

Faculty and staff are welcome to call **CAPS** at **402.559.7276** and ask to speak with a counselor. Let them know you are concerned about a student, and they can help you assess the seriousness of the situation and help you consider how you can best help.