

**ASSISTING STUDENTS
IN DISTRESS
For FACULTY AND STAFF**



STUDENT COUNSELING SERVICES

555 OAKVIEW CIRCLE

Phone: 256.765.5215

Fax: 256.765.5132

Email: counselingservices@una.edu

WEB: <http://www.una.edu/counseling/>

Building New Beginnings

WHO IS A DISTRESSED STUDENT?

Symptoms that persist over a period of time, may suggest that a person is experiencing problems that exceed usual responses to life circumstances. If you observe these types of changes in a student, intervention is necessary.

Marked change in academic performance/behavior:

- Decline in performance or preparedness
 - Excessive absences or tardiness
- Repeated requests for special consideration
- Avoiding participation or dominating discussions
 - Excessive anxiety if called upon
 - Disruptive behavior
- Exaggerated emotional responses that are obviously inappropriate to the situation

Unusual Behavior or Appearance:

- Depressed mood or lethargy
- Hyperactivity or rapid speech
- Deterioration in personal hygiene or dress
 - Dramatic weight loss or gain
- Strange or bizarre behavior/out of contact with reality

Emotional or Life Stressors

- Life-threatening illness or death in family or friend
 - Experiencing physical or sexual assault
 - Target of discrimination or bullying
- Difficulties in legal, financial, employment realms

References to Death/Suicide

- Expressing feelings of helplessness or hopelessness
 - Threatening Behavior
- Verbal or written references to suicide, homicide or death
 - Isolating from friends, family, close peers

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

LOTS!! The purpose of this guide is to provide you with information on recognizing the distressed student, to outline some specific options for intervention and referral, and to encourage you to take the time to reach out.

Stress is to be expected as students enter their university career. Many are experiencing new demands and fulfilling additional life roles for the first time. While most students adjust and cope well, for some the pressures become overwhelming and unmanageable. The student may begin to feel alone, isolated, helpless, and even hopeless. If these feelings are not confronted and new coping skills developed, academic performance and other life roles may become disrupted. Often unhealthy consequences such as alcohol or other drug use or self-injurious behaviors result.

Faculty and staff members are in the unique position to identify and intervene with students in distress. This is particularly true for students who choose to not turn to family or friends. Anyone who portrays a caring and trustworthy attitude can be a potential source of support for the student. Expressions of interest and concern from a faculty or staff member may be the critical factor in helping struggling students find help and salvage their academic careers and even their lives.

UNA's Student Counseling Service is located at 555 Oakview Circle, a white house behind Kilby School. Professional Licensed staff are available to assist you when problem situations arise, and to consult with you on how best to intervene with a particular student. Prompt intervention is encouraged. If you believe a student is in or near a personal crisis, please call us immediately, or encourage the use of specific community resources listed elsewhere in this guide.

WHAT ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE

The following are some suggestions for you to follow to help increase your comfort level and effectiveness when meeting with a distressed student.

- ♦ **Consult.** If you are in doubt about the advisability of action on your part, call for input from a Counseling Service professional before approaching the student.
- ♦ **Meet privately** with the student. Give the student your undivided attention. Often just a few minutes of active listening by you may be enough to help the student feel cared for and more confident about what to do next. If you have initiated the contact, express your concern in non-judgmental terms, describing what you have observed. For example, “I’ve noticed that you’ve been absent from class lately and I’m concerned,” rather than “where have you been lately? You should be more concerned about grades!”
- ♦ **Never make unrealistic promises of secrecy.**
- ♦ **Listen** to thoughts and feelings in a sensitive, non-threatening way. Repeat back the essence of what the student says, trying to include both content and feelings. “It sounds like you aren’t accustomed to such a big campus and are feeling left out.” Let the student talk.
- ♦ **Give hope.** Assure the student that things can get better. Help them realize there are options and that problems are temporary. Suggest resources: family, friends, clergy, coaches, or other professionals on campus. Recognize that your purpose is not to solve the problem.
- ♦ **Avoid judging,** criticizing, evaluating or giving opinions. These would tend to push the student away from the help s/he needs. Respect the student’s value system, even if you may not personally agree with it.

ACTIONS, continued.....

- ♦ **Maintain clear and consistent boundaries** and expectations. Maintain the professional nature of the faculty/student staff/student relationship, and the consistency of academic expectations, exam schedules, etc. You may be able to help a student understand options as related to deferring grades or withdrawal from course work. If the student seems overly distressed about making a decision, offer to facilitate contact with other campus professionals who can offer further assistance in the troubling area.
- ♦ **Refer.** When making a referral, it is important to point out that help is available and that seeking help is a sign of strength and courage, not weakness or failure. Point out that using professional help with other problems is considered good judgment and an appropriate use of resources. Help the student understand what they can expect by telling them what you know about the work campus or community options.
- ♦ **Timing.** When a student agrees to a referral, it is important to facilitate a call. Offer the use of your telephone or to make the call and hand the receiver to the student.
- ♦ **Follow-up.** After the initial contact with a student, it is important to initiate follow-up contact. Follow-up helps cement the fact that a student is not alone and that others care. Your encouragement is a help as they pursue options and achieve their goals.
- ♦ **Always get contact information from a student.**

A blue rectangular box with the number "911" in a white, serif font.

