

# Responding to Student Mental Health Issues

As staff and faculty who work on the front lines, you might notice when students are struggling with mental health or other personal issues. As such, the Bellevue College Counseling Center wants to offer you suggestions on how to support and respond to these students.

Our students are living through an unprecedented and challenging time, which includes the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing racial injustice. In March of 2020, the Counseling Center began providing counseling services remotely via a secure video platform. Prior to their first counseling session, all students complete an intake form, and the data (March 2020 through September 2022) from these intakes indicate that 75% of the students seeking services are struggling with anxiety, 60% are experiencing depression/sadness, and 10% have thoughts/feelings of suicide (students check all-that-apply). Students also indicated that they have had thoughts of no longer attending college because of mental health-related concerns (45%). In addition, students also shared that the pandemic has negatively impacted their lives in the following areas:

- Mental health (52%)
- Academics (48%)
- Motivation or focus (48%)
- Loneliness or isolation (46%)
- Missed experiences or opportunities (42%)
- Relationships – significant other, friends, family (37%)
- Career/employment (34%)
- Financial (33%)

## General Guidelines

As you interact with your students, pay attention, and notice if any of your students report:

- feeling “down,” stressed, anxious, sad, etc.
- experiencing a life-stressor (e.g., illness, unemployment, change in relationship, etc.)
- change in mood, behavior, academic performance, attendance, participation, etc.
- express thoughts or feelings of suicide or self-harm.

Remember, you do not have to be a trained mental health provider to notice that something may be going on, to express your concern, or to show you care.

## How to Let a Student Know You Are Concerned

If you are concerned about a student, let them know by talking to them directly (face-to-face) or by sending them a message to check in. It can make a significant difference when a trusted individual reaches out to show care, concern, and compassion.

## Face-to-Face

When meeting with a student directly face-to-face, be sure to do so one-on-one and not in front of others. This protects the student's privacy and reduces embarrassment.

### Sample Script:

"Hi (*insert student name*). I'm glad we could meet today. I've been a little concerned about you and just wanted to check in and see how you are doing. (*Insert any relevant observations of what has raised your concerns, e.g., I noticed that you have been sleeping in class; have seemed distracted; have been missing class, have expressed feelings of anxiety/depression, etc.*)"

## Message of Concern

Below is a sample message you can send to your student(s).

### Sample Message:

Hello (*insert student name*),

I want to reach out to check in. How are you doing? I've noticed... (*Insert any relevant observations of what has raised your concerns, e.g., I noticed that you have been sleeping in class; have seemed distracted; have been missing class, have expressed feelings of anxiety/depression, etc.*)

I also want to let you know that Bellevue College has a Counseling Center available to help you and other students. The services are free and confidential. Appointments are available remotely (online) and on-campus/in-person. Here is more information about our BC Counseling Center:

1. [Counseling Center Website](#)
2. **How to Make an Appointment**
  - Option 1 - [Submit an Online Appointment Request](#)
    - *Once your information is received, the Counseling Center staff will contact you within 1-2 business days to confirm the appointment.*
  - Option 2 - Call the Counseling Center: 425-564-5747.
3. **What Does a Counseling Appointment Via Video Look Like?**
  - This is a [short video](#) showing how counselors provide counseling appointments via a secure video meeting.

Another option for free support is the King County 24-hour Crisis Clinic Hotline, which can be reached at (206) 461-3222 or 1-800-244-5767. There is also a 24-hour Crisis Text Line: text HEAL to 741741.

Please let me know how I can support you.

*Insert Your Name*

## Do & Don't Chart

Below is a modified "Do and Don't" chart from the American Psychological Association (APA) about what one can do if one believes that a student might be struggling.

Do	Don't
Show care by noticing changes in behavior. For example: "You don't seem like yourself lately. Is there something going on?" Invite students to connect via email, phone, office hours, etc.	Push for information or ask pointed questions.
Schedule regular check-ins with students you are concerned about.	Assume that no response to a check-in means your support is still not needed.
Lend an ear. Give a casual invitation like, "Let's talk."	Ignore concerns or minimize what has happened.
Do more listening than talking.	Dominate the conversation.
Provide opportunities for students to express their feelings.	Recount explicit traumatizing details of the events.
Remain calm when referring to and discussing the events.	Describe these events as a catastrophe or disaster.
Keep to routines as much as possible.	Give surprise assignments or make last-minute schedule changes.

Additional Reading: [Teachers Supporting Students](#)

### Consult with a Member of the Counseling Team

The counselors are available to consult with you regarding your concerns, provide resources, or help you determine how to talk to a student of concern. To schedule a consultation appointment, [submit an online appointment request](#), call 425-564-5747, or stop by our front desk (U 201).

Be sure to indicate that you are an employee seeking a consultation.

### Referral to the CARE Team

If you are concerned about a student, we recommend that you submit your concern to the CARE Team in addition to reaching out to the student. Letting the CARE Team know your concerns can be helpful in getting the student connected with other campus supports and resources. It can also be useful for the CARE Team to know if additional concerns regarding the

student have been expressed by other members of the campus community. Submit a CARE referral [here](#).

## Secondary Trauma/Vicarious Trauma

Just as our students are struggling, we too are struggling. As professionals in higher education, we hear about or witness the emotional distress of our students every day, which can lead to our own emotional reactions (e.g., anxiety, sadness, anger, etc.). These experiences can also lead to what is known as vicarious trauma or secondary trauma, which can have some of the following impacts:

- Increased anxiety and concern about safety
- Intrusive negative thoughts and images related to students' traumatic stories
- Fatigue and physical complaints
- Feelings of numbness or detachment from students and peers
- Diminished concentration and difficulty with decision making
- Desire to physically or emotionally withdraw from others
- Feelings of professional inadequacy

Additional Reading: [The Impact of Secondary Trauma on Educators](#)

## Practice Self-Care

If you notice yourself having a negative reaction, be sure to check-in with yourself and monitor your boundaries. This is where self-care becomes important. Here are some self-care strategies:

- Increase your self-observation - recognize and chart your signs of stress, vicarious trauma and burnout.
- Engage in relaxing and self-soothing activities, such as deep breathing/meditation, journaling, listening to music, watching a movie, reading, etc.
- Look after your physical and mental wellbeing.
- Maintain a healthy work/life balance - have outside interests.
- Be realistic about what you can accomplish.
- Take regular breaks, take time off when you need to.
- Seek social support from colleagues, family members.
- Use peer support and opportunities to debrief.
- Take up training opportunities.
- Seek group or individual therapy.

Additional Reading: [Vicarious trauma: signs and strategies for coping \(bma.org.uk\)](https://www.bma.org.uk/vicarious-trauma-signs-and-strategies-for-coping)

## **Self-Care Resources**

- [Employee Assistance Program \(EAP\)](#)
  - Free and confidential counseling and resources
  - 877-313-4455
- [Psychology Today Find a Therapist Search](#)
  - Search by: Location, insurance type, issues or concerns, language(s) spoken by the counselor, etc.
- [The Washington Counselors of Color Network](#)