

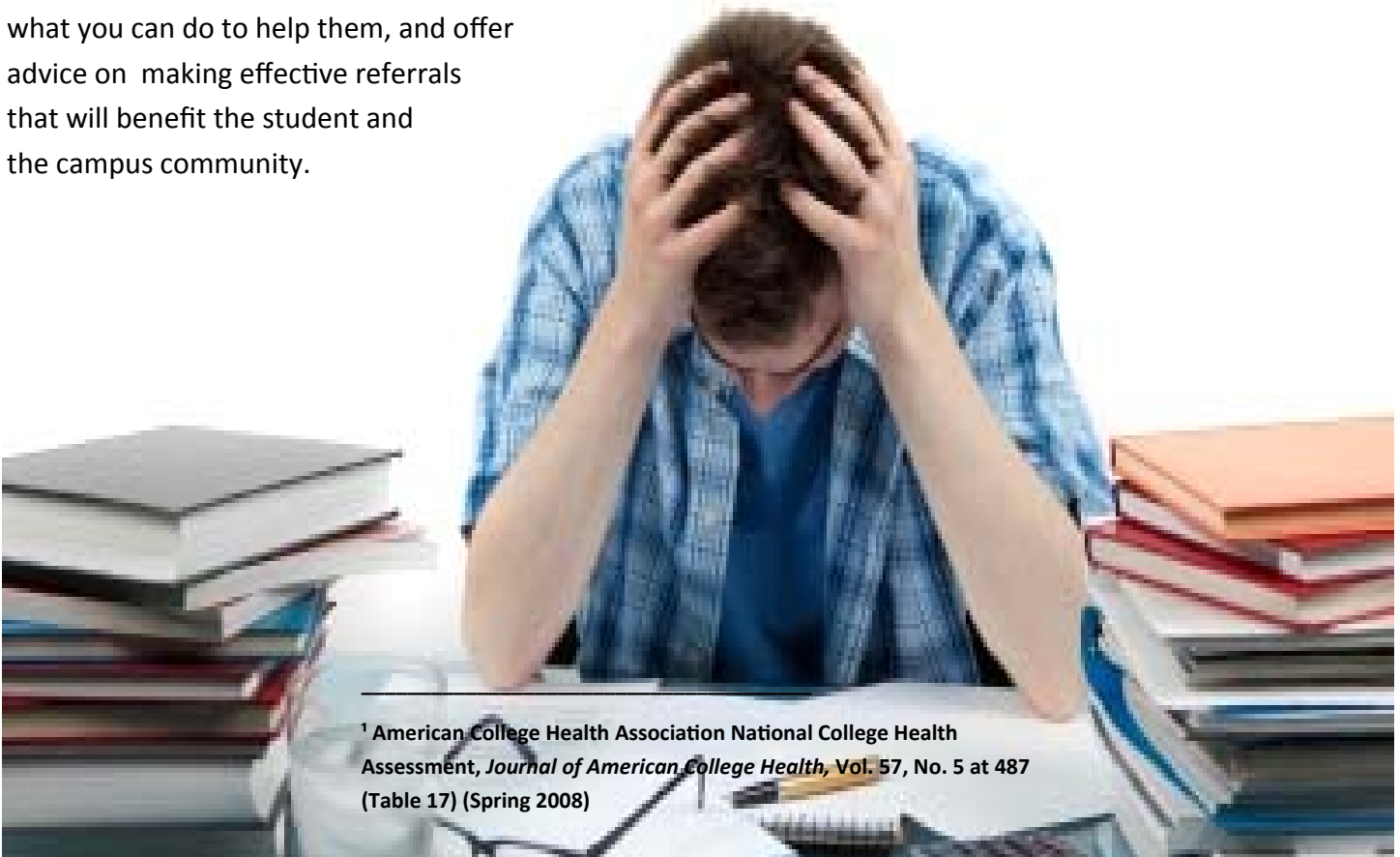
Identifying and Assessing Distressed Students

Indiana State University Student Counseling Center

College is a time of change and transition for the student. Because faculty and staff have daily contact with students, you are often the first individuals on campus to notice student distress. You may become aware of students' struggles with personal problems, significant changes in their behavior or academic performance, or odd speech or actions which make fellow students, faculty, and staff uncomfortable.

Faculty and staff are the eyes and ears of the Student Counseling Center. We need your assistance in identifying troubled students. According to the most recent National College Health Assessment survey¹, 46% of college students reported feelings of being so depressed that it was difficult to function one or more days during the school year. Nearly one in ten students endorsed the item, "seriously considered attempting suicide one or more times during the school year." Depression and anxiety are among the top ten health problems college students identify as interfering with their academic performance.

This brochure will help faculty and staff identify signs of distress in students, provide suggestions on what you can do to help them, and offer advice on making effective referrals that will benefit the student and the campus community.



¹ American College Health Association National College Health Assessment, *Journal of American College Health*, Vol. 57, No. 5 at 487 (Table 17) (Spring 2008)

Distance Education

Cutting-edge technology enables universities to implement distance education to reach more diverse populations and to provide more available learning environments 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. There are substantial discussions about distance education in higher education, and the number of asynchronous distance education courses that rely on Internet applications is growing rapidly. This means through distance education new students are being reached, new revenues are being generated, increasing convenience for students, and possibly enriching educational experiences.

