



FACULTY AND STAFF GUIDE:
RESPONDING TO STUDENTS IN DISTRESS



SAINT MARY'S COLLEGE OF CALIFORNIA
COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES
(CAPS)

Spring, 2022

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**See our website for information regarding remote services during COVID-19:
<https://www.stmarys-ca.edu/counseling-and-psychological-services-caps> **

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CAPS'S ROLE IN ASSISTING STUDENTS

COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

CAPS assists students with emotional and developmental concerns and helps facilitate personal growth and academic success. Services offered include: psychological evaluation, counseling and psychotherapy for individuals, couples, and groups, crisis intervention, alcohol and other drug assessment, referrals to community professionals, consultation, campus crisis response, and psycho-educational outreach.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR CAPS'S SERVICES

Full-time undergraduate and graduate students are eligible for CAPS's services. Part-time students may be seen on a limited basis for evaluation and referral to off-campus resources. Couples therapy requires both individuals to be current, fulltime SMC students.

LOCATION, HOURS AND APPOINTMENTS

CAPS is located on the ground floor of Augustine Hall, a couple of doors down from the Health and Wellness Center.

Our **normal business hours** are:

Monday – Wednesday: 9:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.

Thursday: 10:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.

Friday: 9:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Closed Daily 12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Sessions after 5:00 p.m. are by appointment only

Students can come into CAPS and make an appointment. (NOTE: During COVID, as of 1/1/22, we are still requiring students to schedule online or by phone. Initial appointments will be online, and vaccinated students can opt to meet with their therapist in person for subsequent sessions). During those hours, students will complete some brief paperwork and be scheduled for their first Intake appointment. Please allow 10-15 minutes to complete the paperwork. If more immediate assistance is needed, urgent appointments are available daily. After

regular business hours, you may contact Public Safety, which is available 24 hours a day at (925) 631-4282. Residence Life On-Call Staff also have access to the CAPS clinician on call 24 hours a day, 7 days per week.

WHAT IS EXPECTED AT THE FIRST APPOINTMENT

Students who come to CAPS will have the opportunity to talk about what brought them in. We work together with the student to determine what services would meet their needs. Options may include a brief consultation, time-limited counseling sessions, a referral to another on-campus department, or a community referral for more specialized, long-term, or intensive treatment. Before their first appointment, students are required to fill out a demographic and symptom questionnaire. They should arrive at least 20 minutes prior to their scheduled appointment to allow time for completion of this paperwork.

COMMON CONCERNS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

Most college students are grappling with developmental concerns, such as being away from home for the first time, making decisions on their own, forming new and intimate relationships, taking on new experiences, and exploring their identities. Sometimes these challenges can become overwhelming, leading to more complex problems, or worsening problems faced prior to college. Students may experience anxiety, depression, disordered eating or body image concerns, problematic use of alcohol and drugs, aggressive behavior, or self-injury. At other times, a difficult family situation, financial problems, relationship termination, death or loss of a significant person, or another traumatic event may overwhelm the student's ability to cope. CAPS is available to assist students with their unique concerns during this time of transition and growth.

CONSULTATION

Consultation is an important service that we offer to our faculty, staff and family members. If you are concerned about a student, please do not hesitate to call CAPS to discuss the situation. We are here to listen, offer support, and help to strategize ways to best approach a student and intervene. We can also suggest other on-campus or community resources which may be of help to the student. Because of confidentiality laws (see below), we may not share information about a particular student without their written permission. However, we are always available to receive information from you; any information you may offer is often very helpful in how we are able to assist the student.

CONFIDENTIALITY

With exceptions, such as in cases of imminent threat of suicide or homicide, and suspected abuse of children, elderly persons or dependent adults, we are required by law and professional ethics to protect confidentiality of all communication between CAPS staff and clients. Consequently, we cannot discuss with others the details of a student's situation or even indicate whether the student is being seen. The student must provide written permission before we may release any information to you or to others.

YOUR ROLE IN ASSISTING DISTRESSED STUDENTS

As faculty or staff, you have significant contact with students, and you are often well-poised to recognize signs that they are in distress or experiencing difficulties. Students often turn to faculty and staff for advice and support. Because of your position, you can play a critical role in supporting students in distress.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT STUDENTS SEEN AT CAPS

Stress, academic demands, and social pressures are a normal part of college life. A significant number of students have difficulties that interfere with their performance and general well-being. The following data were obtained from self-report questionnaires provided to SMC students upon intake and exit from CAPS, as well as from The Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors Annual Survey (2018) and the American College Health Association's National College Health Assessment II (2018).

