Recognizing Emotional Distress in College Students

A resource guide for faculty, staff, and students



UPSTATE
University of South Carolina

Prepared by Counseling Services | Updated 2026
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Dear Faculty, Staff, and Students:

American College Health Association (ACHA) National College Health Assessment (NCHA) III Spring 2026 National Reference Group (N = 57,211) reports that in the past 12 months.

Suicide on College Campuses

- 18.9% reported serious psychological distress.
- 45.4% screened positive for loneliness.
- 9.8% engaged in self-injury in the past year.
- 24.1% screened positive for elevated suicide risk.
- 2.0% attempted suicide in the past year.
- 24.3% reported high stress in the past 30 days.
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death among college and university students in the United States (NIH.Gov).

This publication is intended to provide faculty, staff, and students with critical information concerning the emotional distress of college students and its impact on their academic success. Simply recognizing the signs of distress may be enough to get students to the appropriate resources. Since faculty and staff see students on a regular basis throughout the academic year, they are in a prime position to recognize signs of distress and connect students to needed support.

The major purpose of Counseling Services is to support academic success of the students at USC Upstate. Counseling Services believes that by collaborating with you, our staff can help students learn more effective ways of managing their problems and continue successfully with their education.

Even with the best instructional techniques available, if a student is experiencing emotional distress, it can render the educational efforts of the instructor ineffective. Fear, worry, pain, and anxiety often inhibit academic performance by reducing the amount of energy available for learning. As leaders, you will be faced with difficult situations, and the relationships you naturally develop with students may help to ensure their academic success.

Providing you with this information is not intended to put you in the role of a counselor. However, you may be among the first to notice when a student is struggling or needs additional support. Counseling Services is here to support you in identifying students in distress and connecting them with appropriate resources.

We appreciate your assistance and look forward to collaborating with you to promote the intellectual and emotional development of our students.

RECOGNIZING A STUDENT IN DISTRESS

The following information is intended to provide faculty, staff, and student leaders with the signs and symptoms of emotional distress in college students. Simply recognizing the signs of distress may be enough to get students to the appropriate resources. Since faculty and staff see students on a regular basis throughout the academic year, they are in a prime position to recognize signs of distress and connect students to needed support.

Faculty and staff may sometimes be unsure about what information the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) allows them to share when they are concerned about a student. FERPA should not prevent you from seeking help when you are concerned about a student's health or safety. Faculty and staff may share observations and concerns with appropriate university personnel when necessary to support a student or address a safety concern. When in doubt, contact Counseling Services, the Dean of Students/CARE Team, or University Police for guidance.

Warning Signs of a Student in Distress:

- Excessive absences, especially when attendance has been good
- Change in extracurricular activities, loss of interest in things usually enjoyed
- Withdrawal from friends, associating with vastly different peers
- Isolation
- Inability to concentrate
- Nervousness
- Unusual or exaggerated emotional responses that are inappropriate to the situation
- Talk about quitting college or the unimportance of college
- Depressed, hopeless attitude and statements, change in motivation
- Irresponsibility, blaming others, denying, faultfinding
- Presence and/or smell of alcohol
- Frequent illness
- Tearfulness, crying during class, swollen and/or red eyes
- Serious grade problems, change from consistently good grades to poor grades
- Erratic, unpredictable behavior
- Signs of physical violence, hitting objects in anger
- Sleeping in class, lethargy
- Noticeable or significant changes in behavior
- Marked changes in appearance, weight, or hygiene
- Suicidal talk or behavior, self-destructive thoughts, self-mutilation

CRISIS ASSISTANCE

If you are concerned about a student, you do not need to determine exactly what is wrong or manage the situation on your own. Your role is to recognize signs of distress, respond with care, and help connect the student with appropriate support.

- **Express your concern.** Talk with the student privately when possible. Describe the behaviors or changes you have noticed and let the student know you are concerned about their well-being.
- **Listen without judgment.** Give the student an opportunity to talk without trying to diagnose the problem, provide all the answers, or minimize what they are experiencing.
- **Connect the student with support.** Encourage the student to contact Counseling Services at (864) 503-5195. If appropriate, offer to help the student make the connection rather than simply providing a phone number.
- **Ask directly about suicide when you are concerned.** It is okay to ask, "Are you thinking about suicide?" Asking directly about suicide does not cause or increase suicidal thoughts.
- **Take statements about suicide seriously.** Stay calm, listen without judgment, and do not promise to keep suicidal thoughts or plans secret. You do not have to determine the student's level of suicide risk on your own.
- **Do not manage an urgent situation alone.** If a student has an immediate plan or intent to harm themselves or others, has already taken action to harm themselves, or you believe there is an immediate danger, do not leave the student alone if it is safe for you to remain with them. Contact University Police at (864) 503-7777 or call 911.
- **Consult when you are unsure.** If there is not an immediate emergency but you are concerned about a student's mental health or safety, contact Counseling Services at (864) 503-5195 for consultation and assistance.

