

# Guide to Helping Online Students in Distress

When working with online students, you may encounter students who disclose emotional distress or exhibit concerning behavior.

This guide is designed to assist you in:

- 1) identifying possible warning signs of distress;
- 2) helping a student in distress;
- 3) referring a student for professional help.

## **WARNING SIGNS OF DISTRESS IN ONLINE STUDENTS:**

- Asking instructor for help with personal problems
- Dependency on advisor/instructor/staff member
- Excessive attempts to contact the instructor
- Disruptive, argumentative, or otherwise inappropriate behavior in discussion posts
- Complaints from other students who have to work with the student
- Excessive procrastination
- Uncharacteristically poor preparation or performance
- Repeated requests for extensions or special considerations
- Excessive displays of emotion such as sadness, anxiety, or anger
- References to suicide, homicide, or other violence in verbal statements or writing

## **WHAT YOU CAN DO:**

If you have noticed any of these warning signs, you are faced with the decision of whether to intervene. Your interest in your student's well-being can make an important difference to a person in distress and may help the student to be successful.

If you decide to intervene:

- 1) Reach out to the student privately to help minimize embarrassment and defensiveness.
- 2) Do not promise the student confidentiality regarding what he or she shares.
- 3) Express your concern in a non-judgmental way. Respect the student's value system, even if you do not agree with it.
- 4) Assist the student with problem solving: identify options for action and resources available for help.
- 5) Let the student know the limits on your ability to help him or her.
- 6) Encourage your student to take a look at the resources specifically designed for online students on the Counseling Center website: <https://www.maryville.edu/studentlife/services-programs/personal-counseling/online-students/>. The website provides helpful information about various mental health concerns and services. Also, there is an excellent anonymous mental health assessment available through the ULifeline website at: [www.ulifeline.org](http://www.ulifeline.org).

### **IF A STUDENT DISCLOSES THREAT TO SELF OR OTHERS:**

If a student has disclosed that they are considering suicide or harming another person, intervention is always required. This must always be reported to proper personnel to ensure the student's safety.

- If possible, obtain the student's contact information (address and phone number).
- Contact the Counseling Center Support Line at 314-529-6630. You will then be connected with a counselor to help determine next steps.
- Provide the student with the Counseling Center Support Line number (314-529-6630). The support line staff can assess the student for safety and assist in obtaining emergency help if needed.
- For imminent threats, please contact 911.

### **WAYS TO REFER A STUDENT FOR PROFESSIONAL HELP:**

- 1) If the student is local and able to come to campus to meet in person, they are welcome to meet with a Maryville counselor in the Counseling Center.
  - Call the Counseling Center at 314-529-9556 to help the student schedule their first appointment.
  - *Maryville counselors cannot meet with students virtually due to licensing, ethical, and legal requirements. Counseling sessions must be conducted in person.*
- 2) If the student is unable to come to campus, urge the student to contact their health insurance provider for a list of local therapists and counselors.
- 3) Online students have access to many virtual mental health resources through the Counseling Center website: <https://www.maryville.edu/studentlife/services-programs/personal-counseling/online-students/>.
  - The website includes resources for stress management, relaxation, mental health assessment, and several community resources for crisis response.

The Counseling Center and Counseling Center Support Line team are always available to talk with you if you are concerned about a student and would like to discuss possible ways to help. We also highly encourage all faculty and staff to complete the "Ask, Listen, Refer" online suicide prevention training program available at: [www.asklistenrefer.org/maryville](http://www.asklistenrefer.org/maryville).

### **COUNSELING CENTER STAFF:**

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\* Please remember that based on confidentiality requirements, the Counseling Center staff cannot share any information regarding student counseling attendance or any other student information without a signed "release of information" from the student.