

REFERRAL SOURCES

MSUM Counseling Center
218.477.2227

MSUM Hendrix Health Center
218.477.2211

MSUM Campus Security
218.477.2449

Hotline
(701) 235-SEEK (7335)

Lakeland Mental Health
(218) 233.1201

MeritCare Emergency Room
(701) 234.5121

Southeast Human Service Center
(701) 298.4500

Prairie at St. John's
(701) 476.7200

9-911 for police and medical
emergencies **only**

OUR MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Counseling and Personal Growth Center is to promote the development of psychologically healthy, academically successful and self-responsible students.



Adapted from publications by the
University of Alabama Counseling
Center and Penn State Student Affairs

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TIPS

FOR RECOGNIZING DISTRESSED STUDENTS

**A Guide for Minnesota State University
Moorhead Faculty and Staff**



COUNSELING and PERSONAL GROWTH CENTER

260 Bridges Hall • 218.477.2227

TIPS FOR RECOGNIZING DISTRESSED STUDENTS

Any member of the Minnesota State University Moorhead community may come into contact with a distressed student. Being aware of distress signals, methods of intervention, and sources of help for the student can help you feel more in control of these situations. The mental health professionals at the Counseling Center are available to faculty and staff for consultation regarding these issues. Feel free to call us at 477.2777 if you would like to discuss these matters further.

DISTRESS SIGNALS

Listed below are some of the common signs of distressed students. At one time or another everyone feels depressed or upset. The following may help to identify some symptoms which, when present over a period of time, suggest that the problems are more than the “normal ones.” This list is intended to provide basic information only.

Depression:

- poor concentration and motivation
- sleep disturbances
- dramatic weight loss or gain
- change in academic performance
- poor hygiene
- loss of interest in pleasurable activities
- sad, “down,” weepy
- loss of self-esteem
- preoccupation with death

Unusual Behavior:

- disruptive, restlessness, or hyperactivity
- antagonistic, threatening or harassing
- strange or bizarre behavior—may seem “out of it”
- rambling or disconnected speech
- signs of intoxication

References to Emotional or Life Stressors:

- relationship problems
- death of significant other
- physical or sexual assault
- discrimination (e.g. gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, or disability)
- legal difficulties
- other loss or stress

References to Suicide, Homicide, or Death:

- feelings of helplessness or hopelessness
- verbal or written references to suicide
- verbal or written references to homicide or assaultive behavior
- isolation from friends, family, or classmates

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

If you choose to approach a student you are concerned about or if a student reaches out to you for help with personal problems, here are some suggestions which might make the opportunity more comfortable for you and more helpful for the student.

- **TALK** to the student in private when both of you have the time and are not rushed or preoccupied. Give the student your undivided attention. It is possible that just a few minutes of effective listening on your part may be enough to help the student feel cared about as an individual and more confident about what to do. If you have initiated the contact, express your concern in behavioral, non-judgmental terms. For example, “I’ve noticed you’ve been absent from class lately and I’m concerned,” rather than “Where have you been lately? You should be more concerned about your grades.”
- **LISTEN** to thoughts and feelings in a sensitive, non-threatening way. Communicate understanding by repeating back the essence of what the student has told you. Try to include both content and feelings, (“It sounds like you’re not accustomed to such a big campus and you’re feeling left out of things.”) Let the student talk.
- **GIVE** hope. Assure the student that things can get better. It is important to help them realize there are options, and that things will not always seem this hopeless. Suggest resources: friends, family, clergy, coaches or other

professionals on campus. Recognize, however, that your purpose should be to provide enough hope to enable the student to consult a professional or other appropriate person and not to solve the student’s problems.

- **AVOID** judging, evaluating and criticizing even if the student asks your opinion. Such behavior is apt to push the student away from you and from the help that he or she needs. It is important to respect the student’s value system, even if you do not agree with it.
- **MAINTAIN** clear and consistent boundaries and expectations. It is important to maintain the professional nature of the faculty/student or staff/student relationship and the consistency of academic expectations, exam schedules, etc. You may be able to help a student understand options related to a deferred grade, late drop or withdrawal from the semester. If a student seems to feel overly distressed about making a decision about options, personal assistance can be facilitated through the Counseling Center, 477.2227.
- **REFER** student to appropriate resources when necessary. In making a referral, it is important to point out that: 1) help is available, and 2) seeking such help is a sign of strength and courage rather than a sign of weakness or failure. It may be helpful to point out that seeking professional help for other problems (medical, legal, car problems, etc.) is considered good judgment and an appropriate use of resources. If you can, prepare the student for what to expect. Tell the student what you know about the Counseling Center services or other campus and community options.
- **TIMING** is important. Be aware that options for referral vary depending on the time of day. The Counseling Center is open Monday through Thursday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Friday 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. for appointments and crisis intervention. After hours and on weekends, students who are in crisis are advised to call the community Hotline or an emergency room as listed in Referral Sources.
- **FOLLOW-UP** with your student. Arrange a time to meet again to solidify the student’s resolve to obtain appropriate help and to demonstrate your commitment to assist in this process. Check later to see that the referral appointment was kept and to hear how it went. Provide support while the student takes further appropriate action or pursues another referral if needed.
- **CONSULT** when in doubt about the advisability of an intervention. Call the Counseling Center at 477.2227. After hours and on weekends, contact a resource listed in Referral Sources.