

A photograph of the Lafayette College entrance, featuring a brick gate with a sign that reads "LAFAYETTE COLLEGE". The gate is flanked by brick pillars and topped with a decorative urn. In the background, there are trees with vibrant autumn foliage in shades of orange and yellow. A brick building is visible behind the trees. In the foreground, there are out-of-focus green leaves and white flowers.

A Guide for Faculty and Staff

Supporting Students in Psychological Distress

LAFAYETTE
COUNSELING CENTER

Using the guide

Students will often turn to trusted faculty, advisors, coaches and mentors for informal advice and support. Although you are never expected to provide counseling, it may be helpful for you to become familiar with signs that indicate a student is experiencing emotional distress so you can respond effectively when students approach you with a concern.

THIS GUIDE IS DESIGNED TO HELP YOU:

- Become familiar with signs that indicate your student is having difficulties of an emotional or psychological nature
- Learn how to respond effectively when your student approaches you with concerns
- Understand the steps for making an effective referral to the Counseling Center



Signs of Distress

Consider making a referral to the Counseling Center if you notice the following:

CHANGES IN ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

- Poor academic performance, particularly if such behavior represents a change from the past
- Excessive absences from class or multiple requests for extensions
- Lack of responsiveness to outreach
- Bizarre or disorganized content in writing/presentations
- Confusion or uncertainty about interests, abilities, or values

UNUSUAL BEHAVIOR

- Listlessness, lack of energy, complaints about fatigue
- Marked changes in personal hygiene
- Extreme mood changes or disproportionate emotional responses
- Excessive crying
- Overwhelming anxiety or panic
- Irritability or unusual apathy
- Dramatic weight loss or gain
- Preoccupation with food or body image
- Intoxication or indications of problematic substance use
- Impaired speech or disjointed, confused thoughts
- Disoriented and bizarre behavior indicating a loss of contact with reality
- Aggressive or threatening behavior

CHANGES IN RELATIONSHIPS

- Death of a family member or close friend
- Difficulties in romantic relationships
- Problems with family members, friends, or roommates
- Thwarted sense of belonging or patterns of isolation

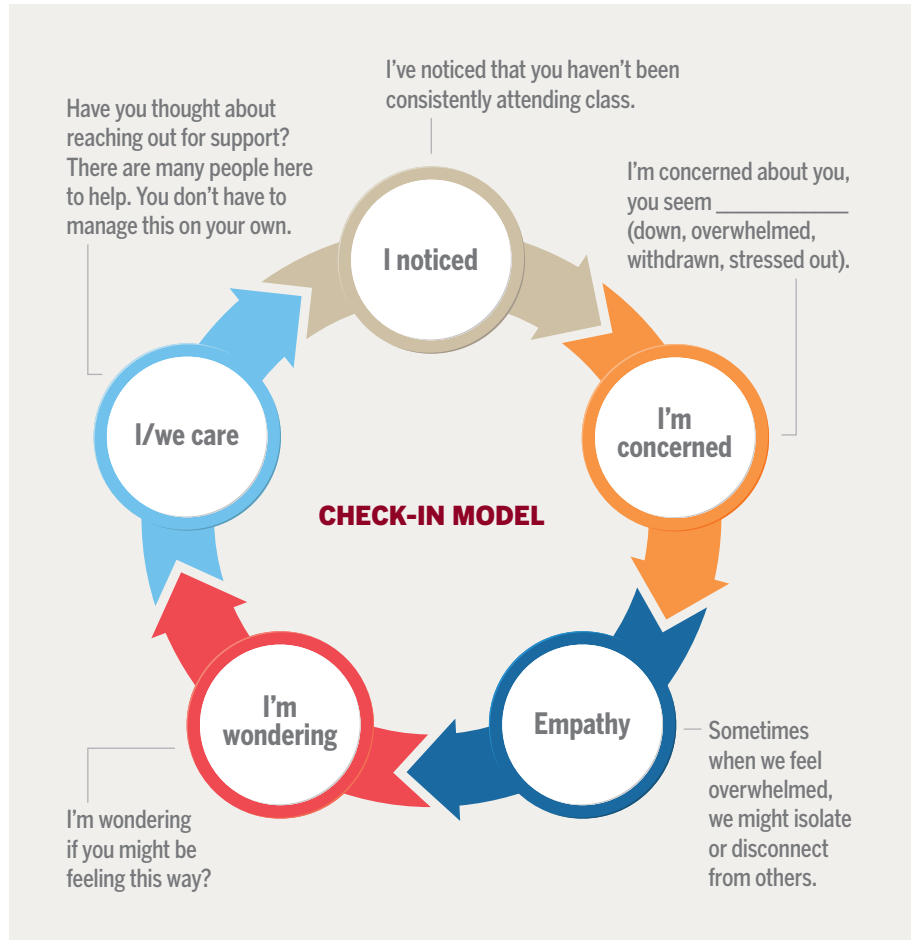
REFERENCES TO SUICIDE

- Overt references to suicide or statements of hopelessness or helplessness
- Indications of prolonged unhappiness or feelings of worthlessness
- Perceived burdensomeness
- Pessimism about the future