If a weapon is present or you believe there is an immediate threat to safety, do not attempt to intervene physically. Move to a safe location if possible and contact University Police at (864) 503-7777 or call 911. Follow instructions from emergency personnel.

If you are concerned about a student's emotional well-being, safety, or behavior, or believe the student may need additional support, submit a Student Affairs Incident Reporting Form (R U OK? Referral) to the Dean of Students. The referral is reviewed by the Campus Assessment, Referral and Evaluation (CARE) Team, which helps assess concerns, connect students with appropriate resources, and coordinate support when needed.

QUICK RESPONSE GUIDE: WHO DO I CONTACT?

- **A student experiencing an immediate emergency:**

  Response: Call 911 or University Police at (864) 503-7777

- **A student experiencing emotional distress or a mental health crisis:**

  Response: Walk with the student to Counseling Services in the John M. Rampey, Jr. Center, or call Counseling Services at (864) 503-5195, Option 1 or after-hours crisis line at (864) 503-5195, Option 2.

- **A student who may need additional campus support or is exhibiting concerning behavior:**

  Response: Complete the Student Affairs Incident Reporting Form, also called the R U OK? Referral or contact the Dean of Students.

- **A student reporting sex-based discrimination, sexual assault, harassment, stalking, or intimate-partner violence:**

  Response: Follow the reporting guidelines on the Civil Rights and Title IX webpage and encourage the student to contact the Title IX Coordinator.

For a complete list of campus, community, crisis, medical, basic-needs, substance-use, and legal resources, see the **Campus & Community Resource Guide** at the end of this manual.

A CLOSER LOOK:

ISSUES FACING COLLEGE STUDENTS

ALCOHOL & OTHER DRUG ABUSE

Alcohol continues to be the most used substance on college campuses, largely because it is easy to obtain, socially accepted, and often woven into student social life. Many college-town bars and venues cater to students with drink specials and events that can encourage high-risk consumption, especially during stressful periods such as midterms and finals.

Other substances appear on campuses as well. Cannabis use has increased in recent years, and some students misuse prescription stimulants or sedatives. While drugs such as cocaine, MDMA, synthetic substances, or opioids may be present in smaller pockets of campus life, they are far less typical. Regardless of the substance, each carries its own risks, and students may show signs of distress long before use becomes visible.

Below are potential indicators that a student may be struggling with alcohol or other drug use:

- Drop in grades or academic performance
- Increased absences or missed deadlines
- Withdrawal from friends, classmates, or activities
- Noticeable personality changes (irritability, hostility, aimlessness)
- Repeated failure to complete assignments
- Frequent hangovers or appearing intoxicated
- Strong odor of breath freshener, mouthwash, or perfume
- Dilated or constricted pupils
- Excessive sleepiness, lethargy, or fatigue
- Hyperactivity or increased distractibility
- Watery or bloodshot eyes; flushed or reddened skin
- Shaky hands
- Visible needle marks (rare but serious)

Assistance

- Approach the student with care and without lecturing, blaming, or threatening.
- Maintain appropriate boundaries. Offer support while remaining consistent with academic expectations and university policies.
- Encourage healthy choices and emphasize concern for their well-being.
- Reflect on your own beliefs about alcohol and other drugs to ensure your response is balanced and supportive.
- Let the student know that confidential help is available through Counseling Services.
- When appropriate, refer students to community resources:
    - **Alcoholics Anonymous** – (864) 585-1930
    - **Narcotics Anonymous** – (855) 613-2762
    - **The Forrester Center** – (864) 582-7588

ANXIETY

Anxiety is a normal part of life and can occur in response to stress, uncertainty, or challenging situations. At times, however, anxiety can become overwhelming or interfere with a student's academic performance, relationships, daily activities, or overall well-being. Students may experience anxiety in different ways, and signs may be emotional, behavioral, or physical.

Possible Signs of Anxiety

A student experiencing anxiety may:

- Appear unusually worried, fearful, nervous, or on edge
- Have difficulty concentrating, making decisions, or completing work
- Become increasingly restless, irritable, or easily overwhelmed
- Avoid classes, assignments, social situations, or other activities
- Express excessive worry about academics, relationships, health, or other concerns
- Have difficulty sleeping or appear unusually tired
- Experience a racing heartbeat, rapid breathing, sweating, trembling, or dizziness
- Report nausea, stomach discomfort, headaches, muscle tension, or other physical symptoms
- Experience sudden episodes of intense fear or panic

These signs can be associated with many different concerns and do not necessarily mean that a student has an anxiety disorder. Focus on what you have observed, how the student is functioning, and whether additional support may be helpful.

