

HRS/COM Counseling: Responding to Student Emergencies, Crises, & Distress

As a faculty or staff member, sometimes it's difficult to tell when a student is experiencing a true emergency, a crisis, or distress, and each category needs different courses of action. You have the power to help students experiencing any type of hardship, and collaborative consultation is key in navigating "grey areas" and helping our students stay healthy and successful.

Emergencies

Examples of mental health emergency include when a student is:

- Threatening or immediately considering suicide or severe self-injury.
 - Including having a specific plan and the means to carry out the plan.
- Threatening or immediately considering homicide or physically harming others.
 - Including having a specific plan and the means to carry out the plan.
- Acting erratic, out of control, disoriented, or confused.
- Under the influence of a substance or behaving dangerously (this is also a medical emergency).

What to do in emergencies – Immediate Action:

- Never leave the student alone, even to go to the bathroom; however, never attempt to physically restrain a student attempting to leave an area.
- During normal business hours please 1st attempt to contact HRS/COM counselors directly for additional evaluation:
 - Tyler Rogols (can be reached via Jabber, phone: 614-685-0930 or at Tyler.Rogols@osumc.edu)

****please indicate Emergency status in any messaging****

- If you are unable to reach HRS/COM Counselors, it is after business hours or on the weekend--please complete one of the following:
 - **On campus options:**
 - Contact OSU Counseling and Consultation Services by **calling 614-292-5766 and choosing option 2** for a student crisis consultation; this option is available weekends and holidays.
 - Walk student to nearest ED and inform staff of concerns for student safety.
 - Contact OSU Police Department at **614-292-2121** and request a **Crisis Intervention Trained (CIT) officer(s)** to transport to ED.
 - **Off campus/local community options:**
 - Instruct student to notify safe member of support system to help transport them to the nearest ED or walk with them to the nearest ED
 - Contact 911 or Netcare Access Mental Health Crisis Line at 614.276.2273 and request emergency mental health support if the student reports that they are unable to arrive at nearest ED without additional support.

*****NOTE: PLEASE STAY ON PHONE WITH STUDENT UNTIL THEY HAVE SUCCESSFULLY REACHED LOCAL ED AND/OR A SAFETY EVALUATION HAS BEEN INITIATED BY A MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL*****

- After the emergency has been successfully addressed, please **request permission from student** to send an email to hsrcom.counseling@osumc.edu with the student's status (please see sample email below). Please notify student that the information in your email will be used to facilitate post emergency care coordination/support. If the student does not give permission for you to email HRS/COM Counseling, please do not share this information.

Crises

Examples that may represent a crisis that is not necessarily an emergency:

- Seeming extremely depressed.
- Seeming uncontrollably anxious or experiencing a panic attack.
- Discussing feeling hopeless or vaguely thinking about suicide.
- Engaging in non-suicidal self-injury.
- Showing signs of ongoing disordered eating or ongoing alcohol or drug overuse.

What to do in crises – Urgent Action:

- Call, message or visit the offices of the HRS/COM Counseling office determine counselor availability for consultation.
 - Please feel free to leave a voicemail or email requesting return contact for consultation. HRS/COM Counseling will attempt to reply to any crisis email within 24 hour period if not immediately available.
- If no HRS/COM counselor is available and you feel as if the student requires immediate attention, please support the student in contacting OSU Counseling and Consultation Services by **calling 614.292.5766 and choosing option 2** for a student crisis consultation; this option is available weekends and holidays.
- After immediate crisis has been addressed, please **request permission from student** to send an email to hsrcom.counseling@osumc.edu with the student's status (please see sample email below). Please notify student that the information in your email will be used to facilitate post crisis care coordination/support. If the student does not give permission for you to email HRS/COM Counseling, please do not share this information.

Distress

Examples of student distress may include:

- Crying or seeming upset.
- Showing signs of anxiety, stress, or worry.
- Discussing personal difficulties involving relationships, academics, or finances.
- Showing signs of decreased hygiene or self-care.
- Displaying normal signs of grief or loss.
- Showing issues with attendance or engagement in class.
- Sharing information about an unhealthy relationship (student is not in immediate danger).

