

# Expressing Caring Concern

Gustavus Adolphus College Counseling Center

## Top three most important things to do:

- Talk with your friend
- Share your concern and help your friend get support from a mental health professional. Many people feel that if they tell another person, they are betraying their friend. However, by telling someone, you are being the best friend possible and helping your friend get the support he or she needs.
- Take care of yourself

## Ten Tips for Expressing Concern:

**1. Act now.** If you are worried about a friend's behavior or attitude, **talk** with him or her **as soon as possible**. Don't wait to see if your friend starts to feel better. If your friend brings mental health concerns up with you, don't change the subject - ask questions, listen to ideas and be responsive. Do not be afraid to ask your friend directly if he/she has thought about suicide. You cannot plant the idea by asking. It is ALWAYS a good thing to ask. If you think your friend might be in immediate danger, make sure he/she is not left alone and immediately utilize emergency contact resources.

**2. Meet your friend in a comfortable place where you can talk privately.** Talk in a calm, nonjudgmental and considerate manner about the specific things you have seen or felt that caused you to worry about his or her health. **Tell your friend clearly what behaviors you observed that are worrying you.** Voice your concern in a supportive and careful way. Tell him or her that you want to help, and avoid ambushing him/her with a large group intervention. One-on-one conversations are best, in most situations, and be sure that you and your friend are not under the influence of substances during the conversation.

You can prepare and practice ahead of time. Outline for yourself the reasons you feel your friend needs help. Practice stating reasons for helping in a positive, non-blaming way, for example:

- "I value our relationship and I am concerned that you seem depressed. You haven't been eating, you've been sleeping a lot, not socializing like usual, and talking about dying. I want to help".
- "I feel really scared when I notice you eating little at mealtimes, and I want to support you."

**3. Listen, don't lecture.** Listen to thoughts and feelings in a sensitive, non-threatening way. Communicate understanding by repeating back the essence of what your friend tells you.

Here are three tips:

- **Use "I" statements.** For example, "I'm worried about your safety," or, "It makes me afraid to hear you talk about suicide."
- **Avoid "You" statements that sound critical.** For example, "You're out of control!" or "You must be crazy!"
- Avoid giving simple solutions. For example, "Everything would be okay if you just stopped..."
- **Rather than jumping in with suggestions, ask what you can do to help.**

**4. Offer help.** Remind your friend that mental health disorders are treatable and there is hope. Ask if they are getting the care they need. **Encourage your friend to seek help.** You can offer to go with them to talk to someone or to help identify and get the right kind of care. You can help by learning about possible treatment options. If your friend is willing to schedule an appointment, you can offer to assist by finding out phone numbers, letting him/her use your phone or walking him/her to the Counseling Center. If your friend is not immediately ready to seek help, you can help them develop a plan for getting it in the near future. **Give advice in the form of options.** For instance, recommend a

health professional you know of or suggest support groups you think may help your friend work through the problem. Although it may be tempting to try and help your friend on your own, it is always safest to get help.

**5. Be prepared for all possible reactions.** Your friend may deny that he or she has a problem. Sometimes people react with hopeless statements saying "there is nothing anyone can do" or with anger "leave me alone - who asked for your help". Realize that this is the depression, anxiety, etc. talking, so don't become defensive or give up. If your friend won't listen to you, you may need to **tell someone else**. Mental health concerns do not clear up on their own. Consider talking to a CF, a dean, your friend's parents, an advisor, a medical provider, a counselor, or another trusted adult. If you're not sure what to do, always refer or ask for help. By telling someone, you are not betraying your friend, you are helping him or her. Counselors are available to talk with you about how to best help a friend. Never worry alone!

**6.** Remember that you cannot make someone get help or change his or her attitudes and behaviors. You can make a significant difference by sharing your concerns, providing support, and knowing where to get more information. **Offer emotional support, understanding, patience and encouragement.**

**7.** Although you may be willing to do anything and everything to help, **don't try to take over your friend's life.** Offer support, but be patient.

**8.** Avoid gossip! You may find yourself seeking out support from other friends on how to manage the situation, and this is okay. However, be mindful of what your friend has asked to remain private. If you need support and feel it's turning into gossip with friends, speak to a counselor in order to manage the situation more appropriately.

**9.** To be a good friend, **never keep talk of suicide a secret**, even if a friend has asked you to. Take any talk of suicide or suicidal plans seriously and seek help immediately from a trusted adult or health professional. Stay close and make sure your friend is not left alone, and tell them "I care about you so much, and because of that I can't promise to keep this secret."

**10. Take care of yourself.** Be sure to take time for yourself. It is important to pay attention to your own health while helping a friend. Know your limits, don't overextend yourself, and be a positive role model for health. If your friend continues to struggle, recognize that you planted a seed - they may thank you down the road for reaching out. Don't hesitate to reach out for support from the Counseling Center in order to care for yourself!

### Emergency Contact Resources

#### On Campus Resources

<b>Campus Safety</b>	(507)933-8888
<b>Counseling Center</b>	(507)933-7027
<b>Residential Life</b>	(507)933-7529
<b>Chaplain Office</b>	(507)933-7446
<b>Sexual Assault (SART)</b>	(507)933-6868
<b>Health Service</b>	(507)933-7630
<b>Dean of Students</b>	(507)933-7526

#### Off Campus Resources

<b>Emergency</b>	911
<b>Crisis Center (Mankato)</b>	(507)344-0621
<b>Rivers Edge Hospital</b>	(507)931-2220
<b>Mayo Clinic Health Hospital (Mankato)</b>	(507)625-4031
<u>24-Hour Confidential Lines</u>	
<b>Crisis Connection</b>	(612)379-6363
<b>Suicide Prevention Line</b>	1-800-273-TALK (8255)
<b>First Call for Help</b>	211
<b>Crisis/Warm Line</b>	1-877-399-3040