

Resources

Local

Counseling & Psychological Services

caps.wcu.edu
828.227.7469

University Police

Emergencies / after-hours Counselor
828.227.8911

Appalachian Community Services

24-hr community mental health emergency
1.888.315.2880
If someone is in medical danger, call 911

National

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

24/7 Crisis Counseling
SuicidePreventionLifeline.org
1.800.273.TALK (8255)

The Trevor Project

24/7 Crisis Counseling for LGBT Youth
1.866.488.7386

Veterans Affairs (VA) Suicide Hotline

1.800.273.TALK (8255)
Press 1 to reach VA Hotline

CATS

Care

Western Carolina University | Counseling & Psychological Services

At Western Carolina University, no one is alone. We care about each other, and we care about helping people in distress. CATS Care will give you information about suicide warning signs, as well as how to approach a student in distress and connect them to a caring network of helpers.

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Facts

- Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among college students nation-wide.
- 9/10 people who die by suicide have a diagnosable mental illness. Only 3/10 of them received mental health services in the year before they died.
- In 2013-2014, 42% of Counseling and Psychological Services clients at WCU reported that they had seriously considered attempting suicide. 3.9% had considered attempting suicide within 2 weeks of coming to CAPS.
- Approaching students in distress and sharing resources with them can save lives on our campus. The Catamount Family at Western Carolina University is committed to reaching out and helping those in distress. CATS Care!

Communications / Signs of Distress

If you know of a student who is acting in a way that they do not normally act, you should check in with them. If you notice any of these communications/signs of distress, apply CATS Care. It's up to you to say something. Here are examples of how students may covertly communicate that they are in distress.

- Sad or irritable mood
- Talking about being a burden
- Talking about feeling hopeless
- Increase in drug/alcohol use
- Withdrawing from or avoiding contact with others
- Communications about suffering: they may talk about it, post on social media, etc.
- Recent changes in behaviors, mood, academic performance, or social relationships
- Talking about wanting to die or kill oneself

CATS Care

Connect

Tolerate your own anxiety and awkwardness. Start a conversation with the student voicing your specific concerns. Acknowledge and validate the distress. Establish rapport.

Ask

Show that you care by asking questions. Be direct, and ask about suicide ("Have you thought about suicide?")

Take Time

Let the student know that he/she is not alone. Help to promote hope and be available.

Share

Share resources with the student. Share information with people you trust. Don't be the only one to know. Counseling & Psychological Services is an excellent resource for you both! caps.wcu.edu or call 828.227.7469

CATS Care

Connect

This step may feel awkward for many people. It's natural to feel nervous when you're approaching someone to talk to them about emotional issues. Don't let this anxiety stop you! Be brave. Understand that by feeling awkward for a few moments, you can help save lives.

If you feel awkward, that's normal! Talking about suicide can feel scary, but that's no reason to avoid the conversation.

Make sure that you're connecting with the student in a safe and private place. It's OK to plan the conversation ahead of time "Hey! I'd love to chat later; do you have time this afternoon?"

Be specific! Remember the communications that alert us to distress and communicate this to the student. Talk about specific things that have made you concerned. "You seem really stressed out lately. I've noticed that you've been avoiding our friend group and not going to class."

Ask

Once you have connected and built rapport with the student in distress by asking how they're doing and communicating your concern, you can and should ask directly about suicide. Bringing up suicide will not put the idea in a person's head, but it can allow them to express their pain in a safe manner.

Build up to asking about suicide by saying things like "I'm really concerned about you." And "How have you been doing recently?"

Don't pass judgment. When you're talking to someone in distress be open to their experience, no matter what you may or may not think about suicide. Being open can help you to stay connected and promote hope.

Be direct and ask about suicide. (Don't use language like "Are you planning to hurt yourself?" Hurting and killing are two different things.) Examples of ways to ask about suicide include

"Have you thought about killing yourself?"

"Are you having thoughts of ending your life?"

"Do you want to kill yourself?"

"Have you thought about suicide?"

Take Time

When you start the conversation, make sure that you have time to devote to the person in distress. You want them to feel cared for and connected to, not rushed. Someone caring enough to really listen can make a big difference. Letting the person know they are not alone helps to promote hope.

Allow the individual to talk about death or dying. This may be uncomfortable, but allowing them to do so shows that you really care.

Listen. Keep the focus on the person in distress. Continue to ask questions—this is a great way of showing that you care.

Encourage/allow them to come up with their own reasons for living

Share

Share resources and referrals with the student. Allow them to have control over who is contacted and how. Know that keeping the student safe is the top priority!

Know resources and have them available to share with the student.

Ask them if they want you to help them make connections with the resources and referral sources. You can call resources together during your conversation. Get permission to follow-up with the student to check in and make sure they're getting what they need.

Form a safety net. Ask the student who else they feel comfortable talking to about their distress.

You cannot be the only person who knows about someone being suicidal. Share with others who you know are safe. This could be an RA, RD, professor, or Counseling and Psychological Services. You have permission and are encouraged to share with others!

If someone voices that they are suicidal, stay with them until they've connected with a helping resource (RA, Counseling and Psychological Services, Campus Police, etc.)