Assistance

If you are concerned about a student:

- Stay calm and supportive. Speak in a calm, reassuring manner and give the student time to respond.
- Listen without judgment. Allow the student to describe what they are experiencing without minimizing their concerns or telling them to "just relax."
- Help the student slow down. If the student is feeling overwhelmed or panicked, encourage slow, gentle breathing, and help them focus on the present moment.
- Reduce stimulation when possible. If appropriate, move to a quieter environment where the student can feel more comfortable and regain focus.
- Connect the student with Counseling Services. Encourage the student to contact Counseling Services at (864) 503-5195 when anxiety is persistent, overwhelming, or interfering with academic or daily life.
- Consider physical health concerns. Some symptoms of anxiety can also occur with medical conditions. Encourage the student to contact Health Services at (864) 503-5191 when physical symptoms are concerning or the cause is unclear.
- Respond to a medical emergency. If the student loses consciousness, has severe difficulty breathing, experiences severe or concerning chest pain, or you believe they may be experiencing a medical emergency, call 911.

CLASSROOM DISRUPTION & AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

Classroom disruption refers to behavior that significantly interferes with teaching, learning, or the ability of others to participate in the classroom environment. Disruptive behavior can range from repeated interruptions or refusal to follow classroom expectations to threatening or aggressive behavior.

Not every disruptive behavior is a safety concern. Respond to the behavior you observe and consider the level of disruption or potential risk.

Examples of Disruptive Behavior

A student may:

- Repeatedly interrupt or talk over the instructor or other students
- Refuse to follow reasonable classroom expectations
- Engage in behavior that repeatedly interferes with teaching or learning
- Use hostile, intimidating, or abusive language toward others
- Escalate a disagreement into a confrontation
- Make threatening statements or gestures
- Invade another person's personal space in an intimidating manner
- Behave in a way that causes concern for the immediate safety of others

Responding to Disruptive Behavior

When addressing disruptive behavior:

- Remain calm and use a clear, respectful tone.
- Address the behavior. Clearly identify the behavior that needs to stop and communicate the classroom expectation.
- Listen when appropriate. Allow the student an opportunity to express their concern without engaging in an argument.
- Set boundaries. Be clear about what behavior is and is not acceptable.
- Avoid escalating the situation. Do not argue, threaten, challenge, touch, or unnecessarily move into the student's personal space.
- Maintain your safety. Position yourself so you have access to an exit and avoid being alone with a student if you feel unsafe.
- End or dismiss class if necessary. Do not put yourself or other students at unnecessary risk.

When Behavior Becomes a Safety Concern

Pay attention to any behavior that suggests a potential threat to safety, including aggressive actions, threatening statements, intimidating gestures, or escalating conflict. If you believe there is an immediate risk to the student or others, contact University Police at (864) 503-7777 or call 911.

If there is no immediate danger but you are worried about a student's behavior, a pattern of disruption, or conduct that is becoming increasingly concerning, document what you observed and contact the Dean of Students at (864) 503-7108 to determine appropriate next steps.

If the student is experiencing emotional distress, help connect them with supportive resources such as Counseling Services at (864) 503-5195.

DEPRESSION

Depression can affect mood, motivation, concentration, sleep, appetite, relationships, energy, and academic functioning. Everyone experiences sadness at times, but persistent or significant changes that interfere with daily life may indicate that a student needs additional support.

Possible Signs of Depression

A student experiencing depression may:

- Show persistent sadness, hopelessness, or irritability
- Lose interest in activities, relationships, or things they previously enjoyed
- Experience significant changes in sleep or appetite
- Have difficulty concentrating, remembering information, or making decisions
- Appear unusually tired or have little energy
- Withdraw from friends, classes, activities, or campus life
- Show a decline in academic performance, attendance, or motivation
- Express feelings of worthlessness, guilt, helplessness, or being a burden
- Show noticeable changes in appearance, hygiene, or self-care
- Talk about death, dying, self-harm, or not wanting to be alive

These signs can be associated with many different concerns and do not necessarily mean that a student is experiencing depression. Focus on changes you have observed and how the student is functioning rather than trying to determine whether depression is present.

Assistance

If you are concerned about a student:

- **Express your concern.** Talk with the student privately when possible. Describe the changes or behaviors you have noticed and let them know you are concerned about their well-being.
- **Listen without judgment.** Allow the student to talk without minimizing their feelings, trying to diagnose the problem, or telling them to "cheer up" or "look on the bright side."
- **Offer support.** Let the student know they do not have to manage what they are experiencing alone and that support is available.
- **Connect the student with Counseling Services.** Encourage the student to contact Counseling Services at (864) 503-5195. When appropriate, offer to help them make the connection.
- **Take concerns about suicide seriously.** If a student talks about suicide, self-harm, death, or not wanting to be alive, ask directly about suicide and follow the guidance in the Suicide Risk & Warning Signs section of this manual.
- **Respond to immediate safety concerns.** If you believe the student is in immediate danger of harming themselves or others, do not leave the student alone if it is safe for you to remain with them. Contact University Police at (864) 503-7777 or call 911.

