

Supporting Wellness in the Classroom

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Agenda

- ▶ Your Role and Responsibility around student Mental Health and Wellness
- ▶ Your Role and Responsibility in supporting student success in the classroom
- ▶ Questions

The Question

- ▶ How can I demonstrate care and flexibility for students' wellness and maintain high expectations in the classroom?

Responding to Distressed Students

- ▶ What is Your Role?
 - ▶ You are a supportive adult in the life of a student, one that is in a unique position to be able to observe behavior that could indicate that a student may be experiencing distress.
 - ▶ As a member of the campus, you are also more available and more knowledgeable about the college environment and available resources than a student's family or friends.
 - ▶ So, you are in an excellent position to identify and respond to students who are in distress.

Responding to Distressed Students

- ▶ WHAT YOUR ROLE IS NOT:
 - ▶ You will NOT be expected to be your student's therapist.
 - ▶ You do NOT have to fix your students problems or struggles.
 - ▶ You are NOT responsible for your student's thoughts, feelings, or behaviors.
 - ▶ You will NOT be involved in the ultimate resolution to the student's struggles.

Boundaries and Role Clarity

- ▶ It is our relationships and connection to our students that gives us capacity to have impact. This creates the space for students to be comfortable talking with us and saying anything to us about what is going on.
- ▶ It is also our responsibility to be clear about our role and to maintain boundaries.
- ▶ So, we want to be aware of the impact that our personal and professional boundaries might have on this connection.
 - ▶ Too rigid boundaries might result in avoidance of the problem, or under-helping.
 - ▶ Boundaries that are too loose result in falling into a rescuer/savior role with the student, or in overhelping.

Boundaries and Role Clarity

- ▶ **ROLE CONFUSION**
- ▶ If you place yourself in the role of caretaker for a student when you are not equipped or trained to do so, the student may begin to make assumptions about who you are in their life.
- ▶ They could start to believe that you will continue to be there for them whenever they need you.
- ▶ This will not be sustainable long term, and eventually you may find yourself becoming resentful or frustrated with the student who is not getting “better”, even after all of your care and guidance.
- ▶ You can't control how the student defines your relationship.
- ▶ *But, you can control how you present it, and how clear you are about how you can and cannot be helpful to them.*

Observing Indicators of Distress

- ▶ Any abrupt changes in any of the following areas could indicate distress:
 - ▶ Behavior
 - ▶ Mood
 - ▶ Appearance
 - ▶ Performance
- ▶ The **MORE** indicators that you are seeing, the more likely it is that this student is in distress.
- ▶ The more **PERSISTENT** the indicators, the more likely it is that this student is in distress.

Safety Risk Indicators

REQUIRES IMMEDIATE INTERVENTION

- ▶ Verbal or written statements that mention despair, suicide, or death
- ▶ Severe hopelessness, depression, isolation and withdrawal
- ▶ Statements to the effect that the student is “going away from a long time.”
- ▶ Physical or verbal aggression that is directed at self, others, animals, or property
- ▶ The student is unresponsive to the external environment; incoherent or passed out
- ▶ Student is disconnected from reality/exhibiting psychosis
- ▶ Student is displaying disruptive behavior
- ▶ The situation feels threatening or dangerous to you

When to Take Action

Take action IMMEDIATELY if any of the Safety Risk Indicators are present

- ▶ If you observe a student exhibiting a cluster of the smaller signs
- ▶ Emotional outbursts
- ▶ Repeated absences
- ▶ Sudden decline in quality of work or grades
- ▶ Signs of drug or alcohol use
- ▶ If you notice one or two of the indicators that may not seem like a big deal at first glance, but something in your gut tells you that something seems off about this student.
- ▶ If another student or colleague tells you about concerns that they have about your student based on their observations.

Responding to Students in Distress.

- ▶ REMEMBER YOUR ROLE.
- ▶ GATHER INFORMATION, SEEK CONSULTATION.
- ▶ SAFETY FIRST!
- ▶ ENSURE PRIVACY AND MINIMIZE DISTRACTIONS.
- ▶ EXPRESS YOUR CONCERN IN SPECIFIC, NONJUDGMENTAL TERMS.
- ▶ BE HONEST AND DIRECT, especially when asking questions about suicidal ideation, substance abuse, or bizarre thoughts or behavior.
- ▶ LISTEN FIRST, WITHOUT INTERRUPTING.
- ▶ SUGGEST RESOURCES AND REFERRALS AS APPROPRIATE.
- ▶ MAINTAIN HEALTHY BOUNDARIES, AND BE MINDFUL OF YOUR ROLE.
- ▶ OFFER TO FOLLOW UP WITH THE STUDENT.
- ▶ TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF.

Responding to students in distress

INVOLVE YOURSELF ONLY AS FAR AS YOU ARE WILLING TO GO.

- ▶ If you are aware that you are being triggered, you don't have to be the one to talk to the student. Raising the concern to someone else might be the most helpful thing that you can do!