Data obtained from CAPS clients who completed the Counseling Center Assessment of Psychological Symptoms (CCAPS) before an initial consultation at CAPS during the 2019-2020 academic year. Percentages reflect those students who reported that they experienced the listed symptom at some level during the last two weeks.

- Thoughts of ending their life: 27% (National Average = 28%) [1]
- Feeling sad all the time: 73%
- Fear of losing control and acting violently: 17%
- Thoughts of hurting others: 8%
- History of abuse in their family: 43%
- Feeling isolated and alone: 78%
- Fear of having a public panic attack: 57%
- Sleep difficulties: 75%
- Dissatisfaction with weight: 75%
- Purging to control weight: 14%
- Using drugs more than they feel they should: 24%
- Can't remember what happened when they drink: 24%
- Did something they regretted because of drinking: 27% (National Average in last 12 months = 36.4%) [2]
- Difficulty staying motivated for class: 76%
- Unable to keep up with schoolwork: 62%

2019-2020 Demographic Data:

- Transgender or non-binary: 2%
- LGBTQIA: 28%
- Latinx/Hispanic: 21%
- Asian American/Asian: 12%
- African American/Black: 6%
- Multi-racial: 8%
- First generation to college: 30%
- Graduate students: 6%

Other data of note:

- Each year between 35 and 50% of our clients have previously received services at our center.
- Satisfaction surveys indicated that students strongly agreed that counseling improved their academic performance and helped them remain enrolled in college.

[1] Statistics courtesy of The Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors Annual Survey (2018).

[2] Statistics courtesy of American College Health Association National College Health Assessment II (2018).

CHARACTERISTICS OF DISTRESSED STUDENTS

Sometimes it is clear when students are having difficulty coping, and sometimes their distress is less obvious. Any marked change from a previous level of functioning is a potential sign of distress. Some obvious and not-so-obvious signs of distress to look include:

PROBLEMS WITH ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

- Poor academic performance and preparation
- Excessive absences or tardiness
- Chronic indecisiveness or procrastination
- Lateness in completing assignments
- Increased concern about grades despite satisfactory performance
- Increased dependence – student hangs around you or makes excessive appointments to see you during office hours
- Change in academic status, such as academic probation or dismissal

UNUSUAL BEHAVIOR

- Lack of energy or falling asleep in class, or difficulty sleeping
- Restlessness, agitation, or distractibility
- Disruptive classroom behavior
- Marked changes in personal hygiene
- Impaired speech or disjointed, confused thoughts
- Aggressive or threatening behavior
- Hyperactivity, irritability, or heightened anxiety
- Extreme mood changes
- Tearfulness, or prolonged, excessive or inappropriate display of emotion
- Dramatic change in weight with no apparent physical illness or reason
- Bizarre or strange behavior indicating a loss of contact with reality
- Evident use of alcohol or other drugs that impacts functioning in the classroom
- Loss of appetite
- Significant changes in performance or involvement in sports or extracurricular activities

REFERENCES TO TRAUMA OR TRAUMATIC CHANGES

- Death of a family member or close friend
- End of a relationship (e.g., breakup, divorce, etc.)
- Problems with family, roommates, and/or close relationships
- Sexual assault, violence, or other interpersonal trauma
- Family crisis
- Financial problems

REFERENCES TO SUICIDE OR HOMICIDE

- Overt or subtle reference to threats to harm self—verbally or in writing
- Pessimistic feelings about the future
- Isolation from friends and family
- Statements of helplessness, hopelessness, or worthlessness
- Indications of persistent or prolonged unhappiness
- Threats to harm others
- Reference to having means to harm self or others (e.g., weapons, pills, etc.)
- Poor grooming and appearance

RESPONDING TO STUDENTS

Because you are in frequent contact with many students, you are in an excellent position to identify those who are in distress and offer assistance. Your care, concern, and assistance will often be enough to help the student. At other times, you can play a critical role in referring a student for appropriate assistance and in motivating them to seek such help. If you are concerned about a student but unsure about the appropriateness of referring, feel free to call the CAPS at (925) 631-4364 to consult with a professional.

