

SUPPORTING STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

A Guide for Faculty & Staff



STUDENT AFFAIRS



An increasing number of college students
are facing mental health challenges.

80%

of students say their academic performance has been
affected by mental or emotional disruptions

41%

screened positive for moderate or major depression

13%

endorsed thoughts of suicide



Student Mental Health

A greater number of students each year report concerns with their mental and emotional functioning compared to the last (Healthy Minds Study; HMS; 2021). In the last study, greater than 80 percent of students reported having had last month's academic performance affected by mental or emotional disruptions. Forty-one percent screened positive for moderate and major depression, and a third screened positive for anxiety. HMS found in the 2021 study that 13 percent of respondents endorsed thoughts of suicide.

The numbers were higher in student groups that are underrepresented and marginalized on Auburn's campus. Faculty and staff are typically one of the first to know when a student is struggling. Nearly 80 percent of higher education faculty reported having been involved with student mental health concerns over the year (Mary Christie Foundation, 2021). In fact, on the HMS, 35 percent of students said they would talk to a faculty member if they had a mental health issue affecting their academic performance.

As such, Student Affairs created this guide in conjunction with two of its offices, **Auburn Cares** and **Student Counseling & Psychological Services**, to guide faculty and staff in providing support to students who are working through disruptions to their mental and emotional health.

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES AT AUBURN

Auburn Cares supports students and families through challenging and complex situations, connecting students with resources and fostering self-advocacy through individualized planning. Some of the support they provide includes:

- Assessing needs of students experiencing a crisis or emergency
- Helping students connect with campus and/or community resources
- Consulting with faculty/staff to provide the appropriate assistance to students
- Assisting students and their families in navigating the medical and/or compassionate withdrawal process

Student Counseling & Psychological Services, or SCPS, is the primary mental health counseling center for Auburn University's undergraduate and graduate student community. It provides brief, time-limited, and goal-oriented counseling and psychiatric services to the Auburn University student community. Services may include individual therapy, group therapy, workshops, drop-in groups, and psychiatric services. The office also provides drop-in crisis counseling services and 24/7 phone support.



Best Practices for Mental Health in Class

TALK ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

From the first class day, let students know that they can come to you when they are struggling. Reinforce a message of support during stressful times in the class (i.e., exam week) and out (i.e., campus or world events).

KNOW CAMPUS RESOURCES

Auburn has multiple departments across campus that are focused on ensuring students have support while they are on campus.

- Academic Support — tutoring, study skills, and academic resiliency building
- Career Discover and Success Center — career testing, interviewing skills, help selecting a major
- Auburn Cares — medical withdrawal information, Safe Harbor, food insecurity
- Recreation and Wellness — nutrition support, substance use services, peer health education, and recreation activities
- Office of Accessibility — academic accommodations and SKILL coaching
- Student Counseling & Psychological Services — mental health counseling, psychiatry, Zen Den, and crisis support

INCLUDE RESOURCES IN YOUR SYLLABI

Below is sample language to use in your syllabus:

Students who would like counseling or mental health information can visit Student Counseling & Psychological Services at aub.ie/scps or call (334) 844-5123.

ENCOURAGE SELF-CARE

Perhaps you can incorporate mindfulness, meditation, or breathing activities prior to a big test or project in class and encourage students to try similar techniques out of class. SCPS suggests reminding students to practice “grannies,” that is, the activities your grandmother checks in with you about (e.g., Are you eating well? Sleeping? Exercising? Taking walks during the day? Spending time with people?).

BE MINDFUL WHEN MAKING DUE DATES

Consider making assignments due mid-day or early evening (noon to 8 p.m.) to allow students the ability to prioritize sleep, a foundational component toward good mental health.

Breaks and holidays within semesters are intended to be just that—days in which students can spend time recharging from their academics and possibly spending time with loved ones. Plan test and assignment due dates to be before these breaks so that they can use the time off to rest.

Finally, some students may experience mental health disruptions that may preclude them from being able to attend class. Consider providing some flexibility for them to make up missed assignments another time.