What not to do:

- ▶ Don't feel that it's your job to rescue the student
- ▶ Don't take responsibility for the student's emotional condition
- ▶ Don't judge, evaluate, or criticize
- ▶ Don't minimize the student's concerns
- ▶ Don't make promises you can't keep
- ▶ Don't promise absolute confidentiality in all circumstances
- ▶ Don't take over their experience with your experience

What to consider

- ▶ You are not responsible for your student's choices and outcomes. Your students are responsible for their choices and outcomes.
- ▶ You are responsible for how to set up your educational environment, how you engage with your students, and how you show up.
- ▶ Your students are coming into this space with their histories, their biology, their traumas, all which has nothing to do with you, and you have no control over what they come with.
- ▶ So, take responsibility for the part you have control over - how you set up your classroom, how you respond. Stay aware and keep your tools sharp.
- ▶ Get help when you need it! This is hard work.
- ▶ Don't forget to take care of yourself!

What is your role in relation to student success?

- ▶ Facilitate excellent, effective learning environments for students.
- ▶ Work towards meeting your institution's strategic outcomes particularly as it relates to academic success.
- ▶ Support overall student success.

Support overall student success which includes providing an inclusive, equitable curriculum and environment with the academic, social, and wellness support that enables all students to learn, thrive, and persist by:

- ▶ Teaching with rigor (high expectations, supports introduced early and often).
- ▶ Allowing for mastery-based learning through formative and summative activities and assessments.
- ▶ Incorporating meta-cognition activities (reflecting on their learning experience).
- ▶ Giving options for learning tasks to reduce student stress.
- ▶ Removing barriers such as zero-tolerance policies and working toward equitable assessment.
- ▶ Requiring divergent thinking and various ways of knowing.
- ▶ Providing clear expectations.
- ▶ Using backward design to ensure outcomes, assessments and learning tasks are well aligned.
- ▶ Making sure students know they are welcome and safe in the learning environment. (Even if we cannot know every single student, we can make each student feel welcome and safe.).

If you have a student struggling with the coursework:

- ▶ Demonstrate empathy.
- ▶ Check in with the student using strategies you learned today.
- ▶ Consider resources available for support including services for students with disabilities, academic advisor, study groups, counseling center, etc.
- ▶ Re-takes for partial credit (you may need to revisit your syllabus and update testing policies).
- ▶ Provide an alternative format for the test (i.e. paper, verbal).
- ▶ Ensure the student knows the content (and receives feedback on it) before moving on to the next unit.
- ▶ Facilitate a discussion about how the student is thinking about the content, how it relates to their goals, and why it is vital for them to actually learn the content, not just perform well on a test.
- ▶ Remind the student that their test score is not an indication of their character. It is an indication of how well they can take a test, on test day.

How can I know early on that students might be struggling?

- ▶ Assess early and often (informal, formative, low-stakes summative) and use the results as DATA.
- ▶ Revisit your assessments with students—use them as a learning tool, not just confirmation students “know” information. Where did they score low overall? Individually? Offer students additional resources for those gaps.
- ▶ Incorporate metacognitive strategies so students are aware where their learning gaps are, where they are grasping concepts, etc.
- ▶ Check out the [TILT project](#)!
 - ▶ Many of the resources they provide are useful, even if you are not formally enrolled in the program.
 - ▶ Consider Purpose, tasks and criterion for every assignment and assessment

I feel like it might not be fair to all students to give some students extensions, adaptations, etc.

- ▶ Try to think about “fair” as equitable, rather than equal.
- ▶ If we are “equal,” we give every student the exact same thing.
- ▶ If we are “equitable,” we give students what they need to be successful.
 - ▶ For some students, it may be that they need the deadlines and routine.
 - ▶ For others, it may mean then need an extension or alternative way to demonstrate their learning.

Ensure all students know you are open to supporting them:

- ▶ You might consider putting something like this in your syllabus*:

Requesting an Extension on an Assignment

Sometimes we have experiences that may put us behind in our work. If you find that you need an extension on an assignment any time before the last two weeks of class, you can copy and paste this email and send it to me:

Dear Professor,

I know the deadline for this assignment is [DATE AND TIME]. I will not be able to meet this deadline. However, I will have the assignment completed and submitted by [DATE AND TIME]. Thank you for your patience.

[TYPE YOUR NAME]

*The requirement for my class is that you can always have an extension, but you **MUST** communicate the need.

Ensure all students know you are open to supporting them:

- ▶ You might consider putting something like this in your syllabus:

Requesting Support for projects, assessments, readings, etc.

Sometimes we have experiences that make it challenging to access the course materials, assignments and assessments. If you find that you need to discuss alternatives to these tasks or strategies to be successful, I am happy to meet with you to offer additional support. You can copy and paste this email and send it to me:

Dear Professor,

I need some support on the [PROJECT, ASSIGNMENT, ASSESSMENT]. I would like to meet with you to find strategies to get through it. I am available to meet you [DATE AND TIME-try office hours if possible, if not, offer 2-3 possible times].

Thank you for your support.

[TYPE YOUR NAME]

Consider advocating for a skill-building training program

- ▶ Builds skills in recognizing when a student may be in distress, how to approach and have a conversation, and refer them to resources.
- ▶ Many universities have mental health/wellness support funds.
- ▶ Work with your development unit as a possible avenue to support this training.

- ▶ Dan Statter @ Kognito: daniel.statter@kognito.com

What Questions do you have today?

Contact Info:

Dr. Sheila Marquardt: marqua36@msu.edu

Consider reaching out to your institution's Counseling Center or Employee Assistance Program (EAP) if available.

Consider connecting with your Center for Teaching and Learning unit if available.