

Protecting Your Child's Mental Health: What Can Parents Do?

If your child is already in college:

- **Keep the lines of communication open.** Don