

## Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Considerations

Our community includes students from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds and with different religious and spiritual beliefs, whether from the United States or countries around the globe. In addition, our students identify across the spectrums of ability, age, gender and sexuality. They also come to campus with different physical, mental and emotional abilities and from families with a range of educational backgrounds. With all their intersecting identities, our students deserve a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment to pursue their academic and personal goals. Each community member is responsible for co-creating a community that fosters equity and mutual respect and that values difference. As students join our community and engage in college life, it is essential that we adapt to their unique needs, especially for students from marginalized and underserved groups. It is also important to differentiate adjustment difficulties from mental health crises and to respond appropriately to both.

## Recognizing Distress, Crisis, Threat or Aggression in Students

Indicators may include, but are not limited to, the following signs:

- **Deteriorating academic performance:** unexpected poor performance, incapacitating test anxiety, sporadic attendance, multiple missed or late assignments, frequent requests to postpone deadlines
- **Changes in appearance and behavior:** changes in personal dress or hygiene, appearing overly tired or falling asleep in class, rapid speech, red eyes
- **Changes in mood:** appearing overly anxious, depressed, irritable or confused; unexplained crying or angry outbursts; unusual emotional responses
- **Changes in social behavior:** evidence of withdrawal or isolation, erratic social interactions
- **Evidence of significant substance use:** intoxication, appearing hungover in class
- **Evidence of self-injury or abuse:** cuts, burns, bruises or efforts to cover these
- **Disorganized thoughts:** incoherent thoughts or speech, or distorted use of language
- **Hypervigilance:** extreme suspiciousness; irrational fears, ideas or beliefs
- **Violent/abusive behavior:** may indicate possibility of domestic or interpersonal violence
- **Statements regarding suicide:** feelings of hopelessness, lack of interest in living, concerning social media posts
- **Signs of threatening behavior:** threatening emails or text messages; display of or allusion to a weapon; physical confrontation or intimidation; stalking behavior, hostility, violence; impulsive classroom behavior

## Safety Considerations

Contrary to media coverage, most students struggling with mental health issues pose no safety risk to anyone. Unfortunately, individuals with mental illness are far more likely to be victims of violence than to perpetrate it. Those at risk are far more likely to harm themselves than to harm others.

Nonetheless, please keep the following considerations in mind when supporting students in distress:

- **Respect personal space.** Do not physically touch the student or get uncomfortably close to them.
- **Be aware of your body position.** Standing eye to eye with the student may send a challenging message. Inviting them to sit or creating more space is often helpful.
- **Remain calm, rational and professional.** How you respond will directly affect the student. Try to avoid overreacting or being dismissive.
- **Be empathetic.** You don't have to agree with someone's feelings, but it's important that you do not convey judgment.
- **Verbal sharing or venting:** Allow them to express their frustrations and feelings before trying to identify ways to solve their perceived problem. Most students just want to be heard, and this can mitigate most situations where a student is upset.
- **Set and enforce reasonable limits.** If a student is becoming belligerent, set limits clearly and concisely. Allow them time to gather their own thoughts before continuing with the conversation.

**REMEMBER:** Avoid making any promises to keep shared information confidential. Let them know you will only share information with those who can be most helpful.

## HOW TO MAKE A STUDENT REFERRAL

### If a student is in mild to moderate distress (no safety concerns):

- Recommend that the student connect with resources including the campus community centers ([diversity.ncsu.edu/community](https://diversity.ncsu.edu/community)) and the Counseling Center.
  - › If the student chooses not to go to the Counseling Center, remember that it often takes a few referrals before someone seeks counseling.
- Call the Counseling Center and share pertinent information that may be helpful in the referral.
- Report your concern online through CARES, NC State's student behavioral case management program, at [go.ncsu.edu/cares](https://go.ncsu.edu/cares).
  - › Check in with the student after making the referral to see how they're doing.

### If a student is in severe distress or crisis (safety concerns are present):

If you are concerned for a student's immediate safety or your own, please contact University Police at 919-515-3000 (911 on campus). NC State officers have specialized mental health training. They will also ensure that the CARES team, the Behavioral Assessment Team and the Counseling Center are notified.

- Call the Counseling Center, or offer to accompany the student to the Counseling Center if possible. Be sure to explain to the student what to expect and that the Counseling Center is free and confidential.
- Speak with the counselor on call about the situation. The counselor will usually then speak directly with the student or schedule a time to meet.
- Stay with the student, or let them know you will call them back, until the counselor on call has a plan. Use reflective and active listening.

## Confusion About FERPA and Confidentiality

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) lends federal protections to student records. Although there are many provisions in FERPA, the most common concern is protecting personally identifiable information from unauthorized access by university personnel or others. University faculty and staff often need clarification regarding the scope and manner of such protections, and they tend to prefer to keep information to themselves (or not get involved in the first place) to avoid reprimand. However, **FERPA protects student records that are directly related to and maintained by the university.** In most cases, classroom observations of a student, conversations, an email exchange, notes kept for personal use or other nonofficial information would not be considered part of a "student record." **University personnel are generally permitted and encouraged to share student information between university offices on a need-to-know basis.** It is important for you not to give students blanket guarantees of "confidentiality"; instead, assure them that you will only inform those on campus who can get them the help they need.

