Staff and Faculty Guidebook

The University of Texas at Austin
Counseling and Mental Health Center
Division of Student Affairs
Creating a Caring Culture

The prevalence of mental health concerns on college campuses have grown in recent years (Lipson et al., 2019; Oswalt et al., 2018). It is vital as faculty and staff that we understand how to support our students in meaningful ways and connect them to clinicians and resources that can help them succeed. This guidebook is designed to assist you in that journey. It emphasizes a variety of resources that will guide you in having conversations with students, recognizing students in distress, identifying possible symptoms of anxiety and depression and familiarizing yourself with resources for student concerns. By using collaborative approaches to support and promote student mental health, we can create a community that cares.
# Table of Contents

- **Creating a Caring Culture** 2
- **Normalize the Need for Help** 5
- **Well-being in Learning Environments (WBLE)** 5
- **Ask, Listen, Help** 5
- **Assisting a Student in Distress** 7
- **Common Symptoms of Depression and Anxiety** 7
- **Mental Health Conversations** 8
- **Campus Resources for Students** 8
  - Mental Wellness Resources 8
  - Additional Wellness Resources 9
  - Basic Needs 10
  - Financial Support 10
  - Academic and Professional Development 10
  - Reporting Concerns About a Student 11
- **References** 11
Normalize the Need for Help

According to an Active Minds survey (2019), the number one thing students say they value most in a professor is approachability. Below are ways you can be supportive to students:

• Share with students at the start of the semester that they can come to you if they are struggling for any reason. Include mental health resources on your syllabi (see sample syllabi statement below).
• Encourage students to get sleep and engage in self-care practices.
• Check-in with students you’re concerned about and ask how they’re doing.

Sample Syllabi Statement

Consider including a statement like the following in your syllabi to help normalize help-seeking for mental health issues and ensure students have the resources they need.

I urge students who are struggling for any reason and who believe that it might impact their performance in the course to reach out to me if they feel comfortable. This will allow me to provide any resources or accommodations that I can. If immediate mental health assistance is needed, call the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC) at 512-471-3515. Outside CMHC business hours (8a.m.-5p.m., Monday-Friday), contact the CMHC 24/7 Crisis Line at 512-471-2255.

Well-being in Learning Environments (WBLE)

Research suggests that the mere absence of a mental-health disorder in students does not indicate flourishing mental health and that positive factors such as social connection, emotional well-being and psychological health can help protect students from academic impairment.

WBLE provides guidance and strategies to help faculty and college/departmental administrators make small shifts in in- and out-of classroom conditions and in teaching activities and practices that can make major differences in students’ mental health and well-being.

Find information about the whole student, conditions for well-being, creating effective learning environments (including virtual environments), collaborating faculty and additional resources at cmhc.utexas.edu/wellbeing.

Ask, Listen, Help

During the course of your work, it is likely that you will encounter students who are in distress. Signs of distress include a pattern of changes in behavior such as:

• Missing class
• Failing to turn in assignments
• Changes in classroom participation
• Disengaging socially
• Odd behavior
• Changes in mood

Having options for responding can help decrease both the student’s distress and your own. A student may say something like, “I’m feeling overwhelmed at home. It’s hard to concentrate on my classes. I don’t know what to do.”

ASK: Avoid close-ended questions (e.g., “Do you want to drop this class?”). Instead, use open-ended and student-centered questions.

• “Can you tell me more about that?”
• “How can I help?”
• “What would make things better for you?”
• “What might be the first step?”

LISTEN: Reflect and validate the student’s feelings.
• Reflect: “That sounds overwhelming.”
• Validate: “I’m glad you shared that with me.”

Avoid jumping to giving advice, making judgments, or minimizing their feelings or concerns (e.g., “That doesn’t sound so bad.”).

HELP: Offer resources (below); check in with the student.
• “How do you feel about reaching out to this service?”
• “What might get in the way of you connecting with your CARE counselor?”
• “Can we check in next week about how that went?”

