

California Lutheran University

Student Counseling Services

Guide to Helping Students in Distress



Student Counseling Services

3222 Luther Avenue

805-493-3727

Helping Students in Distress

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Our CLU Community

In any vibrant community there are many sources of stress, and the California Lutheran University campus is no different. Whether from negative thoughts, such as fear of an impending challenge (e.g., an exam), or from positive sources such as balancing one's commitment to school with work and social activities, Cal Lu students encounter various stressors. Most students develop ways to cope with stress. For an increasing number of students, however, stress sometimes feels unmanageable and interferes with learning and living a productive and pleasurable life. Some reasons why students fail to get the help they need include: lack of knowledge about early signs of emotional and psychological difficulties, and lack of knowledge about necessary resources.

Faculty and staff members are vitally important resources for identifying and helping students in distress. Despite aggressive outreach efforts on most college campuses, university counseling centers simply do not reach the majority of students. For this reason, the Student Counseling Services (SCS) center at CLU wants to support efforts by all campus community members to assist in the identification of students in distress and in their referral for treatment. Most psychological concerns and disorders have high rates of recovery if the person receives help. You may be the first to see students in trouble, and can be the first person to help. You strengthen our campus community by creating a web of support for our students. Responding to students in distress can be confusing or anxiety-provoking, and that is OKAY! SCS staff are prepared and able to guide and assist you and our students.

Remember that *The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)* permits communication about a student of concern in connection with a health and safety emergency – statements or behaviors by a student are not FERPA protected and should be shared appropriately with consideration for privacy.

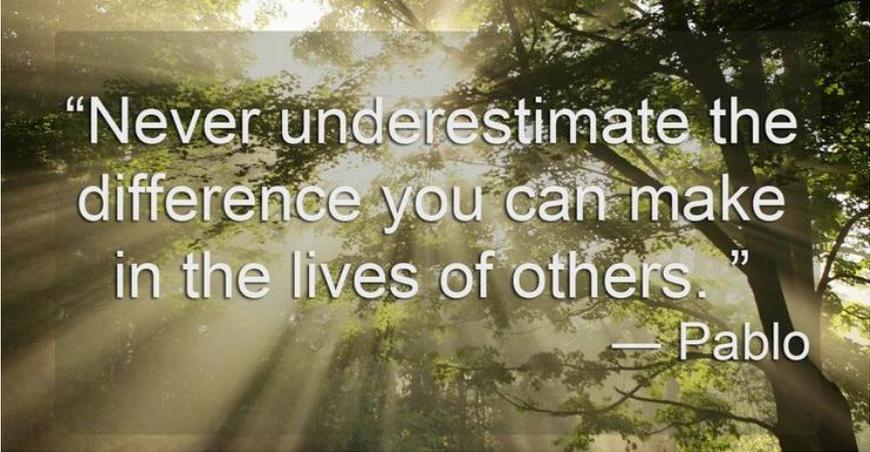
We welcome ALL opportunities to help! Please call **805-493-3727** during business hours to speak with a professional and receive consultation.

Confidentiality: All staff at SCS are required by law and professional ethics to protect the confidentiality of all communication between a clinician and client, except in specific cases, such as when harm to self or others is imminent, or as required by law. Thus, please know that we cannot and will not discuss the details of a student's situation with others, or even disclose if the student is receiving services. For information about a student to be released to you or others, we must get written permission by the student. SCS strictly adheres to these policies.

Helping

Identifying signs of distress, methods of intervention, and sources of help are important ways that helpers can maximize their effectiveness. Some global ideas to keep in mind as you offer help include:

- ❖ **Look** for patterns of behaviors
- ❖ **Understand** that distress is exhibited in many ways
- ❖ **Know** that stress may be situational (short-term) or chronic (ongoing)
- ❖ **Respect individuality:** severity of symptoms varies with individuals and/or situations
- ❖ **Accept** that some distressed students will escape our collective radar. Others will reject our assistance. Nevertheless, *by communicating interest and concern to a distressed student, you may help that student regain the emotional balance needed to cope.*



“Never underestimate the difference you can make in the lives of others.”

— Pablo

In many cases, you will be able to provide adequate help by engaging in empathic listening, facilitating an open discussion about concerns and problems, instilling hope, displaying acceptance, and offering some suggestions for help.

