Recognizing and Responding to Students in Distress
A Guide for MHC Faculty and Staff

Mount Holyoke College Campus Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Phone</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AccessAbility Services</td>
<td>413-538-2550</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alcohol and Drug Awareness Project (ADAP)</td>
<td>413-538-2616</td>
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<tr>
<td>Campus Police</td>
<td>413-538-2304</td>
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<tr>
<td>College Health Services</td>
<td>413-538-2242</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dean of Students</td>
<td>413-538-2550</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dean of Studies/Class Advisors</td>
<td>413-538-2855</td>
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<td>Dean of the College</td>
<td>413-538-2481</td>
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<tr>
<td>Office of Diversity and Inclusion</td>
<td>413-538-3569</td>
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<tr>
<td>Office of Religious and Spiritual Life</td>
<td>413-538-2054</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ombudsperson</td>
<td>413-538-2413</td>
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<tr>
<td>Residential Life</td>
<td>413-538-2088</td>
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Mount Holyoke College Counseling Service

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hours when school is in session</td>
<td>8:30am-5:00pm, Monday-Friday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>413-538-2037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website</td>
<td><a href="http://www.mtholyoke.edu/counseling">www.mtholyoke.edu/counseling</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Emergency</td>
<td>During office hours: Walk-in or call</td>
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<td></td>
<td>After hours: Call Campus Police</td>
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Safety Concerns

If there are signs of safety risk, ask if the student is considering suicide. Someone considering suicide will likely be relieved that you inquired. Asking will not put the idea in her/his head.

Unless students are suicidal or may be a danger to others, the decision to access resources is theirs. If they would like to think about it when you offer referral information, it is okay. Let them know that you are interested in checking in within a few days.

If the situation represents an immediate safety risk to the student or anyone else, call Campus Police immediately at 413-538-2304.
Recognizing Students in Distress

ACADEMIC AND EMPLOYMENT INDICATORS

- Repeated absences from class or employment
- Missed assignments, exams, appointments, or meetings
- Deterioration in quality or quantity of work
- Extreme disorganization or erratic performance
- Written or artistic expression of unusual violence, morbidity, social isolation, despair, or confusion; essays or papers that focus on suicide or death
- Repeated seeking of special provisions (extensions, changing work hours)
- Patterns of perfectionism resulting in great distress
- Overblown or disproportionate response to grades, evaluations, or requests for improvement

BEHAVIORAL AND EMOTIONAL INDICATORS

- Direct statements indicating distress, family problems, or loss
- Angry or hostile outbursts, yelling, or aggressive comments
- More withdrawn or more animated than usual
- Expressions of hopelessness or worthlessness; frequent crying or tearfulness
- Expressions of severe anxiety or irritability
- Excessively demanding or dependent behavior
- Repeated lack of response to outreach
- Uncharacteristic shakiness, tremors, fidgeting, or pacing
- Isolating self in room, lab, etc.
- Statements that may be suicidal in nature, e.g., “I want to go to sleep and not wake up”

PHYSICAL INDICATORS

- Deterioration in physical appearance or personal hygiene
- Excessive fatigue, exhaustion, or repeatedly falling asleep during the day
- Visible changes in weight, or statements about change in appetite or sleep
- Noticeable cuts, bruises, or burns
- Frequent or chronic illness
- Disorganized, rapid, or slurred speech; confusion
- Uncharacteristic inability to make eye contact
- Frequently bleary-eyed or smelling of alcohol
- Visible bingeing, purging, over-exercising

Responding to Students in Distress

Once you have identified a student in distress, you have the option of reaching out to her/him yourself, consulting with a colleague/supervisor, or connecting with campus resources for support and consultation. Your decision will probably be influenced by:

- How well you know the student
- Your relationship with the student
- Your ability to give time to the situation
- Your familiarity with the situation
- The nature/severity of the problem

Suggestions for Talking to Students in Distress

If you choose to talk with a student yourself, here are some suggestions:

- Meet privately with the student (choose a time and place where you will not be interrupted).
- Set a positive tone. Express concern.
- Point out specific signs you’ve observed. (“I’ve noticed lately that you….”)
- Ask, “How are things going for you?”
- Listen attentively to the student’s response and encourage her/him to talk. (“Can you tell me more about that?”)
- Sometimes students are slow to talk; allow time to tell the story. Allow silences in the conversation.
- Ask open-ended questions that deal directly with the issues without judging. (“What problems has this situation caused you?”)
- Restate what you have heard as well as your concern.
- Ask the student what would help. (“What do you need to do to get back on track?”)
- Avoid making sweeping promises of confidentiality, particularly if the student presents a safety risk to self or others. Students who are suicidal need swift professional intervention; assurances of absolute confidentiality may get in the way.
- Suggest resources and referrals. Share any information you have about the resource you are suggesting and the potential benefit to the student.

Referring Students to Class Advisors

If the situation involves academics, consider making a referral to the student’s Class Advisor first or simultaneously. Academic issues or concerns can often be efficiently addressed through direct, timely contact with a Class Advisor.

Referring Students to the Counseling Service

There are several ways to refer students to the Counseling Service. With all options, it is important to communicate concern, as well your commitment to helping students get the support they need. Depending on the urgency you might:

- Suggest the Counseling Service website: www.mtholyoke.edu/counseling
- Offer a Resource Card (available through the Counseling Service)
- Suggest making an appointment independently or while with you
- Walk the student over to meet with the triage clinician
- Offer an off-campus resource: ULifeline (www.ulifeline.org), the National Suicide Prevention Hotline (800-273-8255)