

Caring for Our Bobcats

A Guide to Supporting Distressed Students from the Office of Student Affairs

You can make a difference!

College students, like all of us, experience stress and difficult situations. Faculty and staff members play a critical role in supporting student well-being and identifying students who need additional assistance. Many students can be helped with empathy, validation, and connection to resources.

If a student tells you they are struggling, **believe them**. Never assume that a student is fine or that someone else is already aware of the situation. If a student reaches out to you, they trust you and want your help. This guide can help you initiate a conversation with a student of concern and refer a student to appropriate resources.

Thanks for all that you do to make FSU a great place to live and learn!

Signs of Distress in College Students

Academic Indicators

- Noticeable decline in the quality of coursework or class participation
- Disruptive behavior in class
- Incapacitating test anxiety
- Increased absences
- Repeated requests for special accommodations

Physical & Appearance-Related Indicators

- Drastic weight loss or gain
- Changes in eating or sleeping patterns
- Decline in personal hygiene
- Low energy, restlessness, or hyperactivity

Substance Use-Related Indicators

- Attending class intoxicated or smelling like alcohol or cannabis
- Overuse of alcohol or other drugs

Indicators that Require Immediate Response:

- Threats of harm to self or others
- Talking about death, suicide, and/or having the means for suicide
- Giving away possessions
- Sudden calmness after severe distress
- Creative work or writing indicating extreme hopelessness, despair, anger, or isolation

Behavioral & Emotional Indicators

- Significant changes in mood or personality
- Excessive or irrational worrying
- Expressions of hopelessness or helplessness
- Trouble concentrating or completing tasks
- Difficulty working with others
- Isolation from friends, family, or classmates
- Irritability, aggressiveness or agitation,
- Reckless behavior or excessive risk-taking
- Irrational conversation, paranoia, distortions of reality, or bizarre behavior

Worried about a student's safety or well-being?

The Student Counseling Center and University Police are key resources for assessing student safety.

If you think a student may be suicidal, ask directly: "Are you thinking about killing yourself?"

If the student says yes, contact University Police immediately. Stay with the student if it is safe to do so.

How to Help a Distressed Student

- Speak with the student privately.
- Share your concerns directly and honestly. Be clear about the behavior that is concerning.
- Check for suicidality and safety concerns. Get immediate help if needed.
- Listen openly and nonjudgmentally.
 - Support the student with problem-solving by asking questions like:
 - “What’s worked for you before?”
 - “How have you overcome similar challenges in the past?”
- Refer the student to campus resources.
 - Offer to walk a student to the office if appropriate – this can reduce anxiety and increase follow-through.
- Thank the student for sharing with you.
 - Normalize struggles and seeking support for mental health.
 - Praise seeking help as a sign of strength, not a weakness.
- Follow up with the student.

When a Student Initiates

If a student says they are struggling:

- Believe them and thank them for sharing.
- Reflect what you heard.
 - “It sounds like you’re really overwhelmed.”
- Invite them to share more if they want to.
- Connect them with campus resources.
 - “Would you like information about the Student Counseling Center?”

Where to Refer a Student

Student Counseling Center

☎ 301-687-4234

📍 EHSC 1st floor, Suite 118

For: Mental health concerns

Student Accessibility Services Office

☎ 301-687-3064

📍 Pullen 150

For: Accommodations and disability support

SAFE Office

☎ 301-687-4761

📍 Pullen 109

For: Alcohol and drug use concerns

Captain James A. Graham Veterans Center

☎ 301-687-4409

📍 Veterans Center

For: Support for student veterans

Student Billing Office

☎ 301-687-4321

📍 Pullen 148

For: Billing questions and account holds

Center for Academic Advising & Retention

☎ 301-687-3404

📍 Pullen Hall 139

For: Academic challenges and advising support

Student Health Center

☎ 301-687-4310

📍 EHSC 1st floor, Suite 118

For: Health and wellness concerns

Center for International Education

☎ 301-687-4714

📍 Pullen Hall 108

For: Support for international students

Students of Concern

**Worried about a student?
Submit a Student of Concern referral.**
No concern is too small.

Questions?
Contact Student Affairs at
301-687-4312.