Common Signs of Distress

Unusual Behavior and Appearance

- ❖ Lack of enthusiasm
- ❖ Appears numb/extreme lack of emotion
- ❖ Hyperactivity/rapid speech
- ❖ Irritability or angry outbursts
- ❖ Unexpected mood changes
- ❖ Unusual interaction patterns
- ❖ Social withdrawal/isolation
- ❖ Interpersonal conflicts
- ❖ Demanding/needy
- ❖ Incoherent or slurred speech
- ❖ Irrational or disoriented
- ❖ Appears lost or confused
- ❖ Oblivious to surroundings
- ❖ Very poor hygiene; appears especially unkempt or disheveled
- ❖ Complaints/worry from other students

Physical Symptoms

- ❖ Excessively tearful, swollen or red eyes
- ❖ Frequent headaches
- ❖ Fatigue
- ❖ Insomnia or excessive sleeping
- ❖ Severe appetite changes
- ❖ Dramatic weight change
- ❖ Bruises on face and/or body
- ❖ Seems intoxicated, smells like alcohol

Marked Changes in Academic Performance or Classroom Behavior

- ❖ Uncharacteristically poor performance and preparation
- ❖ Excessive absences or tardiness
- ❖ Repeated requests for special consideration, especially when this represents a change from previous functioning
- ❖ Marked difficulty concentrating
- ❖ Disruptive classroom behavior
- ❖ Avoiding or dominating discussions
- ❖ Hints of feeling upset in written pieces or presentations
- ❖ Intense emotional reaction
- ❖ Excessively anxious, panicked, or overwhelmed
- ❖ Intoxication in class

Signs of Critical Distress: Emergencies

- ❖ Talks about suicide, not wanting to live
- ❖ Makes suicidal threats, gestures, or attempts
 - Gives away personal possessions
- ❖ Feels hopeless and/or helpless
- ❖ Experiencing an overwhelming loss
- ❖ Acts aggressively toward others
- ❖ Make homicidal threats, gestures, or attempts
- ❖ Marked changes in behavior, behaving oddly
- ❖ Social isolation
- ❖ Substance abuse, under the influence
- ❖ Unable to care for themselves
 - Inability to communicate clearly, loss of contact with reality, acting bizarre

Talking about their Distress

Acknowledge your concerns directly to a student. When you are directly involved with a student experiencing distress, your expression of concern can have a tremendous impact.

We recommend the following:

- ❖ **Talk** to the student **in a quiet and private space**. If you are worried about a student's safety or well-being, do not leave them alone.
- ❖ **Acknowledge your observations** in behavioral, non-judgmental terms. Speak directly to the student in a concerned manner.
- ❖ **Refrain from labeling** (e.g., "You are depressed").
- ❖ **Avoid responding in general ways** (e.g., "Everything will be okay").
- ❖ **Listen** carefully. **Seek to understand** without agreeing or disagreeing.
- ❖ **Communicate listening and understanding** by paraphrasing what the student has told you, including both the content and feelings.
- ❖ **Instill hopefulness** that there is help for the student.
- ❖ **Have patience** with the student's unique response style/pace.
- ❖ **Know when to refer**. Some students are initially resistant to the idea of counseling/therapy. In these cases, **be firm and caring**, and **provide a clear explanation** of why seeing a professional may be helpful.
- ❖ **Follow up** with the student. Ask the student to let you know how their appointment went, and check-in occasionally to see how they are doing.

Cultural Awareness

Students who identify with a minority status, or come from underrepresented groups, may feel especially isolated or marginalized. Identity dimensions include: race, ethnicity, cultural background, nationality/immigration status, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability status, socioeconomic status, spiritual and religious beliefs, among others, and are important to consider. Experiences of discrimination or oppression can affect emotional and psychological distress and well-being, and may also influence a student's help-seeking thoughts and behaviors. For example: denial, fear, stigma, negative labels, communication differences, lack of support, or lack of knowledge about resources may be especially relevant.

Your sensitivity to these unique needs can be especially important for students to get assistance. Being knowledgeable about additional campus resources that address these unique needs is extremely important!

Campus Resources:

Campus Ministry

Samuelson Chapel
805-493-3228
campusministry@callutheran.edu

Career Services

Student Union Building
805-493-3200
clewis@callutheran.edu

Center for Student Success

Academic Services Building
805-493-3260
studentsuccess@callutheran.edu

Disability Support Services

Academic Services Building
805-493-3464
dss@callutheran.edu

Health Services

3240 Luther Avenue
805-493-3225
studenthealth@callutheran.edu
(NOT for emergencies)

Multicultural Programs & International Student Services

Student Union Building
805-493-3323

Residence Life & Student Conduct

Mt. Clef Hall
805-493-3220
reslife@callutheran.edu

Office of Veteran Resources

Student Union Building
805-493-3648
veterans@callutheran.edu

Student Support Services

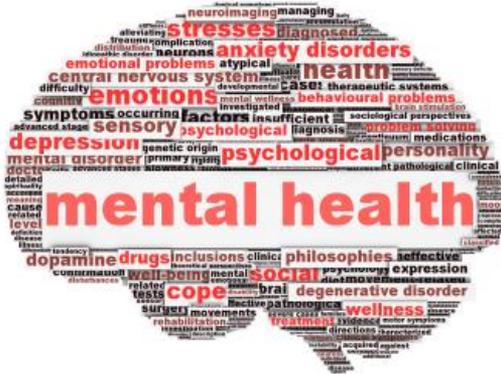
Academic Services Building
805-493-3535
cluss@callutheran.edu

