# How to Help a Student in Distress

## Signs of Distress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agitation or Irritability</th>
<th>Tearfulness</th>
<th>Fearfulness or Anxiety</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More conflicts with classmates and others</td>
<td>More emotional than normal; tired in class</td>
<td>High distress about assignments and exams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undue aggressive or abrasive behavior</td>
<td>Easily upset by small situations</td>
<td>Frequent absences or lack of participation</td>
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Express your concerns to the student, pointing out your observations and asking about their situation.

### Are you worried about the student’s safety or do you see possible warning signs? **WARNING SIGNS** include:

| Reports self-hate (not deserving to live) | Marked change in appearance or hygiene | Appears agitated |
| Talks about or threatens suicide | Bizarre or dangerous behavior | Appears/reports hopelessness |
| Making statements about hurting others | Significant confusion | No longer attending classes |

Making statements such as “I want this all to end” or “I don’t deserve to live” or “I can’t do this anymore”

**DIRECTLY** ask about concerns and/or warning signs

**DIRECTLY** ask about suicide/homicide as it relates

Do you believe the student is in imminent danger?

### YES (imminent danger is clearly present)

**Examples**:

- Student is disoriented, found unconscious or unresponsive
- Student tells you that they have ingested pills beyond the recommended dose
- Student attempts or is threatening immediate danger to self
- Student attempts or threatens to cause physical harm to someone else

**IMMEDIATELY**: Call WCU Public Safety at 610-436-3311

Submit CARE Report:

https://www.wcupa.edu/_services/studentAssistance/CARE/default.aspx

Contact Department Chair

### NO (imminent danger is not present)

**Examples**:

- Student is very upset about a break up, but denies any suicidal/homicidal thoughts and shows no warning signs
- Student reports anxiety and depression, but denies suicidal/homicidal thoughts and shows no warning signs
- Student’s best friend recently died, but denies suicidal/homicidal thoughts and shows no warning signs
- Student reports self-injurious behaviors (cutting or burning), but denies suicidal/homicidal thoughts and shows no warning signs

Listen and provide support

Provide information about Counseling Services and/or other campus resources that may be helpful and address concerns the student may have about these resources.

If student is open to counseling: Consider calling the Counseling Center at 610-436-2301 with the student and asking for a Triage Appointment

If the student is not open to counseling: Consider sending in a Student Alert to the CARE team - https://www.wcupa.edu/_services/studentAssistance/CARE/default.aspx

### UNCLEAR (whether imminent danger exists)

**Examples**:

- Student makes statements that are suggestive of suicidal/homicidal thinking that are not indicative of imminent danger (“I can’t do this anymore”)
- Student appears to be emotionally distraught and does not respond to your attempts to calm them
- Student experiences a sudden stressful event (death in family, breakup, etc.) and seems emotionally unstable/inconsolable OR the student’s response seems unusual (flat affect, unresponsive verbally, refuses to talk to you)
- Student’s communications contain material that raises concern about suicide, homicide, and/or violence

During Business Hours:

Call the Counseling Center at 610-436-2301

Provide all the relevant information you have about the student and the situation to the Front Desk Staff

Student will either be encouraged to come to the Counseling Center right away or scheduled for a Triage Appointment that day to be assessed by a counselor for risk

After Hours:

Call Public Safety and provide all the relevant information you have about the student and the situation

Student must agree to talk to Public Safety who will contact the Counselor On-Call for further instructions

Adapted from Berry College Counseling Center