

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
- Al-Anon/Alateen: <http://www.al-anon.alateen.org/>
- American Association of Suicidology (AAS): www.suicidology.org
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP): www.afsp.org
- Reporting on Suicide: www.reportingonsuicide.org
- National Council for Suicide Prevention: www.ncsponline.org
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org
- PA Adult and Older Adult Suicide Prevention Coalition: www.preventsuicide.org