## Documentation of Class Absences

NC State's class attendance regulation ([policies.ncsu.edu/regulation/reg-02-20-03](https://policies.ncsu.edu/regulation/reg-02-20-03)) provides some parameters and guidance for instructors and students to consider in determining whether a class absence is excused.

Other than in a couple of exceptional situations, the judgment of whether a life event warrants missing a class is in the hands of the instructor. The instructor's attendance/absence policy as stated in the course syllabus can help determine whether an absence is excused or unexcused.

For the latest information on the class attendance regulation, reasons for absences and the process for submitting a request for an absence, visit: [go.ncsu.edu/absence-verification](https://go.ncsu.edu/absence-verification)



# FACULTY AND STAFF GUIDE ASSISTING STUDENTS IN DISTRESS

Showing your humanity as faculty and staff and being flexible when appropriate can go a long way for our students.

The NC State Counseling Center and Prevention Services have created this resource as part of our effort to **raise awareness** about the **prevalence** of mental health issues among our students and to **remove barriers** to assistance, so more students can access resources that support the success of the whole student.

Students discuss **emotional concerns with friends, college staff and professors before reaching out to mental health professionals.** When you partner with the Counseling Center or Prevention Services by offering support to students in need, you contribute to campuswide goals of enhanced student performance, retention, safety and overall health and wellness. **We appreciate your commitment to NC State students!**

For more information, please review the Counseling Center's online faculty toolkit for supporting student mental health: [go.ncsu.edu/mental-health-faculty-toolkit](https://go.ncsu.edu/mental-health-faculty-toolkit).

## Common Myths and Facts

**Myth:** "I can't do anything for someone with mental health needs. I'm not a trained professional."

**Fact:** You can do a lot. Simply listening and validating a student's concerns helps nurture an environment that builds on individual strengths and promotes good mental health.

**Myth:** "Mental health is no longer stigmatized."

**Fact:** Mental health stigma still persists on college campuses. Education, outreach and compassion can counteract the stigma and create a more inclusive and supportive environment.

**Myth:** "If you have a mental health concern, you can 'will' it away, work harder or wait it out."

**Fact:** Research shows that seeking professional services is the best way to address mental health concerns. We can help students by letting them know they don't have to do it on their own.

**Myth:** "People with mental health concerns are dangerous and violent."

**Fact:** Research shows that most people with mental health concerns are not dangerous or violent.

## Decreasing Stigma in the Classroom

Stigma is defined as "shame or discredit associated with a particular circumstance, quality or person." You can help stop the stigma surrounding mental health on campus.

### Consider the following strategies in the classroom:

**Talk openly about mental health.** Normalizing open dialogue can help students feel more comfortable expressing their concerns, less alone in their struggle and more likely to access help.

**Encourage the development of coping skills.** Self-advocacy, help-seeking, problem-solving, critical thinking, goal-setting and conflict resolution are learned skills that can help students in all aspects of their lives, including mental health.

**Model and teach active bystander intervention.** The "bystander effect" occurs when onlookers fail to help someone whom they know to be in a crisis. By encouraging active involvement in the community, offering general guidance about psychological issues and expressing genuine concern, you will reduce stigma and encourage others to follow your lead.

### Understand the impact that mental health concerns can have on students.

Depression, anxiety, grief, trauma and other mental health concerns can significantly impact cognition, decision-making, motivation and energy.

## Wellness Resources

Learn more about the programs and services, events and community, and academics and research of Wolfpack Wellness.



[wellness.ncsu.edu](https://wellness.ncsu.edu)

### DID YOU KNOW?

Nearly 6,000 students seek services at the NC State Counseling Center every year, and there is an increased severity of symptoms in those who do. Data from the Healthy Minds Survey in 2020 indicated:

- 33% of NC State students reported being so **depressed** in the past year that it was **difficult to function** at times.
- 29% of NC State students reported **overwhelming anxiety** during the past year.
- 12% of NC State students have **considered suicide** in the past year.
- 25% of NC State students have participated in **nonsuicidal self-injury** in the past year.
- 48% of those impacted students have not received any mental health treatment.

## Self-Care for Faculty and Staff

### Take care of yourself.

When you feel emotionally and physically healthy, you are more likely to be curious, motivated and engaged in your intellectual pursuits and to have the ability to support students.

### Remember that self-care will help to

#### improve your work.

Work-life balance can make you better at your job. Cultivating a healthy lifestyle, including mindfulness, exercise and supportive relationships, can help you better handle stressful work situations.

### Model a work-life balance for your students.

Take advantage of the resources on campus. Work out at the gym, or take a break to stroll on the Rocky Branch Trail.

### Consult with colleagues.

If a situation takes you outside your normal role as an employee, please consult with others about the appropriateness of the situation. If you feel uncomfortable, trust yourself and set limits.

### Set clear boundaries.

When interacting with students, limit emails, texting, social media and time outside the classroom to activities that have an academic focus. Our responsibility as professionals is to model and teach appropriate boundaries.

### Seek help when you feel stressed, anxious or depressed.

The Faculty and Staff Assistance Program ([er.hr.ncsu.edu/faculty-staff-assistance-program](https://er.hr.ncsu.edu/faculty-staff-assistance-program)) provides confidential support, resources and information to help you handle personal and work-life issues, all at no charge to you and your dependents.

