



# **Helping Distressed** **Students**

at Michigan State University

**Michigan State University**  
**Counseling Center**

207 Student Services Building  
517-355-8270  
TTY 517-353-7278

***[www.counseling.msu.edu](http://www.counseling.msu.edu)***

Division of Student Affairs & Services

**FULLY ACCESSIBLE**

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This brochure is written to aid the campus community in its work with students who may be experiencing distress. One of our goals at Michigan State University is to assist students in achieving academic success and where possible to help them remove or minimize those things which may interfere with their maximizing the student experience.

As you encounter students who appear to be distressed, it is our hope that the information provided in this brochure will assist you in your work and in support of our student population.

A special thanks to Dr. Jan Collins-Eaglin of the Counseling Center and all others who were instrumental in developing this brochure.

Lee N. June, Ph.D.  
Vice President for Student Affairs and Services and  
Associate Provost.

# Helping Distressed Students

## Student Distress

University students may experience a great deal of stress during the course of their academic experiences. Young adults are developing their personal identity and transitioning from being dependent on their families to adults with relationships, careers, and responsibilities. Graduate students face the stress for pursuing their careers and many have to juggle family, financial, and career demands. While most students cope successfully with the challenges these years bring, some students find the various pressures of life unmanageable or unbearable.

According to the NCHA—National College Health Assessment (2006)<sup>1</sup>, the national sample reported that 7% of men and 10% of women felt so depressed that they could not function nine or more times in the last year; 10% of women and 9% of men reported seriously considered suicide. At Michigan State University (2006)<sup>2</sup>, 15% of undergraduate students reported that depression had an adverse affect on their academic careers, 12% of all students reported that depression made them feel nonfunctional nine or more times a year.

As faculty, teaching assistants, and other staff, you may encounter distressed students in your office or your

classroom. Students may come to you sharing their stories and seeking help because you are knowledgeable and perceived as caring and trustworthy. Your role could be a positive and crucial one in identifying students who are in distress and assisting them to find available, helpful resources. Many of these students have not sought counseling and may be unaware of the services available to them. Research evidence suggests that students use of counseling services greatly increases persistence and graduation rates.

It is important to know the consultation resources available to you are free of charge up to 8 sessions for students. The following offices have provided information to help you when faced with distressed students. All are entry points to the Counseling Center that works closely with Olin Health Center's psychiatrists, the Associate Provost for Health, the University Ombudsman, the University Physician, and MSU Police and Public Safety.

### **Why Refer a Distressed Student?**

Some students may directly disclose their response for distress and ask you for help. Other students may not be able to articulate their emotional pain, but their behavior is a signal that they need help.

Some signs of distress are:

- Marked shifts in quality of performance
- Marked shifts in behavior
- Complaints of inability to concentrate

- New troubles in memory
- Apathy, chronic fatigue, falling asleep in class
- Drastic changes in personal appearance or hygiene
- Social behavioral changes
  - Stammering
  - Inability to sit still
  - Emotional outbursts
- Somatic complaints, frequent illness
- Talking about death or suicidal ideas
- Report of life crisis
- Previously outgoing person becomes withdrawn
- Talking about feeling sad or helpless
- Increase in alcohol or drug use
- Recent Loss of a loved one

## **How to Refer A Distressed Student**

When approaching a student in distress:

You may not want to wait for the student to ask for help when s/he is in distress. You can take the initiative—invite the student to speak to you privately. Once together in a private place with the student, listen carefully and comment on what you have observed and express your concern.

If a student discloses a problem, try to allow him or her to discuss it openly. You can convey your support by listening in a calm, accepting, and non-judgmental manner. Acknowledge the student's emotions, let the

student talk, and paraphrase what has been said.

Don't feel that you need to be qualified to deal directly with the student's concerns. Let her/him know that professionals are available on campus to deal with such problems and give them the Counseling Center phone number and locations. If a student discloses a problem, try to allow her or him to discuss it openly.

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## **Where to Refer Distressed Students**

### **Counseling Center**

The MSU Counseling Center has a professional staff of

psychologists, psychiatrists, clinical social workers, and licensed professional counselors trained to work with college students. Students can call or stop by to make an appointment to see an individual counselor, join a group, or join a workshop. The Counseling Center is here to support student goals and personal development.