****CRISIS INTERVENTION SITUATIONS****

During regular University business hours: If you determine the student to be in crisis and unwilling to request an appointment on their own, you can facilitate the process by calling Student Counseling Services and making the request for the student and giving a brief explanation to our receptionist about your concerns.

It may be necessary to physically accompany a student to Student Counseling Services for a crisis meeting. Typically, Student Counseling Services hours are Monday-Friday, 8:00am to 4:30pm

Call us with the student present at Ext 5215.

For after hours and weekends, students with mental health crises should be advised to call the Crisis Line of Riverbend Center for Mental Health at 764-3431, or proceed to the Emergency Department at the hospital closest to them.

WHAT ABOUT COUNSELING?

For routine needs, the initial interview with the counselor is arranged by scheduling an appointment. Faculty/staff can facilitate this by dialing the number (Ext 5215) and then allowing the student to use the phone. The student may call 256-765-5215 during regular business hours to schedule appointments. For routine scheduling, students will usually be seen within 2-5 days of calling. The student will be asked to arrive ½ hour prior to meeting with the counselor to complete a brief intake questionnaire, which will supplement the counselor's assessment of the student's needs. Assure the student that confidentiality will be maintained, except in cases where outside disclosure is legally mandated. Counseling services to actively enrolled students who have paid the Student Health Fee are covered at no extra charge.

After the first session...

If the student and counselor agree that further counseling is appropriate, available options will be reviewed.

If a referral to a community resource is deemed necessary, the counselor will discuss this need and facilitate the referral for the student. There may be a waiting period for specific referral services.

Continuing on-campus counseling usually involves brief interventions involving one to five sessions for most students. Sessions are goal-oriented and emphasize student participation.

Some students may leave the initial interview feeling equipped to handle their problems on their own or with knowledge about other resources to contact. Actively enrolled students may schedule appointments and return for counselor contact at their discretion at any time in the future.

*****Please note that due to the constraints of confidentiality, we cannot discuss a student's specific situation or their contact with us, unless the student has given us written permission to do so.***

WHAT DOES STUDENT COUNSELING SERVICES OFFER?

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| + Consultation Services for Faculty and Staff | + Short-Term Individual Counseling |
| + Initial Student Interviews and Assessments | + Crisis Intervention |
| + Discussion and Support Groups | + Educational Programs and Activities |
| + Referrals to Community Resources for Psychiatric Evaluation/Medication and Other Services | |

NEED TO CONSULT?

If after reading this information, you have questions regarding your decision to help an at risk student, contact us! The professional Staff of Student Counseling Services will be glad to assist you in person or by telephone. (256) 765-5215

Questions you may have:

- Triage**: how to assess the seriousness of the situation....
- Resources**: who are they, what they do, where are they located, how to contact them...
- Your own feelings** and how to be most effective...
- Follow-up concerns/limits** after a meeting or referral.....

Questions regarding UNA's C.A.R.E. Team (Campus Assistance Referral and Evaluation) protocols should be directed to the Vice President of Student Affairs.

More C.A.R.E. Team information: <http://www.una.edu/studentaffairs/care-team/index.html>

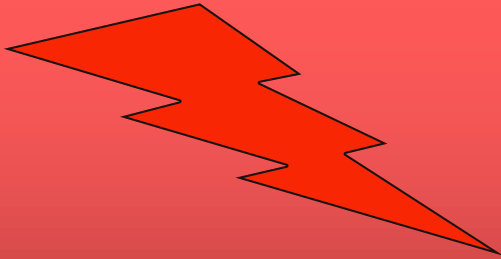
RESOURCE QUICK LIST

On-Campus Resources (Area Code 256)

Student Counseling Services	765-5215
Lauderdale County Sheriff	760-5757
Riverbend Center for Mental Health	764-3431
ECM Hospital	768-9191
Lauderdale County Health Dept.	764-7453
Dept. of Human Resources	765-4000
Safeplace	767-6210
Rape Response	767-1100

Off-Campus Resources (Area Code 256)

Police/Ambulance Emergency	911
Campus Police Department	765-4357
Office of Student Conduct	765-4248
Office of Residence Life	765-5558
Disability Support Services	765-4214
Vice President for Student	765-4223
UNA Women's Center	765-4380
University Health Services	765-4328



SAFETY FIRST..... ALWAYS!!

ALWAYS KEEP YOURSELF & OTHERS SAFE:

1. Report erratic behavior in students or colleagues to proper authorities.
2. Arrange your office with your desk near the door.
3. Keep office or classroom door cracked during private meetings.
4. Lock office doors when leaving and when working late.
5. Arrange office hours when others are in building.
6. Walk to car or late meetings with a buddy or safety person.
7. Know & practice emergency preparedness plans.
8. Keep written records of exchanges with students or colleagues.
9. NEVER promise to keep information from a student or colleague a “secret” until you hear the content.

Always remember!

Intervention with a student whose behavior has become threatening, violent, or significantly disruptive will be different than that for the student who is open to seeking help.

If safety for the student, yourself, or others is in question, call UNA Police (256-765-4357) immediately.