



Recognizing and Responding to Students in Distress



This guide includes:

- Understanding current landscape of mental health at Castleton
- How to identify signs of distress
- What you can do to help a student in distress: Helpful steps to take
- Where to go for more support

Mental Health in College

current trends



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Mental Health in College Students

- Mental health problems are common in young adults
- 31% of college students report being diagnosed with or treated for a mental health condition in prior year
- Anxiety (23%) and depression (18%) are the most common diagnoses



NCHA Fall 2018



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Active Minds surveyed 2,051 high school and college students regarding the impact of COVID-19 on their mental health in September 2020.



Almost 75% of respondents reported their mental health has worsened, worsened somewhat, or worsened significantly since the beginning of the pandemic.

- 87% have experienced stress or anxiety
- 78% have experienced disappointment
- 77.5% have felt lonely or isolated

Many students reported an increase in mental health problems:

- stress (84.25%)
- anxiety (82.35%)
- sadness (73.23%)
- depression (60.7%)



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Faculty and Staff

what is your role?

You do not need to be a counselor, to be helpful!



Creating a Supportive Space



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Creating a Supportive Space



- Normalize “We all have *stuff* that is challenging”
- Statement in syllabus
- Incorporate regular “check-ins”
- Encourage students to let you know if things are especially tough
- Incorporate mindfulness or calming moments

Your Supportive Role

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What Can You Do?

- Know how to recognize a student in distress
- Know how to engage the student: what to say, how to follow up
- Know how and where to refer: what are the campus resources

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Your Role as a Help-Giver

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First Rules

- You don't need to know exactly what the problem is
- It is **courageous** and **sensible** to ask for (and offer) help when it is needed
- **Trust your gut**-if you think there is a problem, you're probably onto something
- **Use your resources and contacts** - and use them
- **If concerned**, always consult



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Common Challenges your students are experiencing



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Common Challenges

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The Big Categories

- Problems with emotions (anxiety, depression, mania)
- Problems in thinking (obsessions, concentration problems, memory problems, psychosis / seeing or hearing things that aren't there)
- Problems in behavior (substance misuse, excessive weight change, sleeping all the time or very little)

These categories are not exclusive (just like you can have pain and fever). This is a way of organizing info to help you understand and articulate problems more easily.



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Common Challenges

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Be concerned if...

Problems are:

- Too intense
- Lasting too long
- Too disruptive
- Getting worse
- Recurring or following the same pattern
- Dangerous (for self or others)

Or if your intuition tells you something isn't right

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Common Challenges

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Signs to Notice

Changes in:

- Appearance
- Mood
- Speech
- Behavior
- Relationships
- Academic Performance

You don't need to be an expert/clinician to notice.

You can trust your observations.

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Engaging with Students



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If You are Concerned

Expressing Concern



- Tell them you are concerned
- Be specific, share your observations
 - “You have been missing lots of classes”
 - “You’ve been falling asleep in class”
 - “You seem kind of down (nervous, on edge, etc.) lately”
 - “It seems like you’re distracted lately”
 - “You mentioned some pretty difficult things you’re going through”

V.A.R. : A Three - Step Strategy



Active Minds: <https://www.activeminds.org/about-mental-health/basic-var/>

- Validate
- Appreciate
- Refer



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Validate Their Challenges

Let them know what they're feeling is okay and that you believe them. Validation sounds like...

- **“That makes sense.”**
- **“That sounds difficult.”**
- **“I’m sorry you are struggling right now.”**

Appreciate Their Courage

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- Speaking up can be a challenging step — let them know it's a good one. Also show you're there to support them. Affirmation sounds like...
 - **“Thank you for sharing.”**
 - **“You are not alone.”**
 - **“I’m here for you.”**



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Refer to Skills or Support

Let them know help is available and refer them to appropriate resources.

Referring sounds like...

- **Taking time for self-care helps me. For instance, I might go for a walk on the rail trail, go for a swim in the pool, or attend a yoga class on campus or online. Let's think of some things you might try?**
- **“I've been using this meditation app. It's really helped me slow down my thoughts.”**
- **“I think it might be helpful to talk to someone. I could help you to . . . ”**
 - Call the Wellness Center
 - Call someone on campus who can help
 - Get in touch with the Academic Support Center
 - Call/text a crisis line

Engaging with Students

The logo for JED (Jewish Emotional Distress) is a blue square with the letters "JED" in white, bold, sans-serif font.

What if the student doesn't want help?