Guidelines for Responding

- **Initiate contact with a student about whom you are concerned; please don't ignore strange, inappropriate or concerning behavior.**
 - ▶ Sometimes students have difficulty expressing themselves directly or are ambivalent about asking for help, but they may be hoping that someone will notice their distress.
- **Talk to your student in private when you both have enough time for a conversation.**
 - ▶ “Do you have a few minutes so that we can talk?”
 - ▶ “When would be a good time for you to stop by my office so we can connect?”
- **Express your care and concern and indicate the specific behaviors that are the cause for your concern.**
 - ▶ Use “I” language that focuses on what you have observed.
 - ▶ “I’ve noticed that you haven’t been coming to class lately.”
 - ▶ “I was concerned that you missed our meeting to talk about your exam.”
 - ▶ “I am worried about you and I’m checking in because I care.”
- **Listen attentively for understanding. Observe nonverbal as well as verbal responses.**
- **Acknowledge the student's distress. Respond with empathy and validation; avoid being critical or judgmental.**
 - ▶ Consider what helps someone who is feeling stuck, scared, or vulnerable: reassurance, empathy, being seen, not feeling alone.
- **Reflect back what you hear including both content and feelings.**
 - ▶ “I’m hearing that you are feeling really overwhelmed with all of the responsibilities that you have this semester. That’s understandable.”
- **Avoid minimizing the student's situation (e.g., “That’s ok. All students feel that way.”)**
- **Help the student to identify their strengths and ask them how they are taking care of themselves.**
- **Encourage positive action by helping the student define the problem and generate coping strategies; avoid the temptation to solve the problem.**

- Ask directly how you can best help them as they take action steps forward.
- Know your limits as a help-giver. When a student needs more help than you can provide, consider making a referral to the Counseling Center.
- Please refrain from making a diagnosis or specific recommendation for treatment (e.g., “You should probably be taking medication,” or “It sounds like you have bipolar disorder.”)
- Let the student know that you would like to follow-up with them to check-in again. Follow-up is an important part of the process. Checking in again lets the student know that you care about them and that you continue to be an available resource. It also creates the opportunity to provide support as appropriate.



Referring to the Counseling Center

Many students may initially be hesitant about seeking counseling. When you have decided that professional counseling is indicated, tell the student directly and clearly why you are making the referral. It can also be helpful to share that over 40% of Lafayette students seek counseling during their college experience.

Short-term counseling is provided to all students enrolled in a degree program. If a student has difficulties that need more frequent and/or longer-term counseling to address adequately, we may suggest other resources that would be more appropriate.

All Counseling Center staff members have experience helping students with a wide range of concerns. Although we will do our best to honor a student's preference to see a specific counselor, it may result in a longer wait time depending upon schedules and availability. You are welcome to call the Center and let us know that you have referred a student.

Here are some recommendations to make an effective referral:

1. Review information about the counseling process with students using the Counseling Center website. Emphasize that services are confidential and free.
2. Offer to call the Counseling Center together from your office:
610-330-5005. **If you believe it is an emergency, you can accompany the student to the Center on the 2nd floor of Bailey Health Center. Please be sure to communicate your specific concerns to the counselor who will be meeting with the student.*
3. Discuss drop-in consultations. Consultations of up to 30 minutes are available daily on a first come, first served basis between 10 a.m.-11:30 a.m. and 1 p.m.-3:30 p.m. These sessions are designed for students who have a pressing or time-sensitive concern but who are not necessarily seeking ongoing counseling.
4. You might suggest that the student attend a couple of sessions before judging whether counseling is helpful or not. For those students who are hesitant, point out that using appropriate resources is a sign of strength and maturity.
5. Except in the case of imminent danger to self or others, it is important to allow the student to refuse counseling.
6. Following the referral, complete a One Pard Universal Form to alert the Student Support and Intervention Team that a student is struggling and would benefit from additional support.

Scan the QR code for One Pard.



Asking about Suicide

Sometimes students may confide in you that they are feeling depressed or hopeless or so overwhelmed that they don't know how to cope with the challenges they are experiencing.

Asking a student whether they are thinking about suicide can feel uncomfortable and even frightening. You cannot increase someone's risk of ending their life just by bringing up the topic. Research shows that acknowledging and talking about suicide might actually reduce suicidal thoughts. Many students feel very relieved when someone realizes they are hurting so much that they are having thoughts about not wanting to be alive. Even though someone might be thinking about suicide, it doesn't mean they have a clear plan. The opportunity to have a conversation with a caring person can significantly reduce the risk that a student will actually harm themselves.