Self-Care

- ❖ **Know your role and recognize your limits.** A helper is a facilitator, not a problem-solver. Your responsibility is to try to help them solve their own problems or to help them get help if it is more than you can provide. Respect feelings of discomfort, and focus on getting assistance.
- ❖ **It is okay to ask for help.** Ask a colleague or supervisor for help, especially if you do not feel safe. If you feel any threat to safety or well-being, maintain a safe distance and develop a route of escape if you need it.
- ❖ **Don't make an absolute promise to keep a secret.** Someone in distress may understandably be concerned about their privacy, but helpers need to consult at times. Informing the student of this represents important helper self-care and maintains trust.
- ❖ **Monitor your own reactions/feelings.** Helpers often feel helpless, fearful, frustrated, angry, impatient, "compassion fatigue," or other feelings. Some signs that you may be over-extending yourself to help a student include: feeling overwhelmed, afraid, having thoughts of "rescuing" the student, or "reliving" similar experiences of your own.
- ❖ **Remember, you are not alone!** Helpers need support, too. Call SCS at [x3727](tel:3727), to arrange a confidential consultation with a clinician. SCS staff can help you personally, or help you decide the best way to make a referral for the student.

Helping Do's and Don'ts

The following section will provide some basic information about common psychological concerns and disorders in order to help you identify potential problems, and provide the best assistance.



Specific information is provided about depression/suicidality, anxiety, intoxication, verbal aggression/violence, and poor contact with reality.

The Depressed and/or Suicidal Student

Signs/Symptoms:

helplessness
hopelessness
low self-esteem
poor concentration

appetite changes
sleep irregularities
fatigue/lethargy

disinterest
irritability
social isolation
talk about suicide



Do:

- ❖ Take the student seriously.
- ❖ Talk about depression or suicidality openly.
- ❖ Offer to call or walk the student to SCS.
- ❖ Try to sound calm and understanding.

Don't:

- ❖ Fear asking whether the student is suicidal.
- ❖ Ignore comments (e.g., “The world would be better off without me.”).
- ❖ Minimize the student's pain.
- ❖ Promise more help than you can provide.

The Anxious Student

Signs/Symptoms:

fearful/nervous
poor concentration

jittery
irritable

distractible
low self-confidence



Do:

- ❖ Let the student discuss their feelings.
- ❖ Remain calm and talk slowly.
- ❖ Provide reassurance when appropriate.

Don't:

- ❖ Minimize the perceived threat/fears.
- ❖ Overwhelm the student with ideas or "fixes."
- ❖ Take responsibility for their emotional state.
- ❖ Try to take the problem away.

The Intoxicated Student

Signs/Symptoms:

mood swings
confused/disoriented

jittery
inattentive
sleepy

unmotivated
tardy/unreliable



Do:

- ❖ Accept and acknowledge the student's feelings.
- ❖ Express concern.
- ❖ Remind the student that help is available.
- ❖ Utilize Campus Safety or Residence Life & Student Conduct if student is intoxicated.
- ❖ Respect the student's right and ability to choose NOT to seek help/change.

Don't:

- ❖ Ignore signs of intoxication.
- ❖ Convey judgment.
- ❖ Lecture.

The Verbally Aggressive and/or Violent Student



Do:

- ❖ Acknowledge their anger and frustration.
- ❖ Let them vent feelings appropriately.
- ❖ Evenly state what behaviors are acceptable.
- ❖ Stay in open areas.
- ❖ Be ready to leave quickly if needed.
- ❖ Inform a colleague or supervisor of your meeting.

Don't:

- ❖ Argue or shout.
- ❖ Ignore warning signs (e.g., clenched fists, shouting).
- ❖ Become hostile or punitive.
- ❖ Press for explanations for their behaviors.
- ❖ Corner or touch the student.

The Student in Poor Contact with Reality

Signs/symptoms:

irrational
disturbed
frightened

illogical
bizarre behavior
usually NOT dangerous

confused
delusional
overwhelmed



Do:

- ❖ Acknowledge their feelings without supporting their misperceptions.
- ❖ Talk in a calm, soft voice.
- ❖ Acknowledge your difficulty in understanding them and ask for clarification.
- ❖ Focus on what you observe in the present moment.

