Recognizing Signs of Distress in our Community

Michele P. Ford, Ph.D.
Licensed Psychologist
Lecturer, Department of Psychology
Signs and Symptoms of Distress

- Everyone experiences distress from time to time
- In many cases, signs and symptoms of distress are short lived and our colleagues or friends get better
- At other times, signs and symptoms of distress are enduring
- In these cases, our colleagues or friends need assistance
Discussion

• Think of a situation in which you experienced a friend/colleague or a student in distress…
  • What did you notice?
  • What did you do to help/resolve the problem?
  • What was the outcome?
  • What, if anything, do you wish you had done differently?
## Concerns among faculty and staff

- **Life changes**
  - New house
  - Marriage/Divorce
  - Having a baby
  - Promotion

- **Grief/Loss**
  - Loss/absence of a loved one
  - Divorce

- **Personal life challenges**
  - Family conflicts
  - Relationship issues
  - Stress management

- **Addiction and Substance Use/Abuse**

- **Anxiety/Depression**
Concerns among students

- Adjustment to school/being away from home
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Relationship Issues
- Disordered Eating
- Sexual Abuse/Assault
Signs and Symptoms

- Decrease in work performance including attendance
- Irritability or anger outbursts
- Losing interest or pleasure in most activities
- Avoiding friends, activities and social events
- Appearing distracted or worrying more than usual
- Daydreaming or checking out more often (i.e., escaping)
Signs and Symptoms

• Complaining of:
  • Feeling fatigued or exhausted
  • Sleep difficulties
  • Sadness or crying
• Expressing feelings of hopelessness/helplessness/worthlessness
• Changes in appetite/eating patterns
• Increased use of alcohol and or drugs
Red Flags

- Similar to the others discussed, along with:
  - Exhausted appearance
  - Talking about being a burden to others
  - Talking about feeling trapped or being in unbearable pain
  - Missing work
  - Withdrawing from family, friends
  - Showing rage; talking about seeking revenge
  - Recklessness
  - Talking/posting about death, dying or suicide
  - Acquiring the means to kill oneself
Protective Factors

• Social/family support
• Good decision-making, conflict resolution, and/or problem solving skills
• Strong beliefs in the meaning/value of life
• Hope for the future
• Treatment
• Restricted access to lethal means
It only takes one person to make a difference in another person’s life
How to Help

• **Communicate**
  - Talk openly and directly
  - Encourage them to open up
  - Listen to what the person has to say

• **Empathize**
  - Acknowledge and validate what you have heard
  - Express concern and interest
  - Avoid criticizing or judging the distressed individual's concerns.
How to Help

- Encourage colleagues/student to seek medical and psychological treatment
- Provide resources
  - Seek out a treatment provider
  - Online resources
  - Accompany them to an appointment
- Work to change the atmosphere in the workplace
  - Staying healthy
  - Model work/life balance
- Check in
How to Help

• When serious signs are evident
  • Take Action
    • Do not ignore serious signs of someone in distress
    • Seek professional assistance right away.

• Don’t forget to consult
  • Colleagues or supervisors can be very helpful when there are concerns about other colleagues or students
Campus Resources

• Human Resource Services
  • http://www.dickinson.edu/info/20083/human_resource_services/1573/emotional_and_intellectual_wellbeing

• Employee Assistance
  • Franco Psychological Associates
    (717) 243–1896
    26 State Avenue
    Carlisle, Pennsylvania 17015
    http://www.francopsychological.com/

• Wellness Center
  • https://www.dickinson.edu/homepage/138/wellness_center
Local Resources

• National Alliance for the Mentally Ill Cumberland and Perry County
  • http://www.namipacp.org/

• The RASE Project
  • http://www.raseproject.org/

• Simply Well
  • http://www.simplywellcarlisle.com/

• Psychology Today Therapist Finder
  • https://therapists.psychologytoday.com/rms
Additional Resources

- Alcoholics Anonymous: [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org)
- American Association of Suicidology (AAS): [www.suicidology.org](http://www.suicidology.org)
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP): [www.afsp.org](http://www.afsp.org)
- Reporting on Suicide: [www.reportingonsuicide.org](http://www.reportingonsuicide.org)
- National Council for Suicide Prevention: [www.ncsponline.org](http://www.ncsponline.org)
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)
- PA Adult and Older Adult Suicide Prevention Coalition: [www.preventsuicide.org](http://www.preventsuicide.org)