



How to Help Someone

College life can be challenging. Students often struggle with feeling homesick, adjusting to college and making friends, relationship difficulties, pressures of school and academic performance, or feeling alone. Studies show that **1 in 5 college students will experience depression, 1 in 2 will experience overwhelming anxiety, and 1 in 6 has considered suicide.**

Crimson CORPS believes no one should have to struggle alone. Often, students are more willing to open up to a friend or a peer than a teacher or mental health professional. Reaching out to a friend in distress can sometimes be the difference between them getting the help they need and not.

Signs that a friend may be in distress:

- Changes in personality, mood, or behavior
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Change in academic functioning – not attending class, failing courses
- Loss of interest or pleasure in social activities
- Recent loss of loved one, family member, or friend
- Decline in hygiene
- Talking – OR JOKING – about death, suicide, or just “not being around”

How to help a friend:

Deciding to approach a friend you're concerned about can be scary and confusing. Approaching someone you care about means you have the courage to let your friend know what you have seen and heard, that you care and are concerned, and that you are willing to help. Approaching a friend with your concerns is not an "attack." It doesn't require judging, blaming, or forcing the person to take action.

Ten things you can do to help:

1. **Choose a suitable time.** Pick a time when you both have time to talk at length and aren't rushed. Choose a place that is quiet, private, and where nobody will interrupt you. Sometimes gathering a small group of mutually trusting friends is a good strategy to use in approaching someone. It can make it harder for the person to deny things if there is more than one person expressing objective observations and concerns.
2. **Plan a simple message of care and concern.** Potentially anxiety-provoking messages need to be

simple and concrete to be understood. Identify what your message will be, and stick to it.

3. **Be honest and specific.** Begin by explaining why you want to have a serious talk with your friend and what you hope will happen--and what you hope doesn't happen. Example: "I am really worried about your drinking and I hope you won't blow me off or think I am just putting you down. I don't want to wreck our friendship."
4. **Describe your observations.** It is important that you describe your observations in a non-judgmental way and express concern about what you've noticed. Example: "Since last Friday night you have come back to our room really drunk four times, twice you said you drove home drunk, and last night you threw up all over our floor."
5. **Express your feelings about what you've observed.** Example: "I am really worried about you. I am scared to talk to you in a serious way because I think you don't believe you have a problem and bringing it up might just make you upset."
6. **Give your friend a chance to talk** about how they're feeling and to respond to what you've said. Listen actively to what your friend says. Listening "actively" does not require that you necessarily agree or disagree with your friend. The important part is that you accurately hear what your friend is saying so he or she feels heard and understood. One way to communicate that you are listening and understanding is to paraphrase what your friend says, from their point of view. For example, you might say, "I hear you saying that your dad drinks a lot more than you do, and that your drinking does not seem like a big deal. But I really wonder what will happen if you don't make any changes. What do you think?"
7. **Offer recommendations for seeking professional help** if you believe this is appropriate. Example: "I really wish you would go talk to a counselor about your drinking to see if you do have a problem. You could either talk with a physician at the Health Center or a counselor at CAPS, whoever you would be most comfortable with. I'll go with you if you want."
8. **Educate your friend** about where to find services, how to make an appointment, and emphasize that the services are strictly confidential. You may want to offer your friend your telephone to make an appointment right there in front of you, or suggest that you go with him or her.
9. **Follow up.** Whether your friend agrees to seek help or not, check in with him or her again about how he or she is doing. If your friend didn't seek help, persistently but gently again encourage him or her again to do so. Following up with your friend sends the message that you believe their problem is important enough for them to follow up on as well.
10. **Take care of yourself.** Your friend may respond positively to your willingness to approach him or her and may actively seek help. However, your friend may also respond by promising to seek help and not doing so, denying he/she has a problem, or becoming frustrated or angry with you. Your friend may need time to digest this conversation. A response of anger by your friend should not be viewed as a lack of appreciation or motivation, but as a sign of their anxiety. However, this can be very upsetting for those who tried to help. If your friend resists seeking help, DO NOT blame yourself; this doesn't mean you did anything wrong. As adults, people do have the right to refuse help. You may want to consult with a CAPS counselor yourself to get assistance with your own feelings about this.

Other Things to Consider

Effective listening. The key to all helping is listening, which is more difficult than it appears. Listening means that you consider your friend's concerns from his or her point of view. You aren't listening well if you are busy trying to think of what to say next or giving advice.

Listening may seem passive, like you aren't doing anything helpful. However, effective listening requires that you communicate your attentiveness to your friend by:

- Looking directly at him or her
- Asking questions to clarify things you don't understand
- Summarizing what he or she says to demonstrate that you understand
- Asking open-ended questions to help them express their thoughts and feelings

If your friend rejects what you have to say, or argues with you, ask yourself if you are listening carefully. You may have unknowingly slipped into advice-giving mode or begun talking about your own or other people's problems rather than the ones your friend is experiencing.

Help your friend express his/her feelings. The second most important part of helping is creating an atmosphere in which your friend can express feelings of sadness, frustration, anger or despair. When people we care about experience discomfort, our first reaction is often to do or say something to make them feel better. Unfortunately, this can cut off their feelings. If we move too quickly to do this, people may feel like their feelings should be held back because the feelings are too "bad."

Questions like, "How did you feel about what happened?" can help your friend get in touch with their feelings. Just sitting with your friend while they express their various feelings about what is going on can be very helpful. Your understanding and supportive presence is often more important and effective than any advice you may give to try to solve their problems.

Don't be afraid to get help! In serious situations where you think you need outside help, you can talk to a CAPS counselor. Call 812-855-5711, Monday through Friday between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. For after-hours assistance, use option 1.