KNOW YOUR LIMITS

An integral part of our Lasallian mission and culture involves a student-centered educational experience. This includes wanting to get to know our students more personally, and reaching out to them to provide the support needed for their personal and academic growth. Sometimes just having someone listen without judgment or advice will be what the student needs most. At other times, you may find yourself feeling uncertain about your ability to help a student or feeling that a student's problem is more than you can handle. In this case, trust your intuition. A referral to CAPS may be needed.

Here are some possible signs that you are taking on too much, and that a referral may be indicated.

If you feel:

- responsible for the student
- pressure to fix the student's problems
- that you are over-extending yourself in helping the student
- stressed by the student's issue(s) or behavior
- that the problems a student brings to you are more than you can handle
- anxious when the student approaches you
- resentful if the student does not improve

***Note:** When a student is talking about suicide or violence, or behaving in violent ways, it is always a good idea to address these behaviors directly. Avoid assuming that the situation will pass without taking action or that the student just wants attention, or that your sympathy and support will be enough. A student who talks or behaves in suicidal or violent ways may need your sympathy and support, but they also need immediate intervention. Students who are unable to control their feelings or impulses may require counseling and/or assessment for medication.*

CONSULT WITH CAPS STAFF

In your attempt to assist a student, it may be helpful to talk about the situation with the CAPS staff. We can suggest possible approaches to take with students or provide you with support. Call (925) 631-4364 and ask for a clinician for assistance.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT MAKING A REFERRAL TO COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES (CAPS)

Our professional staff is trained to assess and intervene with emotional problems and psychological disorders, and to provide counseling. In some instances you may wish to refer students to CAPS.

Here are some tips for making a referral to CAPS:

- 1. When you have decided that professional counseling is indicated, inform the student privately in a concerned and straightforward manner.**

Because many students initially resist the idea of counseling/therapy, it is useful to be caring, but firm in your judgment that counseling will be useful, and to be clear and concrete regarding the reason you are concerned. Describe the specific behaviors that have concerned you. Incorporate the student's own worries or needs as part of your concern and your endorsement that they receive help from an appropriate source.

"I'm concerned about you because I've noticed you have been very withdrawn and uncommunicative in class for the past three weeks."

"I understand that you are worried about how down you have been lately. You are right to be concerned. You really need to talk about this."

- 2. Inform the student why you are making a referral and how you think they may benefit from talking with a counselor/therapist.**

"You and I have talked several times over the past three weeks and it seems that things aren't getting better for you. I think it would be helpful for you to talk with a professional counselor."

- 3. Let the student know what they can expect from talking with a counselor.**

"I want you to know that I am concerned and care about you and want to remain in contact with you, but I feel it would be to your benefit to explore your concern with professional counseling."

Remind the student that services are confidential and offered at no additional fee. Advise the student that if their situation is urgent, they should notify CAPS so that they can be seen sooner. Students can also learn more about CAPS by giving us a call at (925) 631-4364 or by visiting our website at

<http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/counseling-psychological-services-caps>

4. Address stigma and other issues that may make the student feel reluctant to go to CAPS.

“Many students have found the help they need at CAPS. Between 12 and 14 percent of the student body visits CAPS every year.”

“Talking to a counselor does not mean that you are ‘crazy’ or ‘weak.’ Actually the opposite is true—seeking counseling is a reflection of your courage and resilience.”

5. Suggest that they go to CAPS to make an appointment.

Give them CAPS’s phone number (925) 631-4364 and location: ground floor of Augustine Hall.

6. Sometimes it is useful and necessary to assist the student more directly.

In these instances, you can call CAPS yourself while the student is in your office and let them know you will be walking the student over. [\(During COVID, please call us in lieu of walking over.\)](#) This can be especially helpful to students who are unsure about the location and/or are intimidated about meeting with a counselor/therapist for the first time.

Assure the student that you are not rejecting or abandoning them by making the referral. Make plans to follow up with the student.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

RESPONDING TO STUDENT EMERGENCIES

Emergency situations are rare; however, immediate and decisive action is necessary when they do occur. Generally, a psychological emergency involves one or more of the following conditions:

- ***A suicidal attempt, threat, or stated intention***
- ***A homicidal attempt, threat, or stated intention***
- ***Behavior posing a threat to harm oneself***
- ***Behavior posing a threat to harm others***
- ***Loss of contact with reality, irrational thoughts and beliefs***
- ***Inability to care for oneself***

In the event of an emergency, it is helpful to follow these basic guidelines:

- ***Try to stay calm, as this will help you respond more effectively and also help to reduce the student's anxiety or agitation.***
- ***If possible, provide a quiet, private place for the student to rest while further steps are taken.***
- ***Talk to the student in a clear, straight-forward manner.***
- ***Try to talk slowly and softly.***
- ***If the student appears to be dangerous to themselves or others, make certain the student is not left alone or unattended.***
- ***Make arrangements for appropriate intervention or aid through Public Safety, Dean of Students Office, or CAPS.***

The primary campus resources for responding to mental health emergencies are Counseling and Psychological Services and Public Safety. The following options are available to you:

- ***Phone consultation with a CAPS staff member is available at (925) 631-4364 during normal business hours of 9-5. (After 5 pm and before 9 am, refer to Public Safety).***
- ***You can walk the student over to CAPS for an emergency consultation or appointment.***
- ***If the student is unusually aggressive or otherwise unmanageable, call Public Safety for assistance at (925) 631-4282.***
- ***Be prepared to provide as much information as possible about the student and the situation to the campus resource you contact.***

Here are suggestions when meeting with a potentially violent student:

- To create more safety for yourself and the student, you may wish to alert a colleague that you will be meeting with the student, have a Public Safety Officer on stand-by or with you, keep the door of your meeting place open, or position yourself so that you can exit the room quickly.
- End the meeting immediately if you feel unsafe or if the student becomes belligerent or is unable to calm him/herself down.
- Ultimately, do not meet alone with any student you believe to be a threat to your personal safety.
- It is best to refrain from touching any student, especially if they are potentially violent. Never attempt to restrain a student or prevent them from leaving.

CAMPUS AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Campus Resources:

Campus Assault and Response Education (CARE)	(925) 631-4193
Center for Women and Gender Equity (CWGE)	(925) 631-4192
Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)	(925) 631-4364
Health and Wellness Center (HWC)	(925) 631-4254
High Potential Program (HP)	(925) 631-4835
Intercultural Center (IC)	(925) 631-8545
Mission and Ministry Center (MMC)	(925) 631-4366
Public Safety	(925) 631-4282
Student Disability Services (SDS)	(925) 631-4164
Student Engagement and Academic Success (SEAS)	(925) 631-4349

Community Resources:

Al-Anon	(925) 932-6770
Alcoholics Anonymous (www.contracostaaa.org)	(925) 939-4155
Contra Costa Crisis Center (24-hour crisis/suicide hotline)	Call 211 or (800) 833-2900 or Text "Hope" to 20121
Rape Crisis Center (A 24-hour hotline from Community Violence Solutions)	(800) 670-RAPE (7273)
Moraga Police Department (24-hour number)	(925) 284-5010
Moraga Police Department (Emergency)	911
STAND Against Domestic Violence (24-hour hotline)	Call (888) 215-5555 or email crisisline@standffov.org

ADDITIONAL FACULTY RESOURCES

Recognize, Respond, Report, Refer: 4 R's - Behavioral guide to address disruptive behavior in the classroom

<https://www.stmarys-ca.edu/sites/default/files/attachments/files/4%20Rs.pdf>

Red Folder - Faculty Staff Guide - List of campus resources

<https://www.stmarys-ca.edu/smcares/resources/assisting-students-in-distress>

Retention Alert (replacing the Student Success Collaborative effective 1/1/22) - See the module in your GaelXpress 2.0 menu. Faculty and staff can issue an alert for any student here. The interface is fairly straightforward and integrates with our Colleague/GaelXpress system. Advisors and coaches (or program director for grad students) will receive the alerts and can refer cases to other campus departments (Residential Life/Student Life, Financial Aid, Business Office, The Advising Office) for accurate and efficient follow-up, the case tickets will be monitored by The Advising Office to ensure timely resolution.

Managing Stress During Distance Learning – How Faculty Can Support Their Students - Webinar

[Managing Stress During Distance Learning – How Faculty Can Support Their Students](#)

Chronicle of Higher Education: Coping with Coronavirus: How Faculty Members Support Students in Traumatic Times - Helpful articles on various topics related to supporting students during Covid-19

https://connect.chronicle.com/rs/931-EKA-218/images/CopingwithCoronavirus_Collection.pdf

This manual was adapted from:

UC Davis Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). (2004).
Responding to Distressed or Distressing Students [Brochure]. Davis, CA.

USF Counseling Center. (2007). *Responding to Students in Distress* [Brochure]. San Francisco, CA.