What to do for students in distress – Concerned Action:

- Thank them for trusting you enough to be open and honest with you and validate their distress.
- Tell them that you care about them and want to help them how you can.
- Encourage student to send an email to hsrcom.counseling@osumc.edu for additional support/counseling services.
- Refer them to the appropriate OSU or community resources.
- Consult with your supervisor afterwards, as well as HRS/COM Counseling, if needed for further consultation.

Do & Don't

Do acknowledge what the student is saying or experiencing and engage in a conversation about it.

Seeing others upset or having conversations about personal or difficult topics can be uncomfortable, but you are the "front-line" of supporting our students, and you are the person they trust enough to talk to. Hear them out and ask questions so that you have a solid picture of what's happening. You do not need to have an answer or a solution ready in that moment. Your primary function may be simply to listen and to share what you learn in consultation with appropriate staff. What is important is that the student feels heard and cared for, and receives information about potential options and action steps.

Do always show a calm, caring demeanor and offer help, even if they are reluctant at first.

A student who is upset has a better chance of de-escalating or calming down if they see calmness and caring from you. Validating the difficulty of their situation and giving them space to vent is often helpful. Telling a

student to “calm down” can sometimes have the opposite effect because it can make them feel that you don’t think their situation is really worth being upset over.

Do follow-up.

It’s ok to ask a student in a non-prying way how they are doing or if they are seeing a HRS/COM counselor or other OSU support person. It’s up to the student to decide if they want to share with you, and following up is a great way to show them you really care. FERPA and other guidelines don’t prohibit you from asking students personal questions or checking-in.

Don’t ever promise a student confidentiality or guarantee a particular outcome in any situation.

Keeping confidentiality is not something you can legally do, and making such promises to a student can put you at risk from both physical safety and legal liability standpoints. If a student shares their emergency, crisis, or struggle with you, it is because they want help, and often that’s more help than you’re able to provide. It is sometimes impossible to say that lower-level distress now may not become a crisis or emergency later, and unfounded promises can hurt your relationship.

Don’t tell yourself you’re “blowing things out of proportion” or it isn’t your business.

Trust your gut – if it doesn’t feel alright, it’s probably not alright. Second-guessing ourselves is one of the top reasons we don’t reach out to help others when they might really need it. Serious situations happen for our students all the time, and doing what we can to help them be safe and successful is always our business. Students are almost always happy when faculty or staff check-in and show they care.

EXAMPLE EMAIL:

TO: hsrcom.counseling@osumc.edu

FROM:

SUBJECT: Student update

HRS/COM Counseling,

Late Friday afternoon (student name) came to me visibly upset. (Student name) explained that they have been feeling really depressed lately and after failing an exam earlier in the day have started to have suicidal thoughts and feelings. (Student name) explained to me that they have been dealing with depression alone for a long time but are ready for help. (Student name) says that they think they need to go to hospital because they are scared to go home alone for the weekend. I offered to sit with them while they called the OSU Counseling and Consultation crisis line but they said that they didn’t want to talk to anyone about their decision-they just wanted to go to the hospital. I asked them if they would be willing to let me walk with them to the ED and they said that would be ok. On our walk, (student name) called their mother and roommate to let them know what was happening so they wouldn’t be worried. I sat with them until the medical staff at the ED took them back to a room for further evaluation. I explained to the ED staff the student’s description of their current distress. Before leaving I asked (student name) for permission to send you this email and told them that someone from HRS/COM Counseling would be in touch to provide additional support if needed. (Student name) thanked me for helping and said it was ok that I provide you with this information.

Sincerely,

ALL EMAILS SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

- Student full name
- brief description of student distress/presentation
- date and time of interaction
- resources offered to student

- final outcome/decision
- any additional support needs expressed by student
- written documentation that consent was given for email to be sent to HRS/COM
- any general consultation questions/concerns