Don't:

- ❖ Argue with their thinking.
- ❖ Feign delusions (e.g., “I hear voices sometimes, too.”).
- ❖ Expect or demand usual/typical emotional responses.

Consultation is Available

You may have questions about how best to help a student at risk. Staff members at SCS are available to help you:

- ❖ Assess the situation, its severity, and the potential for referral
- ❖ Learn about resources (on and off campus)
- ❖ Find the best way to make the referral, if appropriate
- ❖ Clarify your feelings about the student and consider ways you can be most effective
- ❖ Discuss follow-up concerns after the initial action or referral

When contacting SCS, it is helpful to have as much information as possible. This may include: your name, the student's name and location, a brief description of the current circumstances, and the type of assistance that may be needed.

California Lutheran University

Student Counseling Services

**3222 Luther Ave
(next to Health Services)**

805-493-3727

callutheran.edu/counseling

Making a Referral

Create a positive expectation. Presenting yourself as knowledgeable of and confident in campus services can ease a student's fears about seeking help. In general, consider referring students for counseling if their problems have compromised their ability to function academically, personally, or socially.

Non-Crisis Referrals:

- ❖ **Let the student know what they can gain** from meeting with a clinician (e.g., "I think it could very helpful for you to discuss all of this with someone impartial, who can help you sort out your thoughts and feelings").
- ❖ Remind the student that **services are CONFIDENTIAL and FREE**.
- ❖ **Tell the student what to expect** if they talk with a clinician (see "What to Expect" below).
- ❖ **Encourage students** to contact SCS directly to schedule an intake appointment by calling x3727.
- ❖ **Offer to assist** in making an appointment by dialing the number (x3727) or by walking with the student to SCS.
- ❖ **Leave the option open, except in emergencies**, for the student to accept or refuse counseling.

Making a Referral

Crisis Referrals:

- ❖ **During business hours (Monday-Friday, 9am – 5pm):**
 - Call **x3727** and ask to speak to a clinician or walk the student over.
 - **Urgent care appointments** are always available for students who need to be seen right away.

- ❖ **After business hours:**
 - Call **805-493-3911 (Campus Safety)**
 - or-
 - Call **805-494-8200 (T.O. Police Department)**
 - or-
 - Call **805-652-6727 (Ventura County Mobile Crisis Team)**

If the student or another person is in

imminent danger

CALL 911

What to Expect

Students who have not been to counseling may want to know what will happen at SCS. We follow a uniform set of procedures which make up our screening process:

- ❖ When entering the SCS building (3222 Luther Ave.), there is a reception window that is seen to the right upon entering the building. The assistant sitting behind the window greets the person and asks how SCS can be of assistance.
- ❖ The person can ask the assistant for an appointment (the person can also do this via telephone at x3727). If the person wants to be seen *immediately*, the assistant will give the person several forms that assist the SCS staff to assess the nature of the request and the severity of the person's condition. Urgent care services are a high priority at SCS. Individuals who receive urgent care assistance are typically seen within 45 minutes of their arrival at SCS.
- ❖ Just prior to being seen for the first appointment, the student completes a personal information form, and reviews and signs a statement of informed consent that describes the intake process, confidentiality, and other procedures. This is done in the waiting room at SCS.
- ❖ A clinician comes to the waiting room and meets the client, and then brings them back to that clinician's office. All sessions at SCS are 45 minutes long except urgent care sessions, which can be longer or shorter. The initial intake process sometimes occurs over more than one session.
- ❖ When a student is first seen, whether in an urgent care session or a normal session, the clinician begins by explaining that services are strictly confidential, but that there are certain circumstances in which a clinician is legally and ethically obligated to reveal something a client said. Those circumstances are carefully described to the client.
- ❖ The clinician will help the student explore what brought them to SCS and what the student would like to achieve in counseling. The clinician will discuss how SCS can best assist the student.

SCS Services

Individual Therapy

Relationship Therapy

Group Therapy

Consultation

Outreach Workshops

Referrals to the community

Notes About Confidentiality

Faculty and staff members often have an understandable desire to know if a student who has been referred to SCS has actually attended a session and/or if any progress is being made. In order to provide this information, the SCS clinician must have the student's written consent. Without written consent from the student, SCS cannot acknowledge any contact with the student. Again, all staff at SCS are required by law and professional ethics to protect the confidentiality of all communication between a counselor and client, except in specific case, such as s when harm to self or others is imminent. This policy can at times be a source of frustration for well-intentioned faculty or staff members who simply want to know if the student is receiving treatment. Unfortunately, without written consent, legal and ethical guidelines require that the information be obtained by the faculty member directly from the student. Students are free to disclose any information they wish to share about their treatment, but please do not pressure them.