

What Can I Do?

A Guide for Students Helping Students in Distress

Step 1

Recognize Warning Signs

Recognizing the warning signs of someone in distress does not require special training. However, it requires an awareness of what to look for. A friend may not come right out and tell you that something is wrong, but his or her language and behaviors often do. You may notice:

Withdrawal

- Forgets to call back or show up
- Shows up for a while, but leaves early
- Is “too busy” studying, surfing web or playing video games to hang out
- Spends excessive time on the computer
- Doesn’t seem to connect with others
- Skips class frequently
- Stays at home or in bed all day
- Avoids eye-contact

Disturbing Talk

- Talks about possible harm to self or someone else
- Expresses hopeless, has negative outlook
- Blames self or others for his or her mood, behavior or bad things that happen

Significant Changes in Mood or Behavior

- Seems agitated, depressed, “checked-out”
- Seems uptight, aggressive, “on edge”
- Neglects personal hygiene or appearance
- Increases use of alcohol, drugs or over-the-counter and prescription drugs
- Gains or loses large amount of weight
- Unable to sleep or sleeps more than usual
- Cannot seem to concentrate

The greater the number of warning signs, the greater the likelihood that your friend needs assistance.

Step 2

Listen

Don't be afraid to ask, "What's going on?" or "What's wrong? Asking the question doesn't create a problem where there isn't one. Don't underestimate the importance of your role as a listener. You are providing support that could help your friend feel heard and understood, maybe for the first time. It may be necessary or more convenient to communicate with your friend by e-mail, text or instant messaging, but try to listen in-person whenever possible, as it is easier to observe facial expressions and other non-verbal language.

Effective Listening Skills

Attentiveness

- Maintain eye contact
- Lean forward to indicate interest
- Ask for clarification when you don't understand something that has been said

Attention to Verbal & Non-Verbal Language

- Pay attention to what is being said and not said; tone of voice, posture, hand and facial gestures.
- Notice when your friend's words say all is "fine," but body language says he or she is feeling angry, sad, or low. Let your friend know that the words being spoken are not matching his or her body language you have observed, and ask, "Can I help?"

Accepting Attitude

- Try not to judge or discount what you have heard
- **Don't say:** "You shouldn't feel that way."
- **Don't say:** "You'll be fine."
- **DO Say:** "This sounds like a tough situation."

If you slip into an advice-giving or "fix it" mode, you may not be listening. Take a breath and refocus on what your friend is saying.

Step 3

Express Concern

It is okay to express concern in a calm, non-judgmental way, but be careful not to over-react with too much emotion or panic.

- Avoid negative comments about character, personality, or one's life.
Don't say: "I've noticed you've been really slacking-off lately." **Don't say:** "It seems like your life's really messed-up right now."
- Make statements that express concern and caring.
DO say: "I'm worried about you. It seems like you haven't been yourself lately."
DO say: "It seems like you are struggling right now. Is everything all right?"
- Wait silently for a moment to see if he or she offers a response. Afterwards, suggest getting assistance and offer your help.
DO say: "I think it would be a good idea to talk with someone, and I know the college has counselors. I'd be glad to help you with this."

Make a Referral

Step 4

Struggling with normal life events does not always require counseling. In fact, struggling often provides an opportunity for growth. However, when struggling with life events triggers a more severe reaction, and life seems to be spiraling out of control, or the struggling has continued for more than a couple weeks, counseling may be appropriate.

When to Refer

- Your friend is displaying warning signs
- You have reached your helping limit
- You identify too closely with your friend or the problem
- Your friend complains of insomnia, headaches, dizziness, or stomach ailments
- Your friend expresses thoughts of suicide
- There are no identifiable signs, but your instincts just tell you something is wrong. When in doubt, listen to your instincts.

How to Refer

If you want to discuss your concerns about your friend, the school counselors will listen, answer questions, and provide support. You can refer your friend yourself. To refer:

- Express concern, “This sounds pretty difficult and I want to see you feel better.”
- Ask, “Would you be willing to see a counselor at school? I know they have services for students.”
- If your friend says “yes,” ideally, he or she would make the call. If he or she can’t call, offer to make the call for him or her.
- After explaining the situation to the counseling staff, ask your friend if he or she can finish the call. He or she most likely can.
- Confirm appointment time and offer to accompany him or her. Tell your friend you are glad he or she is taking this step.
- If the matter is urgent, share this information with the counseling staff. Emergency appointments and walk-ins are accommodated whenever possible.
- If the matter is urgent, accompany your friend to the counseling office. If your friend is too distressed to walk, ask if a counselor can come to your campus location.
- In cases not involving concerns of suicide, and your friend is hesitant, suggest other options: an older sibling, a trusted family member, an adult family friend, a physician, or a religious leader.

When to Submit a Concern Report

When your inner voice tells you that information about a friend or anyone on campus should be shared with another, even if you have not spoken to this person, submit a Concern Report. When in doubt, submit.

When to Submit an Incident Report

Incident Reports should be completed if you see or know of a violation of the Student Conduct Code by an L&C student or anyone on campus. (See Student Conduct Code in the [L&C Catalog](#) – under Resources for Students.)

How to Submit a Report

Go to: www.lc.edu and select the “Campus Safety” page under “Student Support & Services” from the dropdown menu. Scroll down to “File an Incident/Concern Report” and click the button. Your report goes to the Vice President of Academic Affairs, who works with other staff to fact-gather and to respond to the situation.

Emergency – On Campus

If your friend's safety is at risk, contact **Security Office** by dialing **2300** or [**\(618\) 468-2300**](tel:6184682300)

Emergency – Off Campus

If your friend's safety is at risk, contact **911** or **Emergency Mental Health Services**:

<u>County</u>	<u>Number</u>
Jersey, Greene & Calhoun:	(618) 498-6881
Madison:	(618) 465-4388
Macoupin:	(217) 854-3135 Ext. 1

Confidentiality and Cost

Counseling services are confidential - UNLESS A STUDENT IS A DANGER TO SELF OR ANOTHER, or if the student has directed staff to share information.

Other services provided: special learning needs, disabilities, advising, study skills, time-management skills, test anxiety, general student questions and assistance, and community referrals and resources.

There is **no cost** for counseling services.

Counseling Department

Hatheway Cultural Center

HY 0211 (618) 468-4130

HY 0212 (618) 468-4125

Lewis & Clark Community College

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(618) 468-7000

www.lc.edu