We suggest that the student call or come in to the Counseling Center to make an appointment. Give the Counseling Center phone number and location or visit the Counseling Center web site ([www.couns.msu.edu](http://www.couns.msu.edu)). Remind them that the counseling is free and confidential. It is a safe place to share their concerns. You do not have to resolve their problems or offer solutions. Just the spirit of trying to help, actively listen, and trying to understand are the most helpful steps.

If you wish to be certain that the student makes an appointment, call the Health Care Assistant at the Counseling Center while the student is in your office. Write down the appointment information, time, date, counselor, and location for the student. If possible, accompany the student to the Counseling Center. Some students may find it comforting for you to wait while they meet with a counselor. However, due to confidentiality laws, the counselor cannot tell you if the student kept the appointment. Follow up with the student. Ask if he/she kept his/her appointment and how he/she felt about the session.

## **Consultation**

We welcome your calls or emails at any time to consult with us regarding your concerns about your students. There are no restrictions to what you can tell a counselor, but mental health laws and ethics prohibit a counselor from divulging any information about a student. The counselor can be partners with you to determine the best resources to address their issues. The Counseling Center also offers:

- A wide range of workshops regarding academic and life stressors
- Speaking at departmental meetings
- Speaking to your classes

### Contact Information:

MSU Counseling Center  
207 Student Services Building  
Monday-Friday: 8am—5pm  
Walk-In or Phone: 517-355-8270

## **Michigan State University Police & Public Safety**

The Michigan State University Police & Public Safety Department is dedicated to Community Team Policing which works hard to establish relationships with faculty, staff, and students to prevent crime and tragic situations. Officers work closely with the Counseling Center and other University organizations to focus on individual and community safety. If you consider the situation to be an emergency, dial Campus Police before contacting the

Counseling Center. Do not delay getting help for the student's and your safety.

Contact Information:

9-1-1 (emergency)  
517-355-2222 (non-emergency)

## **Office of the University Ombudsman**

When dealing with a student who disrupts the teaching/learning environment, document the behavior in memo form. Be sure to state the date, time and place of each incident. State the facts and include the names of all participants, witnesses, and any university offices you contacted about the situation. The office of the University Ombudsman and the Counseling Center can assist with this process.

Contact Information:

129 Kedzie Hall  
Phone: 517-355-8830

**The Department of Student Life**

There are two basic scenarios where Student Life staff members may be of assistance:

- 1) *If the disruptive behavior persists to the point that it is negatively affecting the teaching and learning process for other students.* Assuming you have already tried direct communication with the student, Student Life staff members can talk you through some effective intervention strategies, including but not limited to a face-to-face meeting with the student. Talking through each situation is helpful in identifying the most appropriate and effective approaches.
  
- 2) *If the student's behavior is so concerning that you believe his/her continued presence on campus may pose a clear and present danger to persons or property.* Student Life staff serve as consultants to the Vice President of Student Affairs, when a student's behavior is perceived to be an imminent threat to the community at-large. In such cases, consultation with and intervention by Student Life staff may be all that is needed to correct the behavior. However, in the most extreme situations, the student's behavior necessitates immediate removal from all University property.

In either case, please contact and ask for a member of the *judicial affairs* staff. Please note that the receptionist may

ask you some questions in order to direct your call to the person best able to assist you.

Contact Information:

101 Student Services Building

Phone: 517-432-2471

## **Additional Counseling Center Services For Faculty**

### **Classroom Talks**

If you would like someone to come and give a class on any mental health or wellness topics such as:

- Time Management
- Depression and Self-Care
- Happiness
- Mindfulness and Relaxation Techniques
- Creative Ways to Handle Stress
- College—Challenging or Overwhelming?
- Personal Relationships
- Intergroup Dialogues
- Lesbian/Bi/Gay/Transgender Concerns
- Sexual Assault Awareness
- Alcohol and Substance Abuse

Please contact the Counseling Center, and the receptionist will connect you with the Director of Associate Director.

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***Advancing Knowledge. Transforming Lives***