



Responding to Suicidal Talk

Signs That a Student May Be Distressed or Thinking of Suicide:

- Overt (or veiled) references to suicide - verbally or in writing
- Statements of helplessness or hopelessness
- Signs of persistent or prolonged unhappiness
- Isolation from friends and family
- Pessimistic feelings about the future
- Threats to harm self or others
- Excessive absences or tardiness, especially if representing a change in functioning
- Listlessness, lack of energy, or falling asleep in class
- Marked changes in personal hygiene
- Extreme mood changes or excessive, inappropriate displays of emotions
- Poor academic performance and preparation, particularly if such behavior is a change from previous functioning

What to do if you suspect distress or suicidal ideation:

- Stay calm, as this will help you respond more effectively, and also help to reduce the student's anxiety or agitation. Remember that it is not unusual for people to think or talk about suicide.
- If possible, provide a quiet, private place to talk with the student. Provide supportive and nonjudgmental listening.
- If the student appears to be dangerous to self or others (or you are not sure), do not leave the student unattended. Reach out for professional help immediately (see numbers below).
- Give the student information about counseling services at CSU and in the community and encourage the student to seek assistance. You can help a student make an appointment by calling or walking over to the Counseling Center with the student. Touch base with the student the next time you are in contact to find out if your suggestion was followed. You may need to repeat your suggestion several times before a student will go to see a professional.

Resources for Responding to Suicidal Talk or Other Mental Health Emergencies:

- Phone consultation with a Counseling Center staff member is available at (216) 687 2277 weekdays between 9:00 am to 5:00 pm (except when the university is closed).
- After hours, you may contact Cuyahoga County's Mental Health Crisis Line at 216-623-6888 or the National Suicide Prevention Line at 1-800-273-TALK
- You can walk the student over to the Counseling Center for crisis consultation Monday through Friday 9:00 am to 5:00 pm.
- If the student is unusually aggressive or otherwise unmanageable, contact the Cleveland State Police Department for assistance at (216) 687-2020 or by dialing 911 and asking to be connected to CSU police.
- Be prepared to provide as much information as possible about the student and the situation to the campus resource you contact.

INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE CSU COUNSELING CENTER, 216-687-2277, Rm. 220 Union Bldg.

Responding to Self-Injury

- Recent studies of university students indicate that as many as 15-17% engage in self-injury.
- The most common forms of self-injury are cutting, picking, and self-hitting.
- Self-injury is not generally meant as a suicide attempt, but it is an unhealthy attempt to cope with intense feelings of distress and/or feeling disconnected from oneself or reality. The purpose of self-injury is to temporarily decrease feelings of emotional distress and the lethality of the behaviors is low.
- Self-injury is a clear expression of emotional distress and should be given attention.
- While it is important to take self-injury seriously, it is also important to **remain calm** when dealing with someone who self-injures and avoid dramatic responses.
- Remember that it will probably take a while for the behavior to change after a self-injuring individual decides to seek help and work on changing the behavior. It is difficult and takes time to change unhealthy, habitual behavior.
- There are many differences between self injury and suicidal behavior, but they are not unrelated. Individuals who self-injure frequently or use more severe methods are at an increased risk of suicide.

Signs of Self-injuring:

- Unexplained or clustered wounds or scars
- Fresh cuts, bruises, burns, or other signs of bodily damage
- Bandages worn frequently
- Inappropriate clothing for the season (e.g., always wearing long pants or long sleeves in the summer)
- Constant use of wristbands or other jewelry that covers the wrists or lower arms
- Possessing unexplained cutting implements (e.g., razor blades or other equipment)
- Heightened signs of depression, anxiety, or social withdrawal

What to do if you suspect self-injury or “cutting”:

- Let the student know you are concerned and would like to help. Be honest about what you are seeing and why you are concerned. Respond calmly and with “respectful curiosity.” Avoid displaying extreme reactions like shock, pity, or criticism because such reactions will likely limit the opportunity to talk, build trust, and assist in opening the door to recovery.
- Help the student explore more positive strategies for coping with intense feelings and stress such as talking with a friend, exercising, or participating in therapy.
- Encourage the student to come to the Counseling Center. Provide them the Counseling Center phone number (216) 687-2277 and location (1836 Euclid Avenue, UN 220). Remind the student that our services are confidential.
- Sometimes it is useful and necessary to assist the student more directly with making an appointment. In these instances you may offer the use of your phone or call the Counseling Center yourself, while with the student.
- It may also be beneficial to walk the student over to the Counseling Center. This might be helpful for students who are unsure about the location and/or are intimidated by meeting with a counselor.
- The Counseling Center has walk-in hours from 9am – 5pm Monday—Friday when someone is available to consult with you or to see the student that you’ve referred.