Recognizing a Struggling Student

A college student's life can be stressful. You may recognize a student in distress but be uncertain about whether or not you should contact Auburn Cares about the student's challenges. We believe early detection and intervention are essential to prevent small issues from becoming major obstacles in a student's life. A combination of any of the following may indicate a student is in distress and should be reported to Auburn Cares so they can reach out to support the student.

ACADEMIC CHANGES

- Repeated absences
- Missed/late assignments
- Marked decline in performance
- Dependency (excessive use of your time)

CLASSROOM DISRUPTIONS

- Rude or insubordinate behavior
- Bizarre, aggressive, or morbid comments or written content
- Inappropriate boundaries
- Alcohol intoxication/drinking in class

PERSONAL APPEARANCE

- Poor hygiene
- Disheveled clothing
- Impaired speech
- Excessive fatigue/lack of sleep

PSYCHOLOGICAL SIGNS

- Concerning verbal or written messages
- Missed/late assignments
- Disjointed, tangential thinking patterns
- Verbalization of suicidal thinking

SOCIAL SIGNS

- Poor eye contact
- Exaggerated behavior
- Aggressive, threatening
- Tearful

Supporting Students in Distress

One of the best parts of the Auburn Family is being a part of a community of care. When you see a student in distress, you might be the best person to first approach them and offer help. We recommend the following process to help a student in distress.

APPROACH

- Once you have identified a student who may be in distress, approach the student to offer support. There is no “right way” to initiate this conversation.

RESPECT THEIR PRIVACY

- Choose a place to talk that is quiet from interruption and a time that is convenient for you both.

EXPRESS GENUINE CARE AND CONCERN

- Be honest and clear about the signs that alerted you to a possible problem.
- Remain calm, compassionate and willing to listen.
- Use language that is non-judgmental (ex. I hear you).
- Ask open-ended questions (ex. What happened next?).
- If you suspect the person is contemplating suicide, don't be afraid to ask. Research studies have shown that asking the question does not increase the risk of suicide. In fact, most individuals who are asked this question experience a sense of relief that someone has seen their pain.

OFFER SUPPORT AND LISTEN

- Convey your willingness to help.
- Be aware the student could respond in variety of different ways. Don't interpret negative, indifferent, or hostile responds as a failure. A decision to seek help often takes time and consideration.
- Reflect back or repeat what the student says to indicate you are listening and understanding correctly.
- Do not promise confidentiality. If a student asks you to keep something confidential, gently pause the conversation and tell them you may be able to keep some things confidential, but there are other things you are required to report (you may be required to report information when a student is at immediate risk of harming self or others).

REFER

- Tell the student you are going to refer them to the Auburn Cares office for additional support.
- If you know another specific resource that can assist the student, you can also refer them there.
- Encourage the student to utilize the resources offered.
- Keep communication open by telling the student you are always willing to listen.

THINGS TO AVOID

There are a few things to try to avoid doing when working with a student in distress:

- Minimizing or underestimating a student's struggles; better to check in when not needed than to dismiss a potentially harmful situation.
- Promising confidentiality.
- Leaving a student in crisis alone.

REFER A STUDENT

- To refer a student to Auburn Cares, complete the online referral form at aub.ie/auburncares
- If a student needs immediate support during business hours or you would like to discuss the situation, call Auburn Cares at 334-844-1305. If after business hours, you can call Student Counseling & Psychological Services at 334-844-5123 and ask to speak with the after-hours clinician.
- If the student is experiencing a life-threatening situation, call 911.

**One of the best parts of the
Auburn Family is being a part of
a community of care.**





STUDENT AFFAIRS

Auburn Cares

Melton Student Center, Suite 1206

P: 334-844-1305

auburncares@auburn.edu | aucares.auburn.edu

Student Counseling & Psychological Services

Medical Clinic: 400 Lem Morrison Drive, Suite 2086

Haley Center: 351 Thach Concourse, Room 0326

P: 334-844-5123

scps@auburn.edu | scps.auburn.edu