EATING DISORDERS

Eating disorders are serious mental and physical health conditions that can affect people of all genders, races, ethnicities, body sizes, and backgrounds. They can involve significant changes in eating behaviors, thoughts and feelings about food or body image, and behaviors intended to control weight or shape. A student does not need to look a certain way or have a diagnosed eating disorder to be struggling.

Possible Signs of Concern

A student who is struggling with an eating disorder or disordered eating may:

- Show noticeable changes in eating patterns or behaviors around food
- Frequently skip meals or avoid situations involving food
- Express significant concern about weight, body shape, food, or calories
- Exercise excessively or become distressed when unable to exercise
- Experience noticeable changes in mood, concentration, or energy
- Become increasingly withdrawn from friends, classes, or activities
- Experience frequent illness, dizziness, weakness, or fatigue
- Show changes in academic performance or attendance
- Make frequent negative comments about their body or appearance

These signs do not necessarily mean that a student has an eating disorder. Focus on the changes you have observed and the student's well-being rather than trying to determine whether an eating disorder is present.

Assistance

If you are concerned about a student:

- **Talk privately**. Choose a private setting and express your concern in a calm, supportive way.
- **Focus on what you have noticed**. For example, "I've noticed you haven't seemed like yourself lately, and I'm concerned about how you're doing."
- **Listen without judgment**. Allow the student to share what they are comfortable sharing.
- **Avoid comments about weight or appearance**. Do not compliment or criticize weight changes, debate whether the student "looks healthy," or tell them to "just eat."
- **Do not diagnose or investigate**. Your role is to recognize concerns, offer support, and help connect the student with appropriate resources.
- **Encourage professional support**. Eating disorders can affect both physical and emotional health and may require specialized care.
- **Connect the student with Counseling Services** at (864) 503-5195 for counseling, consultation, and assistance with referrals to specialized treatment.
- **Encourage the student to contact Health Services** at (864) 503-5191 when there are concerns about physical health or medical symptoms.

If a student appears medically unstable, loses consciousness, is experiencing a medical emergency, or you believe there is an immediate threat to their safety, call 911 or University Police at (864) 503-7777.

EMOTIONAL DISTRESS

Emotional distress can occur when personal, academic, social, or other challenges begin to feel difficult to manage. Students may experience distress for many different reasons, and it may affect their emotions, behavior, relationships, physical well-being, or academic functioning. Signs of distress can vary from student to student and may develop gradually or appear suddenly.

Common Causes of Emotional Distress in College Students

- Academic concerns
- Career concerns/decision making
- Depression
- Financial concerns
- Test anxiety
- Time management
- Desire to transfer schools
- Indecisiveness about major
- Problems with parents
- Roommate difficulties
- General anxiety and stress
- Incest and sexual abuse
- Sexual assault
- Learning disabilities
- Emotional abuse
- Problems with relationships
- Family conflict
- Death of a loved one
- Grief

Indicators of Emotional Distress in College Students

- Excessive absences, especially when attendance has been good
- Change in extracurricular activities, loss of interest in things usually enjoyed
- Withdrawal from friends, associating with vastly different peers, isolation
- Inability to concentrate
- Unusual or exaggerated emotional responses inappropriate to the situation
- Talk about quitting college or the unimportance of college
- Depressed, hopeless attitude and statements, change in motivation
- Irresponsibility, blaming others, denying, faultfinding
- Presence and/or smell of alcohol
- Frequent illness
- Tearfulness, crying during class, swollen and/or red eyes
- Serious grade problems, change from consistently good grades to poor grades
- Erratic, unpredictable behavior
- Signs of physical violence, hitting objects in anger
- Sleeping in class, lethargy
- Suicidal talk or behavior
- self-destructive thoughts, self-mutilation
- Noticeable or significant changes in behavior
- Marked change in appearance, weight, or hygiene
- Nervousness

GRIEF

Grief is a natural response to loss and can affect a student emotionally, physically, socially, and academically. There is no single way to grieve or set a timeline for grief. Reactions may change over time and can become more difficult around anniversaries, holidays, important events, or reminders of the loss.

