



SUPPORTING A FRIEND IN DISTRESS

Sometimes it is challenging to know how to support our friends during difficult times. The purpose of this handout is to help identify signs that a friend may be in distress, how to support a friend, and when to help the friend connect to other resources, such as counseling. See our website for more on supporting others, including Supporting Survivors of Sexual Trauma.

If the concern is urgent (e.g., if someone expresses intent to harm themselves or others), call 9-1-1 or campus police at (608) 789-9000 for immediate assistance. You may also consider calling the CTC during business hours. CTC urgent care hours are available Monday-Friday, 2-4pm.

Examples of Signs of Distress

- Withdrawing from friends
- Missing classes and/or decreased academic/athletic performance
- Increased alcohol and/or drug use
- Changes in sleep or appetite
- Feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, or thoughts of harming themselves/ending their life
- No longer enjoying things they used to enjoy

How to Support a Friend in Distress

- **Share** your concerns with your friend (e.g., “I have noticed _____ and I am concerned about you” or “I am concerned about how sad you seem and want to support you”).
- **Listen** to your friend’s experience. *Having a supportive and understanding space to share can be impactful in and of itself.*
- **Foster hope** by validating your friend’s experience and encourage them that they are not alone. Point out that we all need help at different times.
- **Offer your support** for your friend now and moving forward, if you are able to do so. It may be helpful to ask your friend what you can do to support them/what has been helpful in the past.
- **Help your friend find other forms of support too** (e.g., in family and friends, if they are supportive, or through university resources, such as RAs, faculty, supervisors, and/or the Counseling and Testing Center).
- **Don’t take this on alone.** Supporting a friend can be heavy and you may not feel qualified to provide what they are needing. Find resources on campus that may be helpful (e.g., through the Student Health Clinic or the Counseling and Testing Center).
- **Consider consulting with the Counseling and Testing Center** to share your concerns and talk about what may be helpful. Be sure to take care of yourself, too, and seek support, as needed.