

A Culture of Support

Creating a “Culture of Support” at MSU helps to assist students who are struggling by directing them to the appropriate resources. Intervening early helps prevent small problems from developing into more serious ones, like depression, anxiety, substance abuse, violence or suicide. The U.S. Naval Academy adopted such a program in the 90s to address their high suicide rate, and saw mortality rates decrease after its implementation. Because faculty and staff have such close contact with students, they play a vital role in recognizing at-risk students and extending a guiding hand.

There are a few basic tenets to a Culture of Support:

Recognizing a Student in Distress: If we’re paying attention, we can often observe some signs that our students may be struggling (see side bar). It’s easy to become frustrated with students who may not be performing up to standards or whose behavior may be problematic, but it is at this time that students need our attention.

Reaching Out at these moments may mean the difference between student success, struggle, failure or risk. Checking in with students, pointing out what you’ve observed, and stating your concerns shows that you care and that faculty/staff at MSU are here to help our students succeed. Our tendency can be to avoid getting into personal issues, especially if we’re uncomfortable with them. Remember that you are only discussing enough to help them brainstorm solutions or to refer them to the appropriate resources.

Making Referrals: There are a great many resources on campus to help students, depending on whether their problems are academic, professional, relational or emotional. Students don’t always know their options, but you can be very helpful to them if you know some referral sources. You can call CPS at any time to consult about a student you’re concerned about, learn about campus resources, or help a student schedule an appointment.

De-Stigmatizing Help-Seeking and Counseling Services can be useful, as many students are reluctant to make their problems known—even to those of us who can help them. Keep in mind the following:

- Talk openly about CPS as an available resource
- Keep CPS pamphlets visible and available
- Don’t “avoid the issue,” which can communicate it’s not OK to struggle or seek help
- Normalize their challenges and the fact that many students have difficulties similar to theirs
- De-bunk the idea that help-seeking is a sign of weakness
- Don’t joke about mental health issues or put down counseling
- Share your own struggles and times you’ve sought help or counseling
- Share CPS usage statistics and general information

If you’d like to learn more about creating a Culture of Support in your department or helping students in distress, give us a call!

**◆◆Counseling & Psychological Services◆◆
994-4531**

Signs of Distress

Increased absenteeism from class or work
Failure to complete work/assignments
Decrease in academic performance or GPA
Increased or excessive substance use/abuse
Withdrawal or isolation from others
Changes in behavior, mood or attitude
Making comments about hurting self or others
Frequent talk or writing about death or suicide
Violent content in writings/blogs
Losses or perceived failures
Persistent difficulties in working with others
Recent trauma: death, assault, rape, accident
Visits to ER for suicidal thoughts/attempts
Cuts or scars on arms/legs
Panic attacks in class
Going off of prescribed medication
Students who don’t access necessary services

Resources

CPS:	994-4531
Campus Police:	994-2121 or 911
24-hour Helpline	586-3333
VOICE Center	994-7069
Student Health	994-2311
Dean’s Office	994-2826