Possible Signs of Grief

A grieving student may**:**

- Appear sad, tearful, angry, numb, irritable, or emotionally overwhelmed
- Have difficulty concentrating, making decisions, or completing academic work
- Experience changes in sleep, appetite, energy, or daily routines
- Withdraw from friends, classes, activities, or campus life
- Experience changes in academic performance or attendance
- Express guilt, regret, loneliness, helplessness, or uncertainty
- Question their beliefs, sense of meaning, or purpose
- Experience physical symptoms such as fatigue, headaches, or stomach discomfort
- Have difficulty adjusting to responsibilities or routines following a loss

These responses can be a normal part of grieving and may change over time. Focus on how the student is doing and whether they may benefit from additional support rather than expecting grief to follow a particular pattern or timeline.

Assistance

If you are supporting a grieving student:

- **Acknowledge the loss.** Simple statements such as "I'm sorry for your loss," "I am thinking about you," or "How can I support you?" can be meaningful. You do not need to find the perfect words.
- **Listen without judgment.** Allow the student to talk about the loss if they choose. Grieving students may need to tell their story more than once, or they may not be ready to talk at all.
- **Avoid clichés or comparisons.** Statements such as "Everything happens for a reason," "You need to be strong," or "I know exactly how you feel" may unintentionally minimize the student's experience.
- **Allow for individual differences.** There is no correct way to grieve. Avoid placing expectations on how the student should feel, behave, or how quickly they should adjust.
- **Offer reasonable support within your role.** When appropriate, help the student identify academic, social, spiritual, or other campus resources that may provide additional support.
- **Connect the student with Counseling Services.** Encourage the student to contact Counseling Services at (864) 503-5195 if they would like additional support or if grief is significantly interfering with their daily life or academic functioning.
- **Take safety concerns seriously.** Grief can sometimes be accompanied by hopelessness or thoughts of suicide. If a student talks about suicide, self-harm, or not wanting to be alive, follow the guidance in the Suicide Risk & Warning Signs section of this manual (page 17).

RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE

Relationship violence can include physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, or digital behaviors used to harm, intimidate, threaten, or control another person. It can occur in current or former dating relationships and can affect students of any background or identity.

Students experiencing relationship violence may find it difficult to talk about what is happening or seek help. Fear, concern about consequences, emotional attachment, financial or housing concerns, isolation, or uncertainty about available options may influence when or whether a student reaches out.

Possible Signs of Distress

A student experiencing relationship violence may:

- Become increasingly withdrawn or isolated from friends, family, or activities
- Appear fearful, anxious, depressed, or unusually distracted
- Experience noticeable changes in academic performance or attendance
- Receive frequent calls, texts, messages, or demands to check in with a partner
- Seem fearful of upsetting or disagreeing with a partner
- Have unexplained or repeated injuries
- Frequently make excuses for a partner's behavior
- Experience changes in sleep, mood, eating, or substance use
- Have a partner who appears controlling, jealous, threatening, or excessively involved in the student's activities
- Express concerns about being followed, monitored, threatened, or feeling unsafe

These signs do not necessarily mean that relationship violence is occurring. Focus on the student's well-being rather than trying to determine exactly what is happening.

Assistance

If a student shares that they are experiencing relationship violence or you are concerned about their safety:

- **Listen without judgment.** Allow the student to share what they are comfortable sharing.
- **Validate their concerns.** Statements such as "I'm concerned about your safety," "You do not deserve to be hurt or threatened," and "There are people who can help" can provide support.
- **Avoid blaming or pressuring.** Do not ask why the student stays in a relationship or tell them they must immediately leave. Leaving an abusive relationship can be complicated and may increase safety concerns.
- **Ask about immediate safety.** If there is an immediate threat or emergency, contact University Police (864) 503-7777 or 911.
- **Offer options.** Help the student identify campus and community resources without making decisions for them.
- **Connect with trained support.** Encourage the student to speak with Counseling Services (864) 503-5195 or an advocate at Project R.E.S.T. (864) 583-9803 who can help them explore options and develop an individualized safety plan.
- **Know your responsibilities.** If you have university reporting responsibilities, be transparent with the student about what information you need to share.

SEXUAL ASSAULT & SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Experiences of sexual assault or sexual violence can affect a student's emotional, physical, social, and academic well-being. Students may experience distress soon after an incident or much later, and there is no single way a person responds to trauma. Some students may show noticeable changes, while others may show few or no outward signs.

If a Student Discloses Sexual Assault or Sexual Violence

A student may tell you about something that happened recently or an experience from months or years ago. Your response can help the student feel supported and regain a sense of choice and control.

- **Listen.** Give the student your attention and allow them to share only what they are comfortable sharing.
- **Support.** Respond without judgment. Statements such as *"I'm sorry this happened," "Thank you for telling me,"* or *"How can I support you?"* can be helpful.
- **Do not investigate.** You do not need to determine exactly what happened or ask the student for details that are not necessary to provide support.
- **Offer choices.** Ask what the student needs and provide information about available resources and options rather than deciding for them.
- **Be clear about your role.** If you have university reporting responsibilities, explain those responsibilities honestly so the student understands what information you may need to share.
- **Connect.** Help the student identify appropriate campus or community resources. If there is an immediate concern for the student's safety or a medical emergency, connect them with emergency assistance.