The Ask, Listen, Help model was adapted from the Vancouver Crisis Centre.
Assisting a Student in Distress

Sometimes a student may be so distressed that you become concerned for their safety. These situations and conversations can be stressful and anxiety producing. Be aware that your emotions may also be elevated in these moments.

It is imperative to know that if a student communicates to you that they want to hurt themselves, attempt suicide or hurt others the situation is an emergency and requires immediate action. Call 911.

If you are not worried about a student’s imminent safety, but have concerns about classroom or other behavioral issues, you may file an online report via the Behavior Concerns and COVID-19 Advice Line (BCCAL) or call 512-232-5050 (24 hours/day). You can reference the flowchart below for how to proceed in a mental health crisis.

The best way to respond is to communicate with the student honestly (e.g., “I’m feeling worried about you based on the email you sent.” or “I’m concerned about your safety and need to report this information to someone to make sure you are okay.”).

Common Symptoms of Depression and Anxiety

While you are not expected to determine whether a student is depressed or experiencing anxiety, common symptoms of these conditions include:

**Depression**

- Trouble concentrating, remembering details and making decisions
- Fatigue
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness and helplessness
- Pessimism and hopelessness
- Insomnia, early-morning wakefulness or sleeping too much
- Loss of interest in things that were once pleasurable
- Overeating or appetite loss
- Persistent sad, anxious or empty feelings
- Suicidal thoughts or suicide attempts

**Anxiety**

- Nervousness, restlessness or being tense
- Feelings of danger, panic or dread
- Rapid heart rate
- Increased or heavy sweating
- Difficulty focusing or thinking clearly about anything other than the concern your worried about
- Insomnia
Mental Health Conversations

A Simulation Platform to Practice Having Conversations with Students in Distress

Mental Health Conversations is a simulation platform that allows faculty, staff and students to practice having important and life-saving conversations with students who are experiencing distress and/or suicidal ideation and to learn when and how to make a referral to campus mental health resources. Practicing simulated conversations allows participants to develop confidence about having these discussions in real life. While this training does not replace healthcare from a licensed mental health professional, everyone can learn how to respond to student mental health concerns in a caring and appropriate way.

The simulation takes an hour or less to complete, and participants can stop and pick up where they left off. Participants will:

- Complete a pre-survey
- Learn about mental health, how it impacts students and methods for responding to someone who is struggling.
- Participate in scenarios to practice applying these methods
- Get feedback about the choices made during the scenarios
- Complete a post-survey

The program is offered for faculty and staff through UT Learn. It is also available to graduate students who work in a student-supporting capacity such as TAs, AIs, GRAs and GAs.

For questions or comments, contact Thea Woodruff at thea.woodruff@austin.utexas.edu.

Campus Resources for Students

Mental Wellness Resources

Counseling and Mental Health Center
Individual and group counseling, wellness workshops, psychiatric services and crisis counseling
https://cmhc.utexas.edu/

My Student Support Program (My SSP)
App and web-based 24/7 real time chat and phone support, virtual single session and short-term counseling and access to a digital content library.
https://cmhc.utexas.edu/

Counseling and Mental Health Center 24/7 Crisis Line
512-471-CALL (2255)
https://cmhc.utexas.edu/24hourcounseling.html

Anxiety and Stress Clinic
Individual and group therapy for anxiety and stress-related disorders
https://clinics.la.utexas.edu/anxiety-and-stress-clinic/

Be That One
Suicide prevention resources
https://cmhc.utexas.edu/bethatone/bethatone.html

CARE Counselors
Counseling services in each college and school
https://cmhc.utexas.edu/CARE.html
Center for Students in Recovery
Resources for students in recovery and in hope of recovery for drug and alcohol use disorders
https://recovery.utexas.edu/

Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
Counseling services available to academic employees (e.g., TAs, AIs and GRAs)
https://eap.utexas.edu/

Services for Survivors of Sexual Assault - Voices Against Violence
Counseling, advocacy, support and an emergency fund
https://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/vav/vav_referrals.html

