recognize
warning signs

Recognizing the warning signs of a student in distress does not require special training or expertise. It does, however, require an awareness of what to look for.

Academic
• A dramatic drop in academic performance and/or GPA
• Continued seeking of unusual accommodations (extensions for papers, exams, etc.)
• Papers that have themes of hopelessness, despair, or rage
• Inappropriate disruption of the classroom
• Persistent absence from class, missed appointments

Physical / Psychological
• Visible, sudden increase or decrease in weight
• Obvious substance use, such as smell of alcohol, slurred speech, bloodshot eyes
• Marked changes in concentration, motivation, or energy level
• Sudden withdrawal from interactions with faculty, admin, staff, and peers
• Inappropriate or exaggerated behavior, aggressiveness, or violent outbursts
• Other factors to consider
  • Written or verbal statements that indicate despondency
  • Direct statements indicating family problems or personal losses (death of a loved one, break-up, etc.)
  • Attempts to have you around or others
  • Concern about a student from peers
  • Your own sense, however vague, that something is seriously amiss

listen to the student

If a student shares their concerns with you, it is important to listen in an open way. This will help you better assess whether any warning signs are present, and if you should refer the student to the Health and Wellness Center. If you receive a troubling message from a student, try to speak with the person directly.

It is not necessary for you to solve the student’s problem; you do not have to act as a therapist. Just listen patiently and receptively and “be yourself” as much as possible. Do not underestimate the importance of listening to the student. You are providing a support when a student can walk away feeling that their concerns have been heard and understood. Even those whose situation are the most dire, you may be the first person who has really taken the time to listen and understand.

express concern

Explain your concerns and their basis. Avoid negative comments or implications about character or personality. For example, DO say: “I’ve noticed that you haven’t been appearing regularly, and I’m worried about you. I’d like to see how you are doing.” DON’T say: “I’ve noticed you’ve been skipping class lately.”

Tell the student why your observations of their behavior have led you to believe that talking with a counselor may be advisable. Avoid talking in general terms. Instead, consider providing specific, observable behavior. This would be a good point to wait silently for a moment, to see if the student offers a response.

make a referral

In addition to the warning signs listed previously, consider referring a student when:
• you feel you have reached the limits of your ability to help the student
• you identify too closely with the student and/or the problem
• a student has physical complaints that may be manifestations of psychological or medical problems
• a student expresses thoughts of suicide. Ethically, intervention on your part is necessary.

Tips for Making a Referral
• Assure the student that seeking counseling is a sign of strength, not weakness.
• Share your knowledge of local mental health resources, offering a specific name when possible. Otherwise, a simple explanation of the services may alleviate the student’s anxiety about the process.
• Talk about making an appointment, versus “going to counseling.”
• Respect the student’s right to reject the referral suggestion, or to think about it first, unless there has been talk of suicide.
• If a student’s concern is urgent and they are currently in crisis, see the basic panel for directions on seeking care.
• Command the student for taking the first step.

If you have immediate concerns about a student’s safety, stay with them and notify Habilit at 314-935-6695, if the student refuses further assistance and their safety is at risk, contact WUPD at 314-935-5555.

CAMPUS RESOURCES

COUNSELING CENTER REFERRAL SERVICE: WUSTL.EDU/CUIDANTS

DISABILITY RESOURCES
• ACCOMMODATIONS AND GUIDANCE FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: 314-935-5970

THE LEARNING CENTER
• ACADEMIC SUPPORT PROGRAMS: 314-935-5970

LGBT Student INvolvemenT & LEADERSHIP
• 314-935-8029

OFFICE FOR RELIGIOUS, SPIRITUAL, & ETHICAL LIFE: WUSTL.EDU/CURRENT-STUDENTS/RELIGIOUS-LIFE/

RELATIONSHIP AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE PREVENTION (RSVP) CENTER
• 314-935-5746

SEXUAL ASSAULT AND RAPE ANONYMOUS HELPLINE (SARAH)
• 314-935-8085

UNCLE JOE’S PEER COUNSELING & RESOURCE CENTER
• 314-935-5099

WASHU CARES
• FACULTY AND STAFF REPORTING MECHANISM FOR INTERVENTION AND SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS OF CONCERNS: STUDENTS.WUSTL.EDU/WSHU-CARES

WASHU POLICE DEPARTMENT (WUPD)
• 314-935-5555

WASHU RECOVERY
• COMMUNITY, RESOURCES, AND SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS IN RECOVERY FROM SUBSTANCE USE: WASHU.EDU/RECOVERY