Possible Signs of Distress

You may notice changes such as:

- Withdrawal from friends, activities, classes, or campus life
- Increased anxiety, fear, sadness, anger, or irritability
- Difficulty concentrating or changes in academic performance
- Changes in sleep, energy, or daily routines
- Increased use of alcohol or other substances
- Appearing unusually alert, fearful, or concerned about safety
- Difficulty trusting or connecting with others
- Expressions of shame, guilt, self-blame, or low self-worth

Remember: These behaviors can be associated with many different concerns and do not necessarily mean a student has experienced sexual violence. Your role is to notice signs of distress, offer support, and connect the student with appropriate resources.

<u>Confidential Support</u>

- USC Upstate Counseling Services: (864) 503-5195
- USC Upstate Health Services: (864) 503-5191
- Project R.E.S.T.: (864) 583-9803

<u>Additional Support & Reporting Options</u>

- USC Upstate Civil Rights & Title IX Office: (864) 503-7193
- University Police: (864) 503-7777

SUICIDE RISK & WARNING SIGNS

Suicidal thoughts can affect college students from all backgrounds. In 2025, 10.8% of young adults ages 18 - 25 reported having serious thoughts of suicide during the previous year *(SAMHSA, 2025)*. Suicide was the second-leading cause of death among people ages 10 - 44 in the United States in 2024 *(CDC, 2026)*.

While some students experiencing suicidal thoughts may show noticeable warning signs, others may not. Take any indication that a student may be considering suicide seriously.

Warning Signs

A student may:

- Talk about wanting to die or not wanting to be alive
- Express hopelessness or feeling that there is no reason to live
- Talk about feeling trapped, overwhelmed, or unbearable emotional pain
- Say they feel like a burden to others
- Withdraw from friends, activities, classes, or usual routines
- Show significant changes in mood, behavior, sleep, or substance use
- Act increasingly anxious, agitated, impulsive, or reckless
- Give away possessions, say goodbye, or appear to be putting affairs in order
- Look for or talk about ways to harm or kill themselves

How to Respond

If you are concerned that a student may be thinking about suicide:

- **Ask directly.** It is okay to ask, "Are you thinking about suicide?" Asking directly about suicide does not cause or increase suicidal thoughts.
- **Listen.** Stay calm and listen without judgment. You do not need to solve the student's problems or determine why they feel this way.
- **Take it seriously.** Do not dismiss statements about suicide, assume the student is seeking attention, or promise to keep suicidal thoughts secret.
- **Connect.** Contact Counseling Services for consultation and assistance in connecting the student with appropriate support.

If There Is Immediate Danger

If a student has an immediate plan or intent to harm themselves, has already taken action to harm themselves, or you believe there is an immediate danger:

- **Do not leave the student alone.**
- Contact emergency assistance and follow USC Upstate emergency procedures.
- Stay with the student, if it is safe to do so, until appropriate help arrives.

Always take statements about suicide seriously, even if you are unsure how immediate the risk may be.

You do not have to determine a student's level of suicide risk on your own.

TEST ANXIETY

Test anxiety is a common experience among college students. While some nervousness before an exam is normal, anxiety can become overwhelming and interfere with a student's ability to concentrate, recall information, or demonstrate what they know.

Test anxiety may be influenced by academic pressure, fear of failure, feeling unprepared, perfectionism, previous testing experiences, or other stressors in a student's life.

Indicators of Test Anxiety

A student may:

- Have difficulty concentrating or suddenly "go blank"
- Express excessive worry about failing or performing poorly
- Avoid studying, procrastinating, or miss an exam because of anxiety
- Experience a racing heartbeat, sweating, trembling, or rapid breathing
- Feel nauseated, dizzy, lightheaded, or physically tense
- Have difficulty sleeping before an exam
- Become unusually distressed before or during a test
- Struggle to complete an exam despite understanding the material

Assistance

If you believe a student may be experiencing test anxiety:

- **Acknowledge and listen**. Let the student know you recognize that they are struggling without minimizing their concerns.
- **Encourage coping strategies**. Slow breathing, grounding techniques, positive self-talk, and taking a moment to refocus can help manage anxiety during an exam.
- **Encourage preparation over perfection**. Breaking studying into manageable steps, starting early, and developing a realistic study plan can reduce academic stress.
- **Connect with academic support**. Refer students to the Student Success Center at (864) 503-5392 for assistance with study strategies, time management, test preparation, and other academic skills.
    - **Connect with Counseling Services**. Encourage students to contact Counseling Services at (864) 503-5195 when anxiety is persistent, overwhelming, or interfering with academic or daily life.
    - **Connect with Health Services**. Encourage students to contact Health Services at (864) 503-5191 when they are experiencing physical symptoms or have questions about their physical health.

