



National University

Helping Students in Distress

As an employee of National University, you may find yourself helping a student in distress with/without an immediate threat to self. Your primary role in this case will be to **provide support and maintain safety whenever possible**. Please use the guidance below when working with distressed students, and make sure to document all encounters of this kind through our online [Student Referral](#).

Confidentiality and Privacy: FERPA permits communication about a student of concern in connection with a health and safety emergency. However, only share information necessary to keep all involved safe and avoid sharing personal details or other information not essential for emergency response.

When providing support and asking questions of the student, remember...

Do:

Be yourself. Let the person know you care, that he/she is not alone. The right words are often unimportant. If you are concerned, your voice and manner will show it.

Listen. Dark or difficult conversations can be hard. No matter how negative the conversation seems, the fact that it exists is a positive sign.

Be sympathetic, non-judgmental, patient, calm, accepting. The person is doing the right thing by talking about their feelings.

Offer hope. Reassure the person that help is available and that the suicidal feelings are temporary. Let the person know that his or her life is important to you.

Take the person seriously. If the person says things like, "I'm so depressed, I can't go on," ask the question: "Are you having thoughts of suicide?" You are not putting ideas in their head, you are showing that you are concerned, that you take them seriously, and that it's OK for them to share their pain with you.

Do Not:

Promise confidentiality. Refuse to be sworn to secrecy. A life is at stake and you may need to speak to a mental health professional in order to keep the suicidal person safe. If you promise to keep your discussions secret, you may have to break your word.

Argue with the suicidal person. Avoid saying things like: "You have so much to live for," "Your suicide will hurt your family," or "Look on the bright side."

Act shocked, lecture on the value of life, or say that suicide is wrong.

Offer ways to fix their problems, or give advice, or make them feel like they have to justify their suicidal feelings. It is not about how bad the problem is, but how badly it's hurting the individual.

Blame yourself. You can't "fix" someone's depression. The person's happiness, or lack thereof, is not your responsibility.

Student is Distressed if they...

- Express thoughts of suicide (WITHOUT intent/plan/means)
- Appear excessively sad
- Cry frequently or inconsolably
- Show declining hygiene
- See/hear things others cannot
- Believe things others find unrealistic

If a Student is Distressed...

1. Express concern for the student and offer to walk them through the following steps.
2. Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-8255, press 1 for veterans and 2 for nonveterans which will route the caller to a local crisis line person familiar with local resources. It is based on the area code the caller calls from.
3. If the student is a veteran, call a [VA Suicide Prevention Coordinator](#).
4. Refer the student to appropriate campus and community resources.
5. File a [Student Referral](#) within 24 hours.

Student is a Threat to Self if they...

- Are planning on hurting themselves.
- Explain a plan for hurting themselves.
- Tell you they are going to hurt themselves.

If a Student is a Threat to Self...

With you in person

1. Ask the student to remain in the area. Attempt to solicit the help of another staff to remain with the student. Do not leave the student unattended at any time unless they insist on leaving. Encourage but do not force them to stay.
2. Inform campus security (if applicable) or the Center Director.
3. Call 911 and request a mental health assessment by the PERT (Psychiatric Emergency Response Team).
4. When the student is either off premises or the situation has resolved itself, file a [Student Referral](#) within 24 hours.

On the phone with you

1. Confirm the student's current location and contact information. Ask if the student has any family/friends nearby who can help and if the student has access to any weapons.
2. Attempt to solicit the help of another staff to call emergency services. Try to keep the student on the phone.
3. Notify local law enforcement in the student's location (DO NOT call 911). Web search the "student's location" and "police emergency" to locate the local number.
4. After speaking with the police, file a [Student Referral](#) within 24 hours.