Signs a student might be considering suicide include:

- Expressions of hopelessness about the future, or being able to change or improve
- Expressions of being a burden to friends, family, the college
- Difficulty connecting with others
- Physical signs that they have cut or injured themselves
- Giving away possessions
- Talking about "if/when I'm gone...."
- Detaching from responsibilities and routine

Events associated with increased risk include:

- Death of a family member or close friend
- Sudden breakup in a relationship
- Problems with family members, friends, or roommates
- Experiencing or causing an accident
- Legal concerns or doing something about which one is deeply ashamed
- Diagnosis of a serious illness
- Academic setbacks

If you have ANY concern that a student might be considering suicide, you should ask them directly about your concerns.

How to ask about suicide:

- "Sometimes when people are experiencing very difficult situations, they might experience thoughts of suicide; have you?"
- "Do things ever get so bad that you sometimes have thoughts of wanting to die?"

If they say yes, you can ask:

- Have you thought about how you would end your life?
- Do you have the means to follow through?

If a student indicates they are thinking seriously about ending their life, do not let them leave your office. Express appreciation for their honesty and acknowledge the courage this may have taken. Let them know that their safety is your first priority.

During business hours, call the Counseling Center **610-330-5005** and state that a student needs to be seen immediately. Accompany the student to the Counseling Center located on the 2nd floor of Bailey Health Center. Please be sure to communicate your specific concerns to the counselor who will be meeting with the student.

After business hours, call **610-330-5005** to speak with a crisis counselor and explain your concern. The crisis counselor will then speak with the student and determine next steps.

Always call Public Safety **610-330-4444** for assistance if a student is communicating via text or email that they are in immediate danger of harming themselves or someone else.

Please then complete the One Pard Universal Form to alert the Student Support and Intervention Team that a student is in need of additional support.

Scan the QR code for One Pard.



Understanding Confidentiality

Counseling Center staff members are required by law and by professional codes of ethics to protect the confidentiality of all contacts with students. The only exceptions occur in cases of imminent danger to self or others or reports of child abuse. Without a student's permission we can discuss neither the content of counseling sessions nor the fact that they are a client of the Counseling Center. These requirements are in effect even when a faculty or staff member has made the original referral to the Center. However, if the student gives their written permission, we are happy to speak with referring faculty and staff members.

While our counselors are unable to provide confidential information about a specific student without their permission, we always are able to consult with you regarding any concerns you may have about a student and discuss available support and resources. If you have any questions about the services offered by the Counseling Center or would like to consult with a counselor, please feel free to call **610-330-5005**.

Connecting Students to Peer-to-Peer Mental Health Support

There are many ways for students to support their mental health and wellbeing, and this can look different for each student. One approach is through peer support. **Togetherall** is a peer-to-peer mental health community that empowers students to anonymously seek and provide support. This online resource is moderated by mental health professionals and offers a safe space for students to connect with others who are experiencing similar feelings 24/7, 365 days a year. Togetherall also offers journaling, goal-setting and self-assessment tools, in addition to a wide range of self-guided courses to help support student mental health and well-being. Help to promote this free resource to all Lafayette students by sharing information about Togetherall.

Scan the QR code below to learn more.



Thank you for your vital role in creating a culture of care, resilience and wellbeing!

Resources for Faculty and Staff

ENGAGING STUDENTS IN CONVERSATIONS ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

Engaging students in conversations about mental health is essential to decreasing stigma and increasing help-seeking behaviors. Practice and feedback can help to build skills and increase confidence to have these meaningful conversations. **Kognito: At Risk** is a practice-based simulation for faculty and staff that builds awareness, knowledge, and skills about mental health and suicide prevention. Research has shown that the training supports skill development to lead conversations with students that build resilience, strengthen relationships and connect them with support. The training can be completed in 25-30 minutes.

Scan the QR code to complete Kognito.



SUPPORTING STUDENT WELLBEING

The Supporting Student Wellbeing Guidebook provides guidance to faculty teaching, advising, and mentoring students. The resource addresses topics including fostering students' sense of belonging, cultivating connection, promoting a growth mindset, addressing perfectionism, empowering learners from diverse backgrounds, addressing the imposter phenomenon, countering stereotype threat, promoting student growth, creating optimal challenge, implementing trauma-informed and mindfulness approaches, as well as supporting student success and enhancing faculty wellness.

Scan the QR code below to learn more.



CARING FOR YOUR HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Supporting students who are experiencing distress can be both rewarding and stressful. It is important to take care of yourself too.

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

877-240-6863 provides access to services that address personal life challenges, connect you to valuable resources and guidance, and provide confidential support in areas concerning the management of work-life issues. Learn more about the wellness and work-life balance resources available to you through the Office of Human Resources.

Scan the QR code below to learn more.



LAFAYETTE

COUNSELING CENTER

Bailey Health Center, 2nd floor
607 High Street, Easton, PA 18042

Phone: 610-330-5005

<https://counselingcenter.lafayette.edu>

*This guide was published in 2023.