COUNSELING SERVICES:
Response, Services, and Resources

REFERRING A STUDENT TO COUNSELING

When you notice a student in distress, be direct and supportive about your concern. You do not need to be a mental health professional to help. Listen, express concern, and help the student connect with the appropriate resource.

If the student's needs are beyond your role, expertise, or available time, be honest about that while continuing to offer support. **A referral is not a dismissal-it is a way to connect the student with someone who can provide additional help.**

Referring Students to Counseling Services

- Provide the student with Counseling Services contact information.
- Encourage the student to schedule an appointment.
- If appropriate, offer to help the student make the connection rather than simply providing a phone number.
- If you are unsure whether a referral is appropriate or how to respond to a student's situation, contact Counseling Services for consultation.

Students experiencing urgent mental health concerns can access **same-day, in-person crisis services during regular business hours**. See the **Emergency/Crisis Response** section (page 23) of this guide for information about responding to urgent situations and accessing after-hours support.

What Students Can Expect

- **Initial Phone Consultation: 15-30 Minutes**
  The student will speak with a counselor about their concerns, current needs, and what type of support may be most helpful. Together, they will discuss the next appropriate steps.
- **Intake Appointment: Up to 90 Minutes**
  If counseling is recommended, the student will meet with a counselor for a more comprehensive conversation about their concerns, history, goals, and needs. The counselor and student will begin developing a plan for care.
- **Ongoing Counseling: Approximately 50 Minutes**
  Regular counseling appointments typically last 50 minutes. Depending on the student's needs, ongoing support may involve individual counseling, group counseling, psychiatric services, campus-based resources, or referrals to community providers.

  Students are encouraged to ask questions, talk openly about their goals, and take an active role in discussions about their care.

How Confidentiality Works

Information a student shares with Counseling Services is confidential and protected under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), South Carolina law, and the ethical standards that guide licensed mental health professionals. These protections are designed to ensure students feel safe seeking help and can speak openly about their concerns.

REFERRING TO COUNSELING (CONTINUED)

Counseling Services does not release a student's counseling or treatment information to university administrators, faculty or staff, family members, law enforcement, potential employers, or anyone else without the student's written permission, except in situations where disclosure is required or permitted by law.

Exceptions to Confidentiality

There are limited circumstances in which Counseling Services may share information without a student's written authorization. These exceptions are guided by law and professional ethics and are intended to protect safety and support effective treatment.

Situations may include:

- When there is a substantial risk that the student may seriously harm themselves.
- When there is a substantial risk that the student may seriously harm an identifiable person or person(s).
- When there is suspected abuse or neglect of a child or dependent adult that must be reported under state law.
- When disclosure is required through a valid legal process.
- When information is shared within clinical supervision or professional consultation for treatment purposes.
- When the student has signed an authorization allowing Counseling Services to share information with another person or organization.

What This Means for Faculty and Staff

- If you refer a student to Counseling Services, confidentiality may prevent counselors from confirming whether the student attended an appointment or anything that occurred during their session.
- You are still encouraged to contact Counseling Services to share concerns or consult about how to support a student. Confidentiality limits what Counseling Services can disclose, but it does not prevent you from providing relevant information that may help them assist the student effectively.

USC Upstate Counseling Services
John M. Rampey, Jr. Center
490 Hodge Drive, Spartanburg
(Next to Magnolia House)

(864) 503-5195 - Option #1; After-Hours Crisis Line - Option #2

Monday – Thursday: 8:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.
Friday: 8:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

COUNSELING SERVICES & SUPPORT

Currently enrolled USC Upstate students have access to **free, unlimited, and confidential** counseling services designed to support their personal well-being and academic success.