If someone is *not* obviously or immediately in harm's way and won't accept your help:

- Try to keep the lines of communication open
- Consider creating an Aviso alert, or consult with the Wellness Center
- Follow up with the student later

If someone is having an **emergency** and refuses help, call the Wellness Center (802-468-1346) Mon-Friday 9-4

Public Safety (802-468-1215) Weekends and after hours

The logo for JED (Jewish Emotional Distress) is a blue square with the letters "JED" in white, bold, sans-serif font.

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Engaging with Students

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If the student acknowledges problems and is willing to accept help

- Suggest that they see a counselor in the Wellness Center.
- Offer to help them make a call
- Follow up with the student after contact with the Wellness Center

If someone is having an **Emergency (in danger of harming themselves)**

Call the Wellness Center (802-468-1346) Mon-Friday 9-4

Public Safety (802-468-1215) Weekends and after hours

If the student is off-campus: Call 911 and ask for a Wellness/Safety check

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Facts About Suicide

- People who attempt suicide usually *do* give warning signs.
 - ❖ *80% of people who die by suicide gave verbal and/or nonverbal warning signs.*
- Mentioning suicide *will not* lead someone to attempt suicide.
 - ❖ *Asking someone about their suicidal feelings may make the person feel relieved that someone finally recognized their emotional pain.*

More Facts About Suicide

Most suicidal people *have not* decided they want to die, and there *are* things that can be done about it.

- *Most suicidal people are ambivalent; that is, part of them is feeling, “I want to die,” but part of them is feeling, “I want to live.”*
- *Most people who talk about suicide are not being manipulative or trying to get attention (and even if they are, they still need some kind of help).*
- *People who talk about suicide are genuinely distressed and should be taken seriously*

At Risk Students

Signs to Notice

- Talking about wanting to end it all
- Giving away personal possessions
- Expressing guilt, hopelessness or desperation
- Expressing intense anger
- Asking about or actively seeking access to lethal means
- Posting “goodbye” on social media

What can I say or do?

- Ask the student if they are thinking about ending their life

What to Do if someone mentions suicidal thoughts:

- Take them seriously
- Ask if they have a plan
- *If they do have a plan, the student is at serious risk.**

- Stay with the student or have someone else stay with them and call:

The Wellness Center (802-468-1346) Mon-Friday 9-4

Public Safety (802-468-1215) Weekends and after hours

If off-campus, call 911 and ask for a wellness/safety check

**You can tell the student that policy requires you to tell a professional*

Know Available Resources



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Campus Resources



- **General Mental Health Support:**
 - Wellness Center [\(802\) 468-1346](tel:8024681346)
 - Create an alert on Aviso (a good way to learn if a student is struggling across classes and activities)
- **Urgent problem or crisis**
 - Wellness Center [\(802\) 468-1314](tel:8024681314) 9am -4pm, Monday-Friday:
 - **Urgent problem or crisis after 4pm and weekends: Public Safety [\(802\) 468-1215](tel:8024681215)**
 - **If the student is off campus: Call 911 and ask for a Wellness Check**
- **Crisis hotlines: *Crisis Text Line* [741741](tel:741741), *Rutland Mental Health Crisis*: [\(802\) 775-1000](tel:8027751000)**
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: [1-800-273-8255](tel:18002738255)



Online Resources



[Wellness Center Website](#)

Counseling Services

The Castleton Counseling Service strives to promote, enhance and support student well-being and developmental growth within a safe, confidential environment through a range of mental health services.

Castleton Counseling Services promote self-awareness, teaching effective coping strategies, personal responsibility, and respect for self and others.

Counseling Services

- Crisis intervention
- Short-term counseling and referral
- Group counseling
- Workshops and presentations
- Intern supervision
- Consultation to the Castleton University community

At Castleton University, counseling is focused on learning effective self-management skills to enable students to live in a way that enhances their day-to-day relationships and enables them to realize their full potential. It is about getting help in developing insight, evaluating choices, and creating meaning and wellbeing in life.

THIS SECTION

Counseling Services at Castleton

- Check your mental health
- Meet our Counselors
- Castleton Support Team
- Meditation Apps

RELATED SECTIONS

- Health and Wellness Resources
- The JED Campus Initiative
- CHANGE & Violence Prevention
- Castleton Student Support Network
- Wellness Education at Castleton
- Alcohol and Other Drugs: A Guide for Parents [PDF](#)
- Health Form for Incoming Students [PDF](#)
- Contact Wellness Center Staff



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You Can Make A Difference

- Stay aware
- Trust your instincts
- Reach out to students who appear distressed
- Know your campus resources for routine and crisis situations
- Spread the word to other faculty and staff – please share these resources

Thank you.

This presentation was originally designed by the JED Foundation and has been customized for Castleton University



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