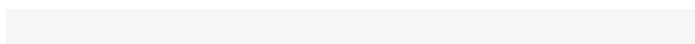
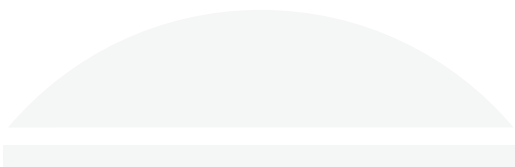


for MIT faculty

HOW TO HELP STUDENTS IN DISTRESS



A Publication of the Mental Health Service



MITMedical

HOW TO HELP

MIT STUDENTS AND STRESS

Stress is a fact of life for students at MIT. MIT students are not just juggling staggering academic demands; they're also coping with the developmental challenges faced by all college students—new friendships and relationships, new personal responsibilities, and distance from home and family. While many undergraduate and graduate students thrive on these challenges, many others students will sometimes feel overwhelmed, anxious, or depressed.

WHAT CAN I DO?

Faculty members may be among the first to notice early signs of distress in their students. For this reason, they have a unique and crucial role in identifying students who need assistance and referring them to appropriate sources of help.

WHEN SHOULD I BE CONCERNED ABOUT A STUDENT?

Making the decision to refer a student to MIT Medical's Mental Health Service or another resource is often difficult, because it involves making a judgment call about another individual's personal issues and emotional state. When is it reasonable, even crucial, to suggest that a student speak with a mental health professional or other student support professional?

Taken alone, any one of the following academic, psychological, physical, or social indicators is not necessarily a sign that the student is experiencing severe distress. However, a student may need, or may be asking for, help if he or she exhibits several of these warning signs:

STUDENTS IN DISTRESS

INDICATORS

Academic indicators

- Frequent absences from class or work, especially when this is a change.
- Marked decline in academic work or work performance.
- Repeated need for accommodations (extensions, OXs, etc.).
- Marked changes in concentration, motivation, and investment in academic work.
- Papers or essays with themes of depression, hopelessness, helplessness, anger, social isolation, and/or despair.

Psychological or physical indicators

- Marked changes in personal hygiene, noticeable weight gain or loss, and/or reported changes in sleeping or eating habits.
- Depressed demeanor, isolation, or withdrawal.
- Apathy, lack of energy, noticeable changes in social behavior, and/or work habits.
- Noticeable anxiety or panic.
- Marked changes in personality traits and/or interpersonal style.
- Anger, irritability, and increased interpersonal difficulties.

Other social or interpersonal factors

- Reported family issues, parent-child conflicts, personal losses, romantic breakups, or friction in friendships, relationships with advisors, or other interpersonal relationships.
- Concerns expressed by peers, GRTs, housemasters, RLAs, advisors, or anyone else with immediate and personal knowledge of the student.

HOW DO I TALK WITH A STUDENT WHO MAY NEED HELP?

A student who is distressed and needs help often doesn't know to seek services, or may be hesitant to do so, even if he or she wants help. As an MIT faculty member, you can make the critical difference by approaching and engaging the student to express your concerns in a caring and non-judgmental way. These suggestions can help:

Be discreet. Find a private, comfortable place to talk with the student in person.

Be non-judgmental. In your own words, offer your observations and explain your concerns without being critical. For example, say, "You seem to be having a hard time lately," Don't say, "You have not been performing well recently."

Ask open-ended questions and listen. For example, ask, "How are things going?" The student may not answer, but may feel relieved to know you are taking an interest, trying to understand, and offering help. If the student shares his or her feelings with you, don't feel that you have to offer a solution to the problem or express a judgment. The important thing is that you are listening.

Direct the student to MIT Medical's Mental Health Service or other MIT resources. Feel free to share the list of resources in this brochure with the student and discuss the various sources of support that are available to MIT students. It is important to let the student know that you are not a mental health professional; therefore, you do not have the background to provide the best sort of help. You can reassure the student that you will continue to provide support as a concerned and caring faculty member.

Gently counter resistance. Students may resist seeking help for a number of reasons. Some may feel ashamed or worry about being seen as weak. Others may be concerned that they are overreacting or taking up valuable resources. You can help by explaining that the Mental Health Service and other student support services are here to help everyone, regardless of the nature or severity of their difficulties. A student may worry that seeing a counselor could affect their future job prospects or security clearance. You can refer students to the Mental Health FAQ produced by MIT's Student Health Advisory Committee (SHAC), which addresses these and other student concerns. The FAQ is available online at <http://web.mit.edu/medical/student/mh/>.

Offer help in making a referral or appointment. It may help the student if you help him or her make the initial contact with the Mental Health Service. If the student agrees, you can call the Service while the student is with you. Write down the appointment details, including the time, the location, and the clinician's name.

Don't promise confidentiality. Situations that threaten life and health require swift professional and administrative intervention, which can make it impossible to ensure absolute confidentiality.

Realize that your offer of help may be rejected.

Try to end your conversation with the student in such a way that will allow you or the student to bring up the subject again.

Know your own limits. Faculty members are always welcome to call the Mental Health Service to discuss concerns about a student. You don't have to try to help the student alone. It does not violate medical confidentiality for you to provide information to MIT Medical. However, the mental health clinician cannot share information with you without the student's written authorization.

What should I tell a student about making an appointment with MIT Medical's Mental Health Service?

MIT Medical's Mental Health Service is located on the third floor of MIT Medical. The phone number is 3-2916. You can offer to help your student make an appointment by calling while the student is with you. Write down the appointment time and location and the clinician's name.

