

THE DANGER OF SUICIDE

Suicide is the third leading cause of death among 15 to 24 year olds in the U.S. and the second leading cause of death among college age students. Suicide claims more lives each year in the U.S. than homicide. In a national survey of college students, 9.5% reported thinking seriously about suicide and 1.5% reported having made a suicide attempt.

SUICIDE RISK FACTORS

Unbearable psychological pain is the common element of suicide. People consider killing themselves when they lose hope of finding another way to stop the pain. The risk factors listed below do not predict how any individual will behave. Many people may show some of these signs without ever trying to kill themselves. These are signs that let us know something may be seriously wrong and give us an opportunity to reach out and offer help.

- 🕒 Significant loss
- 🕒 Prolonged stress
- 🕒 Unrelieved symptoms of mental health problems (especially depression)
- 🕒 Noticeable changes in personality or lifestyle
- 🕒 Social isolation
- 🕒 Loss of interest in activities
- 🕒 Direct or indirect statements about suicide or hopelessness
- 🕒 Preoccupation with death
- 🕒 Making a plan or other preparations
- 🕒 History of previous suicide attempt(s)

RESPONDING TO STUDENTS IN DISTRESS

There are three basic steps for responding to students in emotional distress:

1 Deal with Safety Concerns

Rule out any emergency needs requiring immediate response. If there is imminent danger to the student or to others, call UPD at 392-1111 if you are on campus, or 911 if you are off campus. Establishing safety is essential and emergency responders are trained to intervene in these circumstances.

2 Listen to the Student

Whether or not you know how to fix the problem, genuine concern can provide a human connection at a critical moment. Sometimes a student may only need someone to listen for a short time in order to clarify concerns and validate feelings. The student can then be referred to a resource working within the university system, if needed. Students with suicide risk factors should be referred for professional help. Yet even those who are not suicidal may need more help than you can provide. There are many campus and community resources that can offer professional help, including crisis intervention, counseling for the student and consultation for you. The resources are listed at the back of this brochure.

3 Encourage Hope for the Future

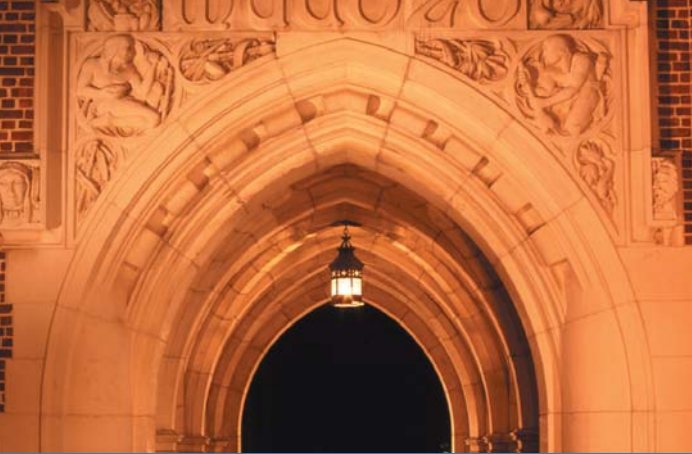
Often people in crisis may not be thinking clearly and are in a state of confusion. You can acknowledge this and remind them not to make any significant decisions during this time. This crisis is not usually a permanent state and there may be alternatives that provide hope for the future.



TALKING TO A SUICIDAL STUDENT

If you observe risk factors of suicide when responding to a distressed student, the following guidelines are suggested:

- 🕒 Express your concern to the student that he or she may be thinking about suicide.
- 🕒 Try to discuss suicide openly without judgment or shock.
- 🕒 Allow the student to express difficult emotions. Often a suicidal person feels angry, helpless, hopeless, worthless, and out of control. Trying to dissuade a student from having these feelings can be perceived as an unwillingness to talk.
- 🕒 Avoid any promise to keep the student's thoughts of suicide secret.
- 🕒 Refer the student to a trained counselor. Same-day and emergency appointments are available at both the Counseling Center (352.392.1575) and Student Mental Health (352.392.1171). Tell the receptionist your call is urgent. You can also consult with a clinician before you talk to a student.
- 🕒 You can offer to make the call to the counseling agency. Give the student the phone once you have told the counselor what is happening. You can also walk the student over to one of the campus agencies.
- 🕒 If a student prefers an off-campus contact, the student can call the Alachua County Crisis Center (352.264.6789) 24-hour telephone hotline.



WHAT IF THE STUDENT REFUSES HELP?

It is important to be prepared for potential obstacles when helping a student in distress. Some students will refuse help. If a student refuses your recommendation to speak to a counselor, there are still some things you can do. Consider the following options if safety is established:

1. Call for consultation with a counselor. Faculty, staff, friends and family should not have to be responsible for decisions about suicide danger.
2. Call the Dean of Students Office (352.392.1261 or 352.392.1111 after-hours); a dean may be able to assist.
3. Call the residence life professional staff (352.392.2161 x10139) if the student resides in campus housing.

STAYING INVOLVED

Even when a student has talked to a counselor, it does not mean s/he has followed-through with treatment. Call back if you notice that the student's risk appears to persist or increase. Keep in mind that counseling resources are governed by confidentiality laws. Follow-up information cannot be disclosed unless the student has signed a release of information.

Working with suicidal students can be challenging and even frightening. However, getting involved can make a difference and can help prevent suicide.

GUIDELINES FOR HELPING

- Deal with safety concerns
- Listen empathically to the student
- Talk openly about suicide
- Get the student appropriate help
- Consult with a counselor

COUNSELING RESOURCES

COUNSELING CENTER
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA
301 Peabody Hall
352.392.1575 • www.counsel.ufl.edu

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA
352.392.1171 • <http://www.shcc.ufl.edu/smhs>
[24-hour phone consultation]

ALACHUA COUNTY CRISIS CENTER
352.264.6789 • [24-hour crisis hotline]

SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE
1.800.273.8255

PSYCHOLOGY CLINIC (fee required)
UF Health Science Center, Shands G-901
352.265.0294 • www.hp.ufl.edu/chp/clinic/index.html

OTHER CAMPUS RESOURCES

DEAN OF STUDENTS OFFICE
352.392.1261 • www.dso.ufl.edu

CAMPUS MINISTRIES COOPERATIVE
352.392.1261 • CONTACT DEAN OF STUDENTS

UNIVERSITY POLICE DEPARTMENT
352.392.1111

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EDUCATING LEADERS FOR A GLOBAL COMMUNITY

*This brochure is available in
alternative print format upon request.*

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