Ask the question.
Make a call.
Save a life.

A program of the University Counseling Center
What Problems Require Professional Evaluation?

The problems or risk factors below may seem innocuous but often precede suicide attempts and merit evaluation, particularly when several occur together.

- Persisting difficulties falling or staying asleep
- Intolerable anxiety, inability to stop thinking, or severe agitation
- Repeated panic attacks
- Persisting sadness, irritability, or emptiness
- Thinking, talking, or writing about suicide, death, or dying
- Using alcohol or drugs to cope or feel better
- A recent crisis in, or loss of, a close personal relationship
- Intolerable feelings of personal failure
- Feelings of being trapped, helpless, or desperate
- Inability to look toward the future with some hope and optimism

Suicidal crises are typically triggered by a loss or perceived loss of relationships, activities or meaningful goals, i.e., being in academic jeopardy. Some students are especially vulnerable to develop suicidal feelings. Those with psychiatric disorders like depression or anxiety disorder, schizophrenia, alcohol and substance abuse conditions, and certain highly impulsive or aggressive “personalities” are especially susceptible. But, a psychiatric disorder alone does not create a suicidal crisis.

What Behaviors Require Immediate Attention?

- A student who has caused serious injury to himself or herself regardless of the student’s stated intention (e.g., pill overdose, alcohol poisoning, serious self-mutilation)
- A student who has threatened suicide, either verbally or in writing, or has somehow made it known that he or she wants or intends to commit suicide (e.g., through e-mail or “away messages”, or giving away prized belongings)
- A student who is making plans or seeking the means for suicide (e.g., obtaining ropes, weapons, pills)

Do you know…?

- Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among college students.
- Students are most likely to disclose suicidal thoughts and feelings to a friend or other trusted person.
- There is help and hope. A University of Illinois study found that early intervention with college students has prevented suicide.[1]

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What Can I Do To Help?

Talking about suicide is uncomfortable but it’s important to do so and to remain involved. You have a role to play and we can work with you to help the student. You are not alone!

Step 1- Ask the Question.

Ask the distressed student if he or she is thinking about suicide. You might say...

■ “I’ve noticed that you... (list the risk factors you’ve noticed). Are you thinking that suicide may be an option?”

■ “Are you feeling as if you have nothing to live for?”

■ “Do you find yourself thinking a lot about death or about killing yourself?”

Use whatever words feel comfortable for you, but be direct. Asking the question will not increase the risk for suicide. In fact, it’s likely to reduce the risk. So, ask directly and be non-judgmental and accepting regardless of what the student says.

Step 2- Make A Call.

Preferably with the student present, call the Counseling Center, University Police or local emergency services. Inform them of your conversation and observations. Be specific. Remember secrets are dangerous when a life is at risk. Of course, we make every effort to respect privacy.

Your objective is to link the distressed individual with professionals who can evaluate and treat suicide. The emergency services listed below have the legal authority to intervene when suicidal students steadfastly refuse evaluation and treatment. Unless your personal safety is in jeopardy, stay with the student until professional or emergency services responds.

Sometimes distressed students display risk factors but deny suicidal thoughts and feelings and have not demonstrated behaviors that require immediate attention. These students need evaluation and treatment nonetheless and may welcome your assistance. Express your concern and offer to call the Counseling Center for an appointment. Later, follow-up; ask the student how it went.

Where Can I Get Help?

For Consultation and Further Evaluation:

■ University Counseling Center
  Clinical and Consulting Services (518-442-5800) and
  Middle Earth Peer Hotline (518-442-5777)
  – evenings/weekends

■ University Health Center (518-442-5229)

For Emergency Services:

■ University Police Department or local police – (911)

■ Albany County Mobile Crisis Unit (518-447-9650)
  – a 24 hour service
How Can We Build a More Caring UAlbany Community?

Little by little, one interaction or encounter at a time, we can build an inclusive and caring community that is responsive to the needs of each and every student. Here are some additional things that we can do to make our campus community more supportive for all students.

✔ Practice and teach problem solving and conflict resolution skills
✔ Support strong connections to family, friends, and the University community
✔ Cultivate and communicate compassion and responsibility for others
✔ Encourage and support students, friends and colleagues seeking help
✔ Report potentially dangerous situations (including possession of firearms) to the University Police Department
✔ Take the time to learn more about available student support and mental health services

Thank you and remember...

Ask the question. Make a call.

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Contact the University Counseling Center at 518-442-5800 or consultation@albany.edu for more information, consultation or training on suicide prevention.

UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY
State University of New York

University Counseling Center
Division for Student Success

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