

## Communicating with People in Distress

### Helpful Hints

Whether on the phone or in person, when you find yourself talking with someone who appears to be in extreme distress, the following are some ways to help you feel confident that you are managing the situation in the best way possible.

#### 1. THERE IS NO MAGICAL, "RIGHT" THING TO SAY

- *Listen and respond to what you hear. Express your honest concern for the person*
- *Share that you recognize the person needs assistance and you will connect the person with a staff member who can help*

#### 2. BE AWARE OF YOUR LEVEL OF RESPONSIBILITY

- *You are not responsible for solving this person's problem or for learning how to effectively counsel this person*
- *You are not responsible if this person chooses to harm him or herself*
- *You ARE responsible for responding to the person's need for help and for connecting this person with a professional (on or off campus)*

#### 3. KNOW WHO TO CONTACT

- *If you receive a phone call from someone threatening suicide, do your best to keep the person on the line using the ideas identified above. While you are on the phone, use Communicator to request assistance of a co-worker to either contact Counseling Services, Safety & Security or to call 911 for you. If appropriate, get the caller's name and location as 911 operators will need this information. Calling 911 (or having a colleague call 911 while you keep the individual on the line) is the best course of action in this type of crisis situation. Follow-up your 911 contact by consulting with the staff from Safety & Security and making a report to the BIT (Behavioral Intervention Team) at [www.otc.edu/otccares](http://www.otc.edu/otccares)\**
- *In most instances, the distressed individual is not threatening immediate harm to self or others and you will have time to connect the individual with a member of our counseling staff for assistance. If you are transferring a phone call to one of our staff, please be sure to stay on the line with the individual until you are sure the transfer was successful. It is okay to interrupt any of us when a crisis situation is occurring.*

**Counseling Services Main Number: 447-6974**  
**James Carpenter 6981**

**Joyce Bateman, Director 6973**  
**Heather Lewellen/Jenn Holum 6980**

- *If none of the counseling staff is available, the following OTC employees can also be contacted to assist:*

<b>Karla Gregg 6966</b>	<b>Jeff Jones 8192</b>	<b>Trixie Braden 8191</b>	<b>Piper Wilson 6977</b>
<b>Julia Edwards 8188</b>	<b>Ramona George 8861</b>	<b>Amy Wood 6992</b>	
<b>Susan Blakey 8123</b>	<b>Alan Tillery 6976</b>	<b>Steve Fritts 3510</b>	

- *Be sure to communicate with the distressed person what you are doing and why. "I can hear that you are very, very upset. I want to connect you with a professional staff person who can help. I am going to stay on the line with you until I am sure you are speaking with someone who can help."*
- **\*Immediately following your conversation with the student, complete an on-line report to OTC's Behavioral Intervention Team ([www.otc.edu/otccares](http://www.otc.edu/otccares)) so that a member of OTC's BIT can also follow-up with the individual of concern.**

#### 4. THERE ARE NO PROFESSIONAL STAFF PEOPLE AVAILABLE, BUT CONTACTING 911 IS NOT NECESSARY

*In very rare circumstances, you may have trouble connecting with any of the above staff members. If this occurs, here are some important community mental-health referral numbers to which you can confidently refer the person. As indicated above, if you transfer the individual to one of the numbers below, please stay on the line until you are sure the individual is speaking with someone who can help (Hit "Transfer;" dial 9 + seven digit number; when a person at the agency answers, identify yourself and the person you are transferring; release the phone call).*

<b>BURRELL BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CRISIS LINE (24-Hour)</b>	<b>417-761-5555 or 1-800-494-7355</b>
<b>MISSOURI VICTIM CENTER</b> (victims of violent crimes)	<b>417-864-7233</b>
<b>SIGMA HOUSE</b> (drug/alcohol abuse)	<b>417-862-3339</b>
<b>SUICIDE HOTLINE</b>	<b>1-800-784-2433 or 1-800-273-8255</b>
	<b>TTY: 1-800-799-4889</b>