Counseling & Clinical Services

- **Individual & Couples Counseling**
  Support for concerns including stress, anxiety, depression, grief, adjustment, and relationships. Only one partner needs to be enrolled at Upstate for couples counseling.
- **Distance Counseling**
  Secure virtual counseling for students located in South Carolina at the time of service.
- **Group Counseling**
  Support, connection, and skill-building with peers who may share similar concerns or experiences.
- **Crisis Intervention**
  Same-day support during regular business hours for students experiencing urgent mental health concerns.
- **Psychiatric Services**
  Evaluation and medication management for students who may benefit from psychiatric care.
- **Abbreviated Testing Services**
  Limited testing services are available for a fee.
- **Consultation**
  Faculty and staff may consult with Counseling Services when concerned about a student or unsure how to respond or refer.
- **Community Referrals**
  Assistance connecting students with specialized or community-based services when appropriate.
- **Wellness, Prevention & Support**
  Wellness promotion, prevention, peer support, and educational programming to strengthen student well-being and the campus community. Faculty, staff, student organizations, and campus departments may request health and wellness programming for classes, groups, or events. **Learn more - Counseling Services website.**
    - **Peer Wellness Coaching**: Peer-to-peer support focused on well-being, healthy coping, substance-use prevention and education, and connecting students with resources.
    - **Health & Wellness Workshops**: Educational programs addressing mental health, relationships, substance use, self-care, and other areas of well-being.
    - **QPR Suicide Prevention Training**: Training to help students, faculty, and staff recognize warning signs and connect someone at risk with help.
    - **Welltrack Boost App**: Self-guided mental health and wellness tools available to the USC Upstate community.
    - **Outreach & Education**: Wellness events, prevention initiatives, and programming across campus.
    - **Spartan Zen Den**: A relaxation space where students can take a break, decompress, and practice stress-management and relaxation strategies.

EMERGENCY / CRISIS RESPONSE

If you are with a student who is expressing thoughts or threats of harming themselves or others, or whose behavior raises an immediate concern for their safety or the safety of others, stay calm and do not manage the situation alone.

If it is safe to do so, have someone remain with the student while you contact the appropriate resource.

Immediate Safety Concern
Immediate threat to the student's safety or the safety of others, contact:

- **University Police**
  (864) 503-7777 - Available 24/7

- **Emergency**
  911

- **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline**
  Call, text, or chat 988

- **Counseling Services**
  (864) 503-5195, option #1
  Monday – Thursday: 8:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.
  Friday: 8:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
- **After-Hours Crisis Line:** (864) 503-5195, option #2

Counseling Services provides same-day, in-person crisis services during regular business hours.

- **USC Upstate Health Services** *(Health concerns during business hours only)*
  (864) 503-5191
  MyHealth Patient Portal
  Monday – Thursday: 8:00 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.
  Friday: 8:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

Remember
When you are unsure how to respond to a student in distress, you do not have to manage the situation alone. Reach out for assistance.

CAMPUS & COMMUNITY RESOURCE GUIDE

The following campus and community resources can help connect students with support based on their individual needs. Use the phone numbers and links provided to learn more about available services, eligibility, and how to access support.

USC Upstate Campus Resources

- University Police → (864) 503-7777
- Counseling Services → (864) 503-5195 Option #1; After-hours - Option #2
- Health Services → (864) 503-5191
- Dean of Students → (864) 503-7108
- CARE Management/Spartan Pantry → Submit an R U OK? Referral
- Civil Rights & Title IX → (864) 503-7193
- Student Success Center & Academic Support → (864) 503-5392
- Disability Services → (864) 503-5199

Mental Health & Crisis Intervention

- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline → Call, Text, or Chat 988
- Spartanburg Area Mental Health Center → (864) 585-0366
- The Eubanks Center → Peer Support Living Room (864) 585-0366
- iTrust Wellness → (864) 520-2020
- Carolina Center For Behavioral Health → (864) 235-2335

Relationship Violence & Sexual Assault Support

- Project R.E.S.T. → Shelter, Legal Advocacy, Counseling (864) 583-9803
- RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) → (800) 656-4673 or Text HOPE to 64673
- Safe Helpline (For U.S. Military & Families) → (877) 995-5247
- National Domestic Violence Hotline → (800) 799-7233, Text "Start" to 88788

Substance Use & Recovery Support

- The Forrester Center → Behavioral Health & Substance Use Disorders (864) 582-7588
- Favor Upstate → Faces and Voices of Recovery – Support Services (864) 430-1802
- AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) → (864) 585-1930
- NA (Narcotics Anonymous) North Central Carolina Area → (855) 613-2762 or www.na.org
- Al-Anon → Help for families and friends of alcoholics – www.al-anon.org

Specialized Support

- Uplift Outreach Center → Safe and inclusive space for LGBTQ+ youth (864) 381-7234
- The Trevor Project → Suicide prevention for LGBTQ+ youth (866) 488-7386 text "Start" to 678678
- Veterans Crisis Line → Call 988 & press 1 or text 838255
- Upstate Warrior Solution → (864) 520-2073
- Eating Recovery Center → (866) 348-9187

Medical & Basic Needs Support

- St. Luke's Free Medical Clinic → Medical care for uninsured adults (864) 542-2273
- Spartanburg County Health Department → (864) 596-2227
- Piedmont Care → HIV/AIDS Resources (864) 582-7773
- Greater Spartanburg Ministries → (864) 585-9371
- Salvation Army → (864) 576-8330
- SC 211 → Call 211 or Text "Help" to 211-211

Legal Assistance

- South Carolina Legal Services → (864) 582-0369 or (800) 922-8176