Explain to the student that there will be a 15-minute "intake interview" before the first appointment. This short discussion helps the intake clinician understand the general problems and their urgency and allows the Service to match the student with the most appropriate clinician. The intake interview is usually done by phone, but if the student doesn't have a private place to talk on the phone, he or she can meet with the intake clinician in person in the Mental Health Service. After the intake interview, the intake clinician will schedule the student for an hour-long evaluation appointment (usually within a week).

If the student needs to see someone right away, the Mental Health Service has walk-in hours every weekday afternoon from 2 to 4 p.m. (Monday–Friday). An appropriate follow-up appointment will be arranged during the walk-in visit.

What if I think it's an emergency?

The Mental Health Service provides 24-hour emergency coverage. An on-call clinician is available at the regular phone number (3-2916) after 5 p.m.

If you think it is an emergency, call the Mental Health Service at 3-2916, and tell them your student needs to be seen today. A support staff person will offer times the student can be seen that day or put you in contact with a clinician who will develop a plan with you to help your student.

If you have immediate concerns about a student's safety, you can walk the student over to MIT Medical—assuming he or she is agreeable. If possible, please call the Mental Health Service at 3-2916 to let us know you're on the way. You can also call Campus Police at 3-1212 to request a medical transport. Remain with the student until police arrive.



Nightline

3-8800 (7 p.m.–7 a.m. during the term)

<http://web.mit.edu/nightline/>

Confidential, student-staffed listening service that includes a male and female staffer every night of the term.

Student Support Services (S³)

3-4861 (9 a.m.–5 p.m.)

<http://web.mit.edu/counsel/www/>

Offers personal counseling for undergraduate and graduate students on a broad spectrum of issues, including adjustment issues, study problems, crisis situations, chronic distress, and other issues that may affect academic performance.

Medlinks

<http://web.mit.edu/medlinks/www/>

Residentially based, peer health advocacy program sponsored and supported by MIT Medical's Center for Health Promotion & Wellness (formerly Health Education). Most living groups, dorms and fraternities have at least one resident who is a MedLink. All MedLinks have received training in a variety of health-related issues and can help other students determine when to seek medical attention and can direct them to various campus resources.

Chaplaincy

http://web.mit.edu/dsl/religious_life.html

Contact information for individual chaplains, representing a variety of religions and denominations, can be found on the chaplaincy website.

Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgendered at MIT

<http://web.mit.edu/lbgt/>

Links to services, activities, and resources, at MIT and in surrounding communities, for lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgendered individuals or those who have questions about these issues.

MIT Center for Work, Family, and Personal Life

<http://hrweb.mit.edu/worklife/>

Can help student parents with parenting issues, child care, and school information.

MIT Ombuds Office

<http://web.mit.edu/ombud/>

Helps faculty, staff, students, and post-docs identify very serious concerns, resolve disputes, manage conflict, and learn more productive ways of communicating.

MIT Medical

<http://web.mit.edu/medical/>

- SHAC Student Quicklinks:
<http://web.mit.edu/medical/student/>
- MIT Mental Health (24 hours): 3-2916
- MIT Medical Urgent Care (24 hours): 3-1311
- MIT Medical Internal Medicine (primary care physicians and nurse practitioners): Cambridge, 3-4481; Lexington, 781-981-7080
- Center for Health Promotion and Wellness: 3-1316

Campus Police/Ambulance Services

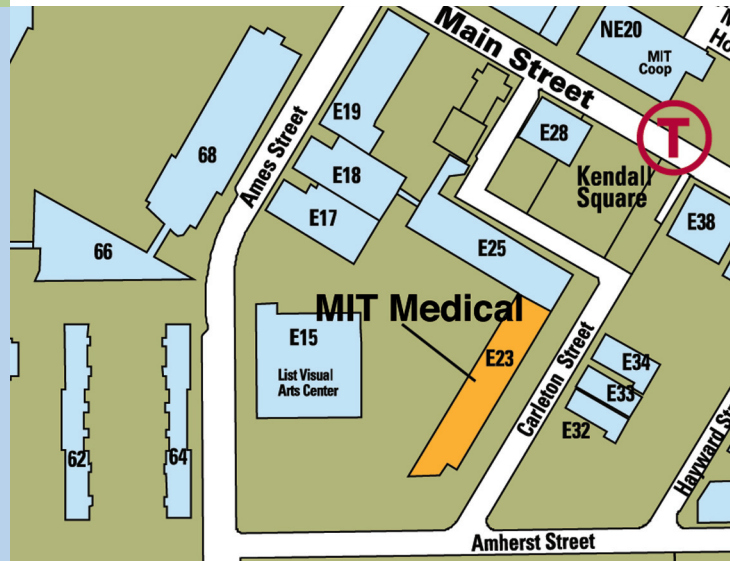
3-1212; in an emergency, dial 100 (on campus only)

ABOUT THE MIT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE

MIT Medical's Mental Health Service serves all members of the MIT community, with an emphasis on providing support to students. We provide consultation, crisis intervention, and treatment, including individual and group psychotherapy and psychopharmacology. Our staff has expertise helping people with stress, relationship difficulties, academic pressure, depression and anxiety, learning problems and ADHD, eating concerns, insomnia, fatigue, alcohol and substance abuse, family issues, and general problems of daily living.

The Mental Health Service works closely with other student support resources within the Institute community and can help students connect with them. We also work closely with professionals outside MIT and sometimes refer a student for specialized services.

All calls and visits are strictly confidential.
617-253-2916



MIT Medical

Mental Health Service

E23-368

617-253-2916

<http://web.mit.edu/medical>



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