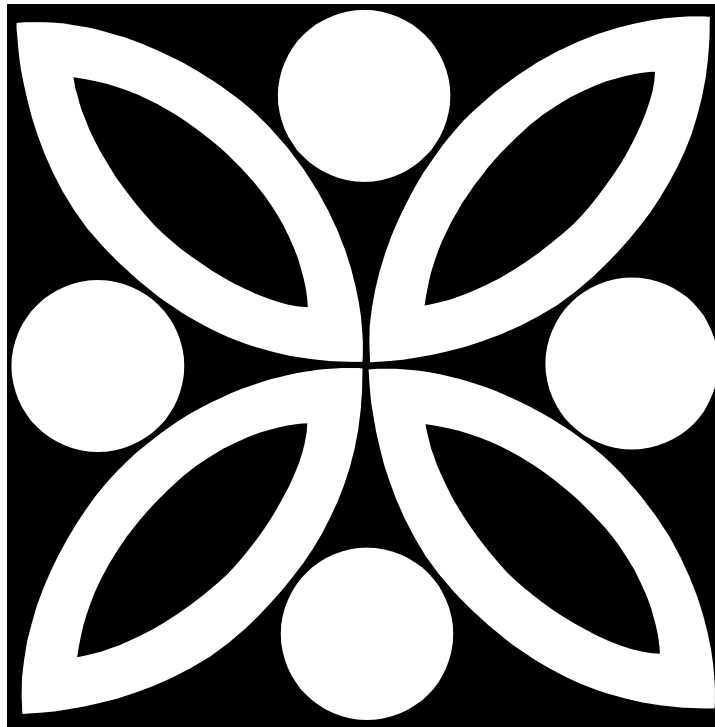


# **Assisting Students in Need**



## **UCSF Staff and Faculty Guide**

**UCSF Student Health Services**



## INTRODUCTION

As a member of the University of California, San Francisco campus community, you may interact frequently with students. As you get to know some students, you might notice problematic behaviors or changes in behavior that cause you concern.

In such cases, it's sensible to want to help the student. It can be challenging, however, to know exactly what to do.

The steps to helping students in need are straightforward:

1. Identify students in need
2. Assess each situation
3. Assist the student

This guide will provide a basic reference for assisting students and serve as a resource for you in the future.

It will also discuss prevention – what you can do to help change some of the circumstances that can trigger students having difficulties.

## WHAT TO DO IF A STUDENT IS IN A CRISIS

**CRISIS = You feel the student may cause self injury or injury to others.** In this case, he or she must be evaluated immediately.

During Business Hours (8 a.m. – 4:45 p.m., M – F except holidays)

1. **Page Student Health at 719-8156.** Do **not** leave a message. A clinician will call you back immediately and ask you questions regarding your observations and concerns about the student and assist in getting the student evaluated by either a primary care or mental health provider.
2. You may need to **walk with the student over to Student Health Services** for the evaluation. Student Health is located in **Millberry Union on the H-level**. Take the elevator by Palio's to the H-level and exit to your left.

After Business Hours

1. **If the student is willing to get help**, you should walk with him or her to the ER so you can be certain an assessment occurs. It is not uncommon for a student who has every intention of going to the ER to lose his or her nerve or become embarrassed and not follow through.
2. **If the student is NOT willing to get help**, dial 9-911 to contact campus police for assistance.



**STEP 1**  
**Identify Students in Need**

Problems in any of the five areas listed below may indicate a student in need:

<p><b>Decreased Productivity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Declining academic performance</li> <li>• Trouble finishing tasks</li> <li>• Poor attendance</li> </ul>	<p><b>Poor Personal Interactions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Withdrawal from social interaction</li> <li>• Increased defensiveness, sensitivity or over-reacting in discussions</li> <li>• Disruptive behavior</li> <li>• Inappropriate or odd behavior</li> </ul>
<p><b>Impaired Cognition</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty comprehending</li> <li>• Poor concentration</li> <li>• Indecisiveness</li> <li>• Forgetfulness</li> </ul>	<p><b>Amplified Emotion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elevated or depressed mood</li> <li>• Hopelessness or more negative outlook</li> <li>• Irritability</li> <li>• Excessive worry or anxiety</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Diminished Self Care</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant loss or gain of weight</li> <li>• Obvious fatigue / sleeping in class</li> <li>• Deteriorating personal appearance</li> </ul>	

Any single problem from the table above provides you a reasonable opportunity to speak with a student, show that you care and see if there is a need for help – that is, continue to Step 2 and assess the situation. Multiple signs indicate a necessity to intervene and proceed to Step 2.

Some of the problems listed in the table may indicate mood disorders (such as depression), anxiety problems, substance abuse, emotional crisis, recent trauma or exposure to violence. While rare, some of these changes may even indicate psychosis or suicidality. Because these are treatable conditions, early identification is important.

**TIPS FOR IDENTIFICATION**

<p><b><i>Maintain Confidentiality When Classmates Are Involved</i></b></p>	<p>Friends or classmates may approach you about a student’s situation. You can meet with and listen to their concerns in order to better help the student, but you must maintain the student’s confidentiality. That is, do not disclose information the student told you to the friends or classmates.</p> <p>In addition, the classmates or friends may wish to have their confidentiality preserved. You should do your best to do so, but tell them that in some cases you may think it helpful for the student know classmates and friends have expressed concern.</p>
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<p><b><i>Timing Matters</i></b></p>	<p>Keep in mind that holidays and final exam periods are a common time for issues to surface for students. Try to be more attuned to students during these times of increased stress.</p>
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**STEP 2**  
**Assess Each Situation**

**Get the Picture**

After identifying a student in need of assistance, you need to assess the nature and urgency of that student's specific situation.

Each student's circumstances are unique. Make some time to meet privately with the student so you can discuss the student's current situation.

You can quickly ascertain the student's general state and begin to help by using the **BATHE** approach:

**Background** – "How are you doing? What's been going on lately?"

**Affect** – "How do you feel about this?"

**Trouble** – "What is troubling you the most?"

**Handling** – "What have you tried doing to manage or handle the situation?"

**Empathy** – "This sounds like it has been really difficult. I can see that you have been really trying to help yourself. Could I recommend some other resources for you?"

**Judge the Urgency**

**Crisis Situation:**

- The student may hurt him or herself or someone else. This requires **immediate** referral – see page 1 or 5.

**Urgent Situations:**

- The student is functioning at an extremely low level, imminently jeopardizing academic record, professional standing or personal life.
- The student's condition seems to be worsening at a noticeable (perhaps frightening) pace.
- While not suicidal, the student exhibits unpredictable, risky behavior.

**Non-Urgent Situations:**

- The student appears fairly stable, maintaining a low or adequate (though clearly below the best possible) performance academically, professionally and personally.

If you are in doubt when judging urgency, choose the higher level of need and act upon it.



**TIPS FOR ASSESSMENT**

***Maintain some distance***

In helping, be careful not to ask too many questions. For example, it may be helpful know the student is having family difficulties, but you probably do not need know the difficulties in exquisite detail.

Your role is not to become a therapist for the student, but to facilitate in a thoughtful, caring way the process that will improve the student's physical and mental health.

***Consider cultural diversity***

Cultural beliefs can affect how students show (or hide) distress, how students feel or react when confronted with that distress, and what kind of help (if any) may be acceptable. For example:

- In many Asian cultures, depression often presents with a predominance of physical symptoms rather than emotional symptoms (as is typical in American culture).
- In some cultures, seeking mental health services may bring shame to the individual or to the family, leading to students refusing help. If you feel cultural issues may be complicating factors for a student in need of help, call Student Health Services at 476-1281 and ask to speak with a mental health clinician.



**STEP 3**  
**Assist the Student**  
**Crisis**

In a **crisis situation**, the student **must be evaluated immediately**.

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**Urgent**

In an **urgent situation**, the student needs to be promptly evaluated to determine the best way to assist him or her.

- **Express your concern** – Tell the student that you are worried about this situation and think that it is important he or she be evaluated at Student Health to get some help before things get any worse.
- **Reach an agreement** – Ask the student if you can help him or her set up an appointment with a mental health provider at Student Health. If the student doesn't agree, discuss the reasons why and try again to reach agreement. In some cases, the student may agree to referral elsewhere (see Tips below), which may facilitate a Student Health appointment.
- **Contact Student Health at 476-1281** – Ask to speak with a mental health triage nurse and discuss the student's situation. Make it clear this seems like an **urgent** (not a crisis) situation and you'd like the student evaluated within the next day or two. Relay the appointment information to the student.

**Non-Urgent**

In a **non-urgent situation**, the student needs support and encouragement to get help for a current problem.

- **Offer support** – Show your concern and care for the student. Acknowledge that it is normal for students to need extra support periodically.
- **Locate the best resources** - Take the time to make a specific referral, if one is needed. Call ahead if you



have a relationship with the person. That transition can make a difference. Student Health and Student Affairs Officers are available to work with you.

- Act concretely - Give the individual something tangible to hang onto. Make a specific plan or recommendation to the student.
- Follow through with referral - Check in with the student a few days after giving a referral. If the student hasn't followed up, find out what's holding him or her back and see if there is a way to address it.

Note that in many non-urgent situations, the very act of following these steps provides significant help to the student.

### **TIPS FOR ASSISTING**

#### ***Know your resources***

Student Affairs Officers in your school are accustomed to talking with students about difficult issues and helping the student find assistance. They are also familiar with the policies, procedures, and forms of assistance available in your school.

Student Academic Support Services are available in cases of poor academic performance. Student Affairs Officers in your school or Program Administrators in Graduate Division programs can help connect a student with tutoring, advanced study/learning skills training or, when appropriate, a learning disability specialist.

Office of Student Relations (OSR) Director and other staff members are available on an informal and confidential basis to assist students with problem resolution outside of the student's academic affiliation. In addition, working with OSR may be attractive because they are not seen as "mental health provider."

Student Health Services offers a confidential evaluation with a mental health provider as soon as possible after referral, usually within the next week. Students have up to 10 free counseling appointments through Student Health. For urgent and ongoing care, students may be referred out to other providers for counseling.

Emergency Room (ER) evaluations are available during a crisis. If you are unsure about referring or walking a student to the ER, call Student Health or the ER for consultation at 353-1037.

#### ***Get a consultation***

Call Student Health at 476-1281 and ask to speak with a mental health nurse to discuss concerns about how to approach a student, refer the student for assessment or counseling, or if you are unsure about how to proceed with a student in need. The nurse will help you or refer you to another staff member as necessary (Monday – Friday 8:00am to 4:45pm.)



**Step Zero  
Prevention**

Training for a career in the health sciences (as well as actually having that career) includes performance under varying degrees of stress. Students come to their training programs with a wide range of strengths and coping skills for managing stress. Some are well prepared to deal with stress. Others will need help learning how to manage it.

Although studies have shown that a certain degree of stress enables peak performance, studies have also shown that excessive stress has significant negative physical, cognitive and emotional consequences (for examples, see the table on page 2). Even the best-prepared students can have problems caused or triggered by stress.

Eliminate excessive stress for students with these steps:

- Know the stressors
- Help students cope
- Change the system

**Know the Stressors**

**Types of Stressors for Students**

- **Academic** – Fresh from past academic success and now faced with high expectations and outstanding peers in their classes, students may feel as if they are faltering (or even losing their identity as “top of the class.”). UCSF’s academic culture often reinforces competition, sometimes leading to undue stress.
- **Developmental** – Learning the responsibilities and the role of a health care professional frequently brings up problematic issues such as handling uncertainty, wielding authority and acting professionally.
- **Financial** –The rising fees for UCSF students and the cost of living in San Francisco both add to what may already be significant loan burdens from undergraduate study. In addition, some students may have additional financial obligations to children or family members.
- **Sociocultural** – Some students excel academically, but have less developed social skills, keeping them from a fulfilling personal life. Cultural differences can also affect relationships, leading to social isolation.

**Help Students Cope**

**Model healthful behavior in your own life** by monitoring yourself for the negative physical, cognitive and emotional consequences of stress. Taking care of yourself makes it easier to take care of and train healthcare professionals.

**Acknowledge stress and its effects** by talking openly about the positive and negative aspects.



**Discuss coping techniques** that might be effective and healthful. Encourage students to share coping strategies with one another.

**Encourage students to maintain a balanced and healthful lifestyle** despite the many forces pulling them to devote themselves almost entirely to their studies. Millberry Union programs can be useful towards these ends.

**Refer students to resources** like the SHS website (<http://saawww.ucsf.edu/health>), well-being programs or seminars, or to a mental health professional to learn stress reduction techniques.

### **Change the System**

**Identify and act upon stressors on students that are within your sphere of control.** Find ways in which you can limit the impact of these stressors on students. For example, change a class time to prevent students from having to rush to an exam. Be aware that your students model their behavior and expectations based on both the explicit examples you give and the personal example that you set. You profoundly affect how they approach their profession, assess their own competence, and lead their lives.

**Identify and act upon stressors on students that are outside your sphere of control.** Bring systems issues creating undue stress to the attention of Student Affairs, so that change might be effected. Look for opportunities to change the culture of your school, department or organization so it reinforces healthy living.