The number of students taking online and distance learning classes has increased, as has the use of electronic communication tools such as Blackboard. With this increase in use comes an avenue for disruptive, threatening or other inappropriate behaviors. Students may make comments electronically that they would not make in person-to-person classroom contacts. Faculty members must establish expectations for students during online and distance classes, and through electronic communications, just as they would for on-campus class meetings.

Problems with Distance Learning

With online courses students have feelings of:

- Isolation
- Frustration
- Anxiety
- Confusion



Identifying Distressed Students

Some of these indicators may be hard to identify due to the fact these students are taking an online course.

- References to suicide (written or verbal)
- Noted isolation from friends, classmates or other support persons
- Marked change in behavior
- Listlessness, lack of energy
- Impaired speech or garbled, disjointed thoughts
- High levels of irritability, unruly or abusive behavior
- Students who appear overly nervous, tense or tearful
- Anxiety, stress, depression
- Marked inability to make decisions
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Normal emotions displayed to an extreme degree or for a prolonged period
- Threat to others

How You Can Help

Responses to Ambiguous Dangerous Behavior

Talk to the student in private when you both have time

- Express your concerns in behavioral, nonjudgmental terms
- Listen to the student in a sensitive, non-threatening way criticizing the student
- Clarify costs and benefits of each option for responding to the problem
- Maintain clear and consistent expectations
- Ask if student is considering suicide
- Share your hope that things will improve
- Consult with the Student Counseling Center
- Refer the student for help if needed
- Arrange a follow-up meeting with student

If you choose to approach a student about whom you have concerns or if a student reaches out to you for help for personal problems, be aware that there is no “perfect formula” for interacting with a distressed student. People have different capacities for dealing with others’ problems. It is very important to know your personal limits as a helper.

It is also important to be mindful that there are times when effectively listening, offering encouragement, and empathizing with the student can help the student feel cared about as an individual and more confident in his or her ability to make decisions during stressful times.

Referrals

When to Make a Referral

You are not comfortable in handling the situation. The help necessary is not in your area of expertise. Personality differences may interfere with your ability to help. You know the student well and think you may not be objective enough. The student is reluctant to discuss the situation with you. The student requests help. You see little progress in the student. You feel overwhelmed or pressed for time.

How to Make a Referral

Be honest with the student about the limits of your time, ability, expertise, or objectivity. Assure student that many individuals seek help while in college.

These individuals are non traditional students. They have chosen to receive their education online. This makes the referral process for the both the student and faculty/staff tricky. Have the student find counseling centers in their area. If the student does not contact you saying they have taken further action it is best to look up counseling centers for them. After looking up counseling centers in their area send them the contact information.

How the Student Counseling Center Can Help Faculty and Staff

- Assessing the seriousness of the situation
- Suggesting potential responses or resources
- Finding the best way to talk to the student
- Finding the best way to make a referral
- Assisting in writing behavioral contracts regarding student's behavior
- Clarifying your own feelings and concerns about student or the situation

Helpful Resources for Distance Education Students

Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1-800-273-TALK (8255)

TTY: 1-800-799-4889

Website: www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

24-hour, toll-free, confidential suicide prevention hotline available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. Your call is routed to the nearest crisis center in the national network of more than 150 crisis centers.

SAMHSA's National Helpline

1-800-662-HELP (4357)

TTY: 1-800-487-4889

Website: beta.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline

Also known as, the Treatment Referral Routing Service, this Helpline provides 24-hour free and confidential treatment referral and information about mental and/or substance use disorders, prevention, and recovery in English and Spanish.



Student Counseling Center

Currently enrolled ISU students may use the various services offered by the Student Counseling Center:

- Crisis, walk-in counseling
- Individual counseling
- Group counseling
- Couples counseling

Students, faculty, and staff may use the following services offered by the Student Counseling Center:

- Talking to a counselor about your concerns for a student
- Workshops delivered for a class or student organization
- Self help resources and faculty resources can be found on our Web site, www.indstate.edu/cns

Office Hours

Monday– Thursday: 8:00 a.m.— 5:00 p.m. Friday: 8:00 a.m.— 4:30 p.m.

Summer Hours

Monday– Friday: 8:00 a.m.— 4:30 p.m.

Location

7th Floor Hulman Memorial Student Union Building
550 Chestnut Street
Indiana State University
Terre Haute, IN 47809

Phone: (812) 237-3939
Fax: (812) 237-3964
www.indstate.edu/cns

After Hours

The student Counseling Center is closed when the University is closed.

Emergency:
Call Public Safety 812-237-5555 or 911

Supportive conversation with a trained professional:
Call 800-273-TALK or 800-273-8255
National Suicide Prevention Hotline

Additional Campus Resources

Dean of Students	812-237-3888
Public Safety	812-237-5555
Residential Life	812-237-3993 or toll-free 888-824-3920
Student Health Center	812-237-3883
Student Health Promotion	812-237-3939
Student Conduct and Integrity	812-237-3800



**Indiana State
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