



Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Medical Department
77 Massachusetts Avenue, E23
Cambridge, MA 02139

**For Mental Health
Appointments & Emergencies**
Call 617-253-2916
(24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

How to Help Someone in Distress

When to be concerned

Stress is a fact of life for many people at MIT. Many thrive on the challenges of this stimulating environment. But at times we all become tired, irritable, overwhelmed, anxious, or depressed.

When is it reasonable, even crucial, to suggest that someone speak with a medical professional? The initial decision to direct someone to MIT Medical is often the hardest. Yet identifying and referring a person in distress is vital, even though it is often difficult to make such a personal suggestion.

Signs and symptoms of psychological distress

- excessive anxiety or panic
- marked decline in academic work or job performance
- frequent absence from class or work, especially when this is a change
- apathy, lack of energy, change in sleeping or eating habits, or dramatic weight gain or loss
- marked changes in personal hygiene, work habits, or social behavior
- isolation or withdrawal

How you can help: some simple guidelines

An individual who is distressed often wants help but doesn't know how to ask. You can play an essential role by expressing your concerns in a caring, non-judgmental way.

- Find a private, comfortable place to talk.
- In your own words, explain your concerns in a non-judgmental way.
- Ask open-ended questions. Your friend may choose not to answer but may feel relieved to know you are trying to understand.
- Don't feel compelled to find a solution or express a judgment. Often listening is enough.
- Suggest that your friend can get more help if needed. You can give this brochure to your friend and point out the resources at MIT.

- Know your own limits. If you find yourself thinking about your friend too much, it might help to speak with a tutor, housemaster, dean, or someone at the Mental Health Service. You don't have to handle this alone.

How to make a referral

- Suggest that your friend make an appointment. The Mental Health Service is on the third floor of MIT Medical. The phone number is 617-253-2916, day or night.
- If necessary, you can help your friend make an appointment. Call while your friend is with you. Write down the appointment details, including time, provider's name, and location.
- If you think it is an emergency, call and say that your friend needs to be seen urgently. Stay on the line until you understand the specific steps you should take.

Services offered

MIT Medical's Mental Health Service offers help to all members of the MIT community. We provide consultation, crisis intervention, and treatment, including individual and group psychotherapy and medication. Staff members have expertise in special issues such as stress, isolation, academic pressure, eating problems, insomnia, fatigue, alcohol and substance abuse and general problems of daily living.

We work closely with professionals in the outside community and sometimes refer an individual for specialized services. We also have close relationships with members of the Institute community and can help people make useful connections.

When someone calls for an appointment, the secretary will ask if this is the first contact with the Service. First time callers will be scheduled for a brief intake phone call. This is an approximately 15 minute phone call during which an intake clinician will establish the general problem and its urgency, as well as gather information that will help match the caller with the most appropriate clinician. The clinician will then schedule an initial hour long appointment. If an individual doesn't have the privacy for a phone call, they can choose to come to MHS (3rd floor of MIT Medical, building E23) for an intake interview.

If an individual cannot wait, there are walk-in hours every afternoon, Monday-Friday from 2 pm to 4pm. Appropriate follow-up will be arranged at that walk-in visit.

All calls and visits are strictly confidential.

Emergencies

The Mental Health Service provides 24-hour emergency coverage. Call MIT Medical at 617-253-2916 to reach the psychiatrist-on-call. In addition, you may call MIT Medical Urgent Care at 617-253-1311; there is always a medical doctor and nurse or nurse practitioner on-site.

Useful resources

- MIT Medical Urgent Care (24 hours): 617-253-1311
- MIT Medical Internal Medicine, personal physicians and nurse practitioners: Cambridge, 617-253-4481; Lexington, 781-981-7080

- Counseling and Support Services (CSS) Deans: 617-253-4861
- Chaplaincy: see MIT telephone directory
- Campus Police: 617-253-1212; in an emergency, dial 100 (on campus only)
- Dean on Call: call Campus Police
- Nightline (Confidential, student-staffed hotline; 7pm – 7am during the term): 617-253-8800
- Center for Health Promotion and Wellness: 617-253-1316
- Mental Health Service (24 hours): 617-253-2916
- Clinical Director for Campus Life: 617-253-5240
- Ambulance Services, call Campus Police: 617-253-1212, or dial 100 (on campus only)
- Tutors and Housemasters in each living group