Services for Survivors of Interpersonal Violence and Stalking - Voices Against Violence
Counseling, advocacy, support and an emergency fund
https://cmhc.utexas.edu/vav/index.html

**Additional Wellness Resources**

Counseling and Mental Health Center Self-Care Activities
Resources for engaging in self-care at UT Austin
https://cmhc.utexas.edu/selfcare.html

Division of Diversity and Community Engagement
Cultivates an inclusive campus culture, connects with the community and offers academic support
https://diversity.utexas.edu/

Gender and Sexuality Center
Resources and education responsive to the needs of women and the LGBTQIA+ community
https://diversity.utexas.edu/genderandsexuality/

Longhorn Wellness Center
Contributes to a culture of well-being at UT through evidence-informed health promotion, resources, skills development and support that are responsive to needs of the community
https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/healthpromotion.html

MindBody Labs
Self-paced learning environment to help improve emotional and physical health
https://cmhc.utexas.edu/mindbodylab.html

Monarch Student Program
Services for undocumented students
https://diversity.utexas.edu/academic-equity/monarch-student-program/

Multicultural Engagement Center
Community development and advocacy for students with a range of identities
https://diversity.utexas.edu/multiculturalengagement/

SHIFT
Substance misuse prevention initiatives
https://shift.utexas.edu/

Thrive at UT
Free app designed specifically for UT students to enhance well-being
https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/thrive/
Wellness Network
Campus-wide coalition committed to assessing and addressing health and wellness needs at UT Austin
https://www.wellnessnetwork.utexas.edu/

**Basic Needs**

Recreational Sports
Facilities and programs for physical fitness and healthy lifestyle behaviors
https://www.utrecsports.org/fitness-and-wellness

Legal Services for Students
Consultation on many legal issues
https://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/lss/

Student Emergency Services
Assistance during times of emergency, including family emergencies, missing students, hospitalization, absence notifications and more
https://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/

UT Outpost
Food pantry and career closet
https://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/utoutpost.php

University Health Services
Primary care, women’s health, urgent care, preventive care, sports medicine, physical therapy and more
https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/

**Financial Support**

Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid
Scholarships, loans, emergency funding and financial aid
https://finaid.utexas.edu/

Student Emergency Fund
Limited emergency financial support
https://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/studentemergencyfund.php

Student Veteran Services
Assistance with state and federal veteran education benefits
https://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/veterans/

Texas Global Financial Services
Scholarships and emergency financial assistance for international students
https://global.utexas.edu/isss/advising-services/financial-aid

**Academic and Professional Development**

Faculty Innovation Center
Graduate student pedagogical, academic and professional support
https://facultyinnovate.utexas.edu/

Graduate Student Assembly
Advocate group for graduate and professional students
https://utexas.campuslabs.com/engage/organization/graduatetestudentassembly
Ombuds Office
Assistance with university-related interpersonal difficulties, university policies and bureaucracy and conflict resolution
https://ombuds.utexas.edu/

Sanger Learning Center
Tutoring, learning specialists and peer academic coaching
https://ugs.utexas.edu/slc

Services for Students with Disabilities
Accommodations for disabilities and instructional continuity
https://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/

Texas Career Engagement
Undergraduate and graduate student career development support
https://careerengagement.utexas.edu/

University Writing Center
Help at any stage of the writing process
https://uwc.utexas.edu/

**Reporting Concerns About a Student**

Behavioral Concerns and COVID-19 Advice Line (BCCAL)
Report concerns about students, faculty and staff
512-232-5050
https://safety.utexas.edu/behavior-concerns-advice-line

Departmental Advisors
Academic advising and counseling for specific undergraduate majors

Office for Inclusion and Equity
Resources to advance a diverse, equitable and supportive campus and to report bias incidents
https://equity.utexas.edu/

Title IX Office
Report instances of sexual harassment, sexual discrimination, exploitation and intimidation
https://titleix.utexas.edu/

UT Police Department
UT Austin's dedicated campus police department
https://police.utexas.edu/

**References**


