



# Interacting with a Distressed Student

## Signs of Distress or Reasons an Individual May Need Assistance

- Sullen, withdrawn, or crying
- Statements that reflect hopelessness
- Rapid breathing or panic
- Agitated or irritable
- Argumentative
- Changes in typical behaviors or daily grooming

## Interventions - Responding Using the 3 P's

Use the below strategies when you are not concerned for the safety of the student, for yourself, or others. Contact the CMU Counseling Center for mental health emergencies that do not involve immediate safety concerns. Immediate safety concerns should be directed to 911 or CMU PD (989-774-3081).

### Presence: Responding with Empathy

- Express concern and a desire to help
- Use a neutral facial expression and open body posture
- Use eye contact that shows you are listening
- Validate feelings and experiences:  
"That must have been very hard for you"
- Use "I" statements: "I see how frustrated you are"
- Refrain from asking "why" questions
- Refrain from multi-tasking while listening
- Refrain from sharing your own similar experiences that can be interpreted as minimizing
- Refrain from touching the individual unless given permission
- Always explain your intentions before taking action

### Paraphrasing: The Art of Listening

- Focus on the student, not your response
- Pay attention to their story
  - How is it told
  - Use of their language
  - Voice and body language
  - Feelings expressed
- Repeat back your understand of what you heard
- Summarize using their words and yours
- Ask if you understood them correctly
- Clarification and feedback
  - Share observable behaviors from the moment
  - Ask open-ended questions

### Problem-solving

- What does the individual need?
- What are they asking for?
- If concerns for safety have been identified, ask directly about thoughts of suicide
- How can you assist within your role?
- Offer choice as much as possible
- You are responsible "to" them, not "for" them
- Maintain professional boundaries while also showing compassion
- Brainstorm possible solutions
- Recommend campus resources
- Check to see if their concern has been resolved when possible
- Do they need additional assistance or resources?

## When More Assistance is Needed

### Call CMU Counseling Center:

- Rapid or disoriented speech
- Difficulty communicating their needs
- Loss of contact with reality  
(seeing/hearing things others cannot)

### Call 911 or CMU PD for:

- Suicidal thoughts or behaviors
- Unstable motor activity
- Homicidal or aggressive behaviors that threaten safety

## CMU Resources

### Counseling Center

(989)774-3381 | [www.counsel.cmich.edu](http://www.counsel.cmich.edu)

### CMU CARES

File a CARE Report:

(989)774-3346 | [www.cmich.edu/cmucares](http://www.cmich.edu/cmucares)

## 24/7 Resources

- |                               |                        |                        |                            |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| • CMU Counseling Center       | 989-774-3381 (press 3) | • Trevor Lifeline      | 866-488-7386   text 678678 |
| • Suicide and Crisis Lifeline | Dial "988"             | • Trans Lifeline       | 877-565-8860               |
| • Crisis Text Line            | text HOME to 741741    | • Veterans Crisis Line | Dial "988" then press 1    |