



STUDENTS IN CRISIS: A GUIDE FOR TRINITY FACULTY

Prepared by: Dean of Students | Counseling Services | Academic Affairs

Common student issues

Because of the enormous emotional and social transitions students experience between their first year and senior year, it is likely that most students will grapple with an array of issues during their time on campus. Given that Trinity is a small campus, our goal is to work together as a team on each student's behalf.

Problems may include homesickness, fitting in socially, handling problems at home (divorce, death of a relative, loss of a pet), alcohol or drug use and abuse, sexual assault, hazing, illness, depression, anxiety, eating disorders, issues related to sexual activity or orientation, relationship issues, and roommate conflicts.

The key to assisting students is identifying those in need and helping them receive assistance. Whether students eventually leave the University or work through their issues here, it is most important that they are offered a helping hand to cope with their problems. Please work with colleagues in Student Affairs and Academic Affairs to assist these students as they navigate through personal issues during this complicated time.

Student Affairs staff members do not provide documentation to excuse students from their academic commitments. We expect that students will communicate with their faculty members, make arrangements for absences, and submit verification for such absences on an individual basis. In the event of a tragedy or extremely stressful situation in the life of a student, we will inform the faculty members to make them aware of its gravity, but again, we leave it to the faculty members to handle individual arrangements with students.

Signs of psychological distress

Some signs of psychological distress are obvious, but others are subtle or ambiguous. Obvious signs include:

- Bizarre or strange behavior
- References to harming self or others
- Crying or persistent sadness
- Nervousness, agitation, impaired speech, tics
- High level of irritability, including unduly abrasive or aggressive behavior
- Marked deterioration in personal hygiene or appearance

More ambiguous signs include:

- Dependency (e.g., excessive demands on your time)
- Excessive procrastination or very poor work
- Inability to make decisions
- Frequent class absences
- Persistent sleepiness
- Persistent lack of interest

How to intervene

Some students will tell you that they are struggling to cope. Many others, however, are reluctant to ask for help. Therefore, you may need to take the initiative with a student whom you suspect is troubled.

If you are concerned about a student, speak to him or her when you are in a location (or can go to a location) where you have privacy. Express your concern for the student's well being, note the behavior(s) you have observed that concerns you, and ask the student what may be contributing to the behavior(s).

If the student is willing to confide in you, you may find that you can intervene adequately. If the student's problems are too severe or complex for you to address, you may want to refer the student to Counseling Services. When making a referral, emphasize your concern for the student and your confidence that Counseling Services can provide assistance.

Should the student react as though you are implying s/he is "crazy," explain that most "normal" people need help from time to time. Inform the student that the counselors at Counseling Services help ordinary people struggling with everyday predicaments as well as extraordinary circumstances.

Please contact a counselor or the Dean of Students directly if you would simply like some advice on how to intervene with a particular student.

Intervening during emergencies

If the student appears to be out of control or is acting in a strange manner, these guidelines may help:

- Be calm and matter-of-fact; set clear limits on behavior.
- Try to identify the problem, and clearly indicate whether you can be of assistance.
- Be respectful but firm.
- Be clear, simple, and direct. If the student is having difficulty understanding you, repeat yourself.
- Convey your support and understanding.
- Contact Campus Security in the event of a dangerous or life-threatening situation.

Making a referral to Counseling Services

You can refer the student in any of the following ways (in increasing order of urgency):

- Encourage the student to contact Counseling Services to make an appointment.
- Encourage the student to use your phone to call and make an appointment.
- Make the call yourself while the student is with you, and help the student make an appointment.
- In an emergency, bring the student to Counseling Services, calling ahead if possible.

NOTE: Any reference to suicide is serious, and a referral to Counseling Services is strongly advised.

Resources available to assist troubled students

Dean of Students and Director of Residential Life

For general concerns about student conduct or behavior, contact the Dean of Students. Generally, for on campus students, members of the Residential Life staff will then follow-up or report observations of the student for whom there is concern. Not sure where to go with a student concern? This is a good place to start.

Residential Life Coordinators

Usually the Residential Life Coordinators are asked to intervene with the student. There are three full-time Residential Life Coordinators and there is always one on call during the academic year. During evenings and weekends they may be contacted through Campus Security.

Counseling Services

Counselors are not only available for appointments during the week, but students can also see a counselor without an appointment during designated walk-in hours. In case of an urgent situation after hours, a counselor can be contacted through Campus Security. The counseling offered on campus is short-term. The staff refers students with specialized or longer-term counseling needs off campus. Counseling services cannot provide information about a client without the student's written permission.

Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs: Curriculum and Student Issues

Please contact this person for problems that are academic in nature or that involve excessive absences. If reports are coming from more than one instructor, the Associate Vice President and the Dean of Students will work together to intervene.

Chaplain

The chaplain is available to assist students in dealing with an array of personal issues, including but not limited to spiritual issues.

Health Services

The staff is available for medical problems and can make referrals off campus or to Trinity Counseling Services. Health Services is bound by confidentiality and cannot report on student conditions.

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