

STUDENT INFORMATION

PURPOSE OF PAMPHLET

Students at Midwestern University have worked diligently preparing themselves academically for their chosen medical profession. Although you understand the academic challenges of your medical program, at times, personal and/or academic difficulties arise that can interfere with succeeding in any given program. This pamphlet is designed to provide guidelines, resources, and options in the event you experience academic or personal challenges while attending Midwestern University.

HOW CAN ACADEMIC SUCCESS BECOME COMPROMISED

Each professional program at Midwestern University is challenging in its own way. Each program presents a high volume of information at a rapid pace with rigorous exam schedules. Unlike undergraduate and some graduate programs, courses are prescribed, progressive, and are offered once per academic year. Although it is common for students to experience some level of stress throughout their academic programs, the pace, volume of information, desire to succeed and adjustment to this environment can result in being overwhelmed.

Circumstances in life can also provide additional distractions and distress that can interfere with academic success. Some examples can be situations that have been planned, like getting married or planning for break or a vacation. Others are experiences that are unexpected, like serious illness of oneself or a family member, death of a significant person in your life, or a world tragedy. In any case, these intrusions into your life may disrupt your ability to concentrate, study, or prepare for an exam. In addition, getting enough sleep, eating, taking care of yourself, or disruptions in interpersonal relationships can be affected.

WHEN SHOULD I BE CONCERNED ABOUT MY LEVEL OF DISTRESS

Distress can be experienced in a variety of ways, differing dramatically from person to person both in how it is experienced and how individuals respond to distress. Stress is part of everyday life and certainly part of the atmosphere at Midwestern University. As a human being and future healthcare professional, it can be useful to identify, understand, and manage emotional distress to ensure your own health and well-being.

Emotional and psychological distress can be experienced in a variety of physiological, emotional, and behavioral ways. The following is a list of symptoms that signal potential distress and cause for concern. This list is not exhaustive.

- sleep disturbance (difficulty falling asleep, sleeping excessively, interrupted sleep)
- change in appetite
- feeling helpless and/or hopeless
- mood swings (sad, irritable, elated, etc.)
- anxious, fearful, worrying
- depressed mood
- ruminating thoughts
- fatigue
- withdrawn and/or isolation
- disinterest in usual activities
- difficulty functioning/getting through the day
- difficulty concentrating and/or focusing
- thoughts to harm self
- thoughts to harm others

HOW CAN I HELP MYSELF?

Many students are concerned about their academic and professional careers should they identify distress and/or seek outside assistance. Here at Midwestern University, asking for and seeking help is not only accepted, but encouraged by administration, faculty, and staff. In addition, seeking outside assistance from healthcare professionals, physicians, psychologists, and social workers are bound by confidentiality, therefore any identifying information cannot be disclosed without the written permission of the individual seeking help.

Recognizing and identifying emotional or psychological distress is the first step in feeling better. However, sometimes it is difficult to self-identify. If you are not sure whether you are distressed, please contact or talk to someone on or off campus to assist in clarifying your uncertainty. Usually, when a person questions their level of distress, they are distressed. This is the time to seek external support and possibly professional help.

At times, you may not recognize any signs of distress in an attempt to maintain responsibilities and expectations. This is when family, friends, loved ones, faculty, and/or staff may be helpful in expressing their concern for you or noticing changes in your behavior. You can help yourself by listening to this feedback and considering whether it may be accurate. You can also become more aware of your own experiences, and reactions in an attempt to understand and identify possible symptoms. Seeking outside assistance may also help in providing guidance, clarification, information, and resources.

HOW DO I HELP A FRIEND IN DISTRESS?

There are a variety of ways that may raise your concern about a friend or classmate. He/she may confide his or her concerns, you might observe change in behavior and may infer he or she is distressed, or you may hear through other classmates or friends their concern for another student.

Friends or classmates who tell you directly that they are distressed and have been unable to resolve their concerns on their own may be reaching out for help and ready to accept help from you. In this case, listening may be the most effective intervention.

The situation is more difficult when friends or classmates do not confide in you directly but you sense there is something wrong. Depending on the particular situation, you may or may not choose to intervene. This decision depends on such factors as what behaviors concern you, how distressed your friend/classmate seems to be, your relationship with the person, how approachable your friend is, as well as your personality style and feelings about intervening. If you think your friend/classmate might be open to discussing his or her concerns with you, the best approach generally involves letting the student know that you've noticed he or she seems upset lately and you're wondering if he or she would like to talk with you (someone).

If your friend/classmate takes you up on your offer to talk, here are some suggestions:

- Listen. Sometimes having someone listen is enough to alleviate distress.
- Comment on the change of behavior or attitude. Try to be curious about these changes in an attempt to help you and your friend/classmate begin to understand why these changes are occurring now.
- Empathize with the feelings, experiences or concerns being expressed. Be as genuinely supportive as you can be.
- If appropriate, offer assistance by providing options and resources to assist your friend/classmate.

- Suggest contacting Student Counseling Services in situations that you feel unable or unwilling to be helpful. Inform your friend/classmate that Counseling Services is confidential and has experience dealing with similar problems or concerns they have articulated.
- Keep in mind your own limits. You do not need to get more involved in the life of your friend/classmate than is comfortable or appropriate for you. Your role is to provide support.
- For more information and advice on dealing with friends/classmates in distress, call Student Counseling Services to consult with the Counselor.

You need to keep in mind that some friends/classmates may reject your efforts, may deny any distress and/or may feel intruded upon. However, they might also feel appreciative of your interest and concern and connecting with them might be an important step toward dealing with their distress.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IN A CRISIS SITUATION?

If you or a friend/classmate are feeling out of control, violent, decompensating, and/or immediately suicidal or homicidal, then immediate intervention is clearly needed. At least one of these interventions must be taken, including talking directly with one of the following individuals:

- Go to Student Counseling Services
- Contact the Dean of Student Services (call the office 630-515-6470 or go to the Office of Student Services)
- If you live on campus, contact the Manager of Residential Life
- Contact Security to have the Dean of Student Services paged
- Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255
- Call the DuPage County Health Department Access and Crisis Center at 630-627-1700
- Call the Downers Grove Police Department at 630-464-5600 or 9-1-1

KEEP YOUR LIMITS IN MIND

It is important to realize the limits of your responsibility and ability to be helpful to a person who is not receptive. If a friend/classmate opens up to you, either on your initiative or their own, 1) it does not mean you must or can solve your friend's/classmate's problem; and 2) it does not make you responsible to ensure your friend/classmate takes steps to resolve their concerns.

Except in certain life-threatening situations, the choice of whether or not to seek professional help is up to the distressed individual. If your friend/classmate remains adamant about not seeking counseling, you can only make suggestions and recommendations and nothing more.

If you are quite concerned about a student, consult with Counseling Services. The Counselor may be able to offer alternate ways of approaching the situation and your friend/classmate.