

- The Behavioral Health staff consists of professionally trained and licensed psychiatrists, psychologists, clinical nurse specialists, social workers, and mental health counselors with expertise in caring for college-age students.
- The first meeting is an intake or consultation session.

Students in Crisis

A crisis is a situation in which an individual's usual style of coping is no longer effective, and the emotional or physiological response begins to escalate. As emotions intensify, coping becomes less effective, until the person becomes disoriented, nonfunctional, or attempts harm. If a student is in a serious mental health crisis, you might see or hear the following:

- Suicidal statements or suicide attempts
- Written or verbal violence or acting out violently
- Destruction of property or other criminal acts
- Extreme anxiety resulting in panic reactions
- Inability to communicate (e.g., garbled or slurred speech, disjointed thoughts)
- Loss of contact with reality (e.g., seeing or hearing things that aren't there, expressing beliefs or actions at odds with reality)
- Highly disruptive behavior (e.g., hostility, aggression, violence)



What to Do When You Suspect a Serious Crisis

If you believe there may be imminent danger of harm to a student or someone else, as evidenced by these crisis symptoms, immediately call the Boston University Police (617-353-2121) or Medical Center Public Safety (617-414-4444). If you need help in assessing the situation, call the Office of the Dean of Students at 617-353-4126 between the hours of 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. After hours you can call 617-353-3569 and ask to be referred to the dean on call. For urgent situations, Behavioral Medicine providers are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, at 617-353-3569.

BOSTON UNIVERSITY RESOURCES

Boston University Police 24 hours	617-353-2121
Medical Center Public Safety 24 hours	617-414-4444
Student Health Services 24 hours (Medical Clinician on call after hours)	617-353-3575
Behavioral Medicine 24 hours (Mental Health Clinician on call after hours)	617-353-3569
Crisis Coordinator 24 hours (Crisis Coordinator on call after hours)	617-353-3569
Dean of Students (business hours) Dean on call (after hours)	617-353-4126 617-353-3569
Educational Resource Center	617-358-7077
University Service Center	617-358-1818
Career Services	617-353-3590
University Chaplains	617-353-3560
Disability Services	617-353-3658



CONTACT:

Office of the Dean of Students

775 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, MA 02215
www.bu.edu/dos

Boston University Student Health Services and Dean of Students Office



A Quick Guide for Faculty and Staff

Helping Students in Distress

Life at Boston University can be very stressful for students as they face the challenge of a highly competitive academic environment and begin to assume adult roles and responsibilities. Many students come to college with family difficulties, financial problems, or other struggles that challenge their ability to succeed in this environment.

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Faculty and staff are often the first to witness early signs of distress as they are played out on campus in classrooms and residence halls. Students may initially seek assistance from faculty and staff members, particularly when they perceive you as available and willing to listen. In addition to the support you can provide, there are also professional support services available to students on campus through the Dean of Students and Behavioral Medicine. Both staffs are available to consult with you about providing a student with the help that he or she may need. **Privacy laws do not preclude you from reaching out to express your concern about a student in distress.**

How to Identify Students in Distress

We have seen in our society that there can be tragic results when a person, often owing to underlying psychological problems, feels pushed beyond his or her ability to tolerate the stresses of life. Students dealing with personal issues or problems tend to show signs that they are struggling in some way. The severity of the distress is one factor that will determine the best response. Many students may feel depressed or upset at one time or another. However, when symptoms of distress are persistent over a long period of time or when they interfere with academic responsibilities and social relationships, it may be a cause for concern. Following is a list of signs that may indicate that a student is in distress:

Academic Signs

- Deterioration in quality of work
- Missed assignments or appointments
- Repeated absence from class or lab
- Continual requests for unusual accommodations (late papers, extensions, postponed exams, etc.)
- Essays or papers that have themes of hopelessness, social isolation, rage, or despair
- Lack of engagement in participation-oriented classes or with lab mates
- Inappropriate disruptions or monopolizing classroom time

Physical or Psychological Signs

- Excessive anxiety or panic
- Apathy, lack of energy, a change in sleeping or eating habits, or dramatic weight gain or loss

- Marked changes in personal hygiene, work habits, or social behavior
- Mood elevation
- Isolation or withdrawal
- Overtly suicidal thoughts, such as referring to suicide as a current option
- Giving away treasured personal possessions
- Increased irritability or aggressive behavior
- Bizarre thinking, seemingly at odds with the reality of the situation (such as apparently paranoid ideas)
- Excessive use of alcohol or other drugs

Other Factors to Consider

- Direct statements indicating family problems, personal losses such as death of a family member or the break-up of a relationship
- Expressions of concern about a student by peers
- Written note or verbal statement that has a sense of hopelessness or finality
- Your sense, however vague, that something is seriously amiss

What You Can Do for a Student in Distress

Taking the step to assist a student can save a life...perhaps save many lives. It is a positive and life-affirming step to take. An individual who is distressed often wants help but doesn't know how to ask. You can play an essential role by expressing your concern in a caring, nonjudgmental way.

- Find a private, comfortable place to talk. Give the student your undivided attention. It is possible that just a few minutes of effective listening on your part may be enough to help the student feel comfortable about what to do next. Ask if the student has ever talked about this problem with anyone else, including a counselor. Try to get an accurate understanding of the issues, and, if appropriate, encourage the student to talk about the situation with a professional.
- In your own words, express your concern using statements like, "I'm concerned that...".
- Ask open-ended questions. The student may choose not to answer, but may feel relieved to know you are trying to understand.

- Don't feel compelled to find a solution. Often, listening is enough.
- Suggest that the student can get more help if needed. You can give this brochure to the student and point out the resources available at BU.
- Don't hesitate to ask for support from the Dean of Students Office or Student Health Services, Behavioral Medicine Department.

How to Make a Referral

If you think that the situation is urgent, call Student Health Services and ask that the student be evaluated immediately.

- For assistance in emergency situations, consider calling the Boston University Police at 617-353-2121 or Medical Center Public Safety at 617-414-4444.
- Do not attempt to make a referral when the student is so upset and confused that he or she cannot understand or listen to you. Wait until the student has calmed down enough to be able to converse and respond to your suggestions.
- Suggest that the student make an appointment at Student Health Services (617-353-3569 or see the "Boston University Resources" list).
- If necessary, you can help the student make an appointment. Call while the student is with you. Write down the appointment details, including time, provider's name, and location.
- In an urgent situation, if you do not believe that it is safe to wait for an appointment, you may bring the student to Behavioral Medicine (881 Commonwealth Avenue). Call ahead, if possible to 617-353-3569.

If the student is hesitant to make an appointment, explain to the student that:

- Counseling at Behavioral Medicine is confidential. This means that information about the student cannot be released to other Boston University offices, family members, or professors without the student's written permission (except when the student is in danger of harming himself or herself or others). Counseling records are not kept with any academic records and are protected by law.
- The services are free to currently registered full-time Boston University students.