

ACT for Faculty and Staff

A resource for faculty and staff to facilitate conversations with struggling students.

ACT: Acknowledge, Care, Tell when concerned about a student, or approached by students asking for help:

Acknowledge

Whether a student asks for help directly, or you have concerns, acknowledge that the situation is serious and that you're worried about their wellbeing. Remember, there's no harm in asking a student if they're suicidal.

Example: "I really value your input in class and appreciate x, y, and z, but I've noticed a few changes in your behavior and wanted to check in to see how you're doing." [As the conversation progresses] "Has it gotten so bad that you've thought about suicide?"

Care

Show you care by listening non-judgmentally to what the student says: observe their demeanor and avoid making the student feel embarrassed or guilty. Avoid minimizing their feelings. Don't say things like, "It'll get better tomorrow" or "It'll pass soon." Depression isn't a simple problem that can easily be fixed.

Offer words of encouragement, but do not promise to keep a secret. Acting to prevent suicide overrides any confidentiality between faculty/staff and students.

Example: "It sounds like you are really struggling, I would never want you to be hurting like this."

Tell

Advise that student that you must tell your school's mental health contact and that you will accompany them to their office.

Example: "There are people at this school who know how to help kids that are dealing with big issues like this. Let's walk down to the counseling suite together."

Whether or not you believe a student is suicidal, alert your school's mental health contact about your concerns and your conversation with the student. Do not let the student walk alone to the office.

Help is always available.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is available 24/7 and provides free, confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources at 1-800-273-8255.

Crisis Text Line Text ACT to 741741 for free, 24/7 crisis support in the U.S.

