Recognizing and Responding to Students in Distress

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Let’s talk about Stress

Stress is a normal and expected part of the college experience.

It is the tension and strain we feel in response to challenging or adverse circumstances.

Stress, in and of itself, is not “Bad”.

It can often lead to increased focus, energy, determination, and clarity.
Let’s talk about Stress

Stress becomes problematic when it becomes intense, sustained, and frequent.

This is when stress becomes Distress. Distress can have negative effects on a student’s body, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.
What can we do to support students who are in Distress?

• Recognize
• Respond
• Resources
Recognize the Signs of Students in Distress
Signs of Distress:

- Significant change in mood, appearance, presentation
- Increase in emotionality
- Changes in pattern of socialization
- Changes in routine
- Report of a major life change
- Direct expressions of distress
- Impairment in functioning
- References to suicide or homicide in verbal or written statements or drawings
DO’s and DON’T’s: Responding to Distress

• DO show that you take the student's feelings seriously
• DO let the student know that you want to help
• DO listen attentively and empathize
• DO reassure that with help things will improve
• DO stay close until help is available, or risk has passed

• DON'T analyze the student's motives
• DON'T become argumentative
• DON'T react with shock or disdain at the student's thoughts and feelings
• DON'T minimize the student's distress
• Don’t promise to keep secrets
“But what do I say...?”

• “Sounds like you are really struggling with________. Many people find it helpful to talk with someone in confidence who is outside of the situation.

• “I want to help you get the help you need and deserve.”

• “Meeting with a counselor is confidential and will not go on your academic record.” “Give counseling a try.”

• “These are services your tuition pays for; take advantage of them.”
Connect them to Resources
Providing Resources to Distressed Students

• Make the student aware of campus resources
  o For general concerns - **Dean of Students**
  o For mental health concerns - **Center for Mental Health Care & Resources**
  o If imminent danger of hurting self or others - **Georgia Tech Police Dept.**
What CMHCR Services Looks Like?

Speak with CMHCR Receptionist → Meet with CMHCR Case Manager → Case Manager creates an Action Plan for you → Referral to off-campus mental health provider

Meet with CMHCR Counselor → Meet with other campus mental health provider

Individual Group Couples → Psychiatry Wellness Coaching

Referral to on-campus support (non-MH) → Academic Support Dean's Office STAR program

Academic Support Dean's Office STAR program
Smithgall Student Services Building ("Flag Building")
Suite 238

(404) 894-2575
Monday-Friday 8am-5pm

Website: https://mentalhealth.gatech.edu/
Questions?