



Signs & Symptoms of Stress in Students

Your Observations

- Social isolation, withdrawal, lethargy
- Inability to focus on a specific topic in a conversation or activity
- Disorganized thinking and speech; feelings that are inappropriate to the situation; lack of affect or other evidence that a student is out of touch with reality
- Expression of feelings of persecution; strong mistrust of others
- Violent outbursts
- Signs of excessive alcohol or drug use
- Expressions of general unhappiness over a period of several weeks
- Frequent class absence or disappearance over extended periods
- Gain or loss of significant amounts of weight
- Abrupt change in manner, style, or personal hygiene

Student's Complaints

- Marked anxiety, extreme restlessness, inability to concentrate or relax
- Marked increase or decrease in appetite
- Marked increase or decrease in sleep
- Loss of interest in formerly pleasurable or meaningful activities, such as class, social life, relationships
- Expression of irrational fears
- Physical complaints without a medical cause, such as headache, stomach pains, etc.
- Unusual ritualistic or repetitive behavior
- Chronic fatigue
- Suicidal thoughts, plans, or threats
- Overwhelming financial obligations

Student's Background

- History of emotional disturbances (depression, alcohol, drug use, eating disorder, anxiety)
- Traumatic family event(s) such as recent separation or divorce of parents, serious illness or death of a family member, or physical, emotional, or sexual abuse
- Recent loss of an important person (by death or separation)
- Recent loss of esteem
- Previous period of poor functioning

Guidelines for Responding

- Share your interest and concern openly, directly, and with care
- Set clear limits
- Maintain a student's privacy. Do not promise confidentiality. Rather, inform a student that you will use discretion if seeking outside assistance.
- Help a student tell his or her story. Offer the opportunity to listen to whatever is on the student's mind. Demonstrate an understanding of what the student discloses.
- Clarify vague, confusing, or disturbing student disclosures. Ask "What do you mean by..."
- Develop response options together
- Consider with the student the consequences of doing more of the same
- Consult with colleagues, dean, counseling staff, or others you feel you need to for additional perspectives
- Suggest a referral to the counseling center, chaplain, career planning, or other community resources
- Follow up. Offer and be open to further contact.

Consultation

- It's always a good idea to consult with colleagues, dean, counselors, or others who might be able to give you feedback and suggestions for working with a problem student
- Often a referral is not necessary; approaching the student with your concerns can make an immediate impact on his or her behavior or performance in class
- No one has the expertise to handle everything an individual may present to them, so we all need to be familiar with the process of asking for help or referring a problem to someone who has the training, experience, and position to do the best job

Consider a Referral When

- The problems or requests made are beyond your level of competence
- There are personality differences that interfere with your ability to work with the student
- The boundaries of your role make it unwise to work with a student on personal issues
- A student expression of preference (either directly or indirectly) to speak with someone else about their concerns
- After some time and effort you feel like you are not making progress in helping this student

Referral Guidelines

- Consider helping the student make an appointment, perhaps by walking with the student to the office where the referral is being made or letting the student call from your office
- After a referral, let the student volunteer information they want to share. It may not be necessary for you to have details of a student's interaction with another agency. In fact, at times the student may wish to stop talking to you about the problem altogether. Communicate continued concern and openness to help.
- Once a referral is made, communication between the student and the referral agency is often confidential. You may be curious and feel unfinished in your work with the student, but you may have to let it be that way as the student begins to work with someone else.
- Do not expect miracles. Behaviors, attitudes, and feelings take time to change and a student may show slow progress for a while, or none at all. Trust the process and again communicate your continued concern and availability.