

Helping Distressed College Students

The college experience often marks a time of substantial personal, emotional, social and psychological growth. During times of transition, it is common to experience distress. Some college students will need additional support as they manage these life challenges, and you have the ability to help W&J students in distress.

Know the signs of distress, how to respond in emergency situations, and how to connect with the W&J Student Counseling Center team when you notice difficulties are negatively impacting a W&J student's well-being.

Signs of Distress

If you are concerned about a W&J student but do not feel they are in imminent danger, please contact the Student Counseling Center during office hours at (724) 223-6107 and/or submit a report on PrezPathways. We will reach out and share resources available to them.

- Alcohol or drug use.
- Avoidance and/or withdrawing from social or academic engagement.
- Chronically tired, anxious, depressed, irritable, angry or sad.
- Declining grades.
- Exaggerated emotional responses inappropriate to the situation or environment.
- Fatigue, muscle pain, headaches, stomachache, etc.
- Marked changes in appearance or habits, such as deterioration in grooming or hygiene, dramatic weight loss, marked withdrawal in a normally outgoing person.
- Perceived loneliness and isolation; lack of belonging.

Signs of Severe Distress

If you believe a W&J student is experiencing severe distress, please call the [24/7 Crisis Counseling Line at \(833\) 434-1217](#) to consult and/or submit a report on PrezPathways describing your concerns. We will reach out and share resources available to them.

- Abuse (e.g. emotional, verbal, physical, sexual assault and relationship violence).
- Anger, anxiety, depression, or other mood changes that last days or longer.
- Chronic or severe academic difficulties.
- Highly disruptive behavior.
- Loss of contact with reality.
- Self-injury.
- Significant interpersonal difficulties (e.g. isolation, inappropriate communication, conflicts).
- Suicidal thoughts.
- Threats of violence.
- Use of alcohol or other substances that interferes with academic or social life.

Warning Signs of Suicide

If you believe a W&J student is experiencing a life-threatening emergency, call **911 (on campus)** or **(724) 223-6032 and press 1 (off campus)** immediately. This will connect you to Campus & Public Safety and local emergency services.

All the above signs of severe distress combined with the following:

- Chronic drug or alcohol abuse.
- Feeling trapped or hopeless.
- Impulsiveness or recklessness.
- Loneliness, isolation or loss of meaning.
- References indicating a desire to die.
- Statements indicating suicidal thinking.
- Suffering a major loss or life change.
- Withdrawal from friends/family.

Responding to Distress

It is important to trust your instincts and recognize your limitations when responding to a college student in distress.

- **For student emergencies** (life-threatening; imminent danger to self or others)
 - Call **911 (on campus)** or **(724) 223-6032 and press 1 (off campus)** immediately. This will connect you to Campus & Public Safety and local emergency services.
- **For student urgencies** (severe distress but not life-threatening)
 - Call the **24/7 Crisis Counseling Line at (833) 434-1217** to consult.
 - Submit a report on PrezPathways describing your concerns.
- **For less urgent student needs** (mild/moderate distress) (e.g. anxiety, stress, panic)
 - Contact the Student Counseling Center during office hours (Mon–Fri, 9am–12pm and 1pm–5pm) at (724) 223-6107.
 - Submit a report on PrezPathways describing your concerns.
 - Helpful ways to respond to a college student:
 - Talk to them one-on-one in a private place, if possible.
 - Allow them to talk freely and listen to understand their perspective.
 - Do not promise confidentiality.
 - Encourage them to seek support services.
 - Help them to clarify the problem.
 - Identify possible campus resources they can access.
 - Identify what has worked for them in the past.
 - Respect and accept their value system.
 - Take them seriously; ask directly about what is going on.
 - Tell them about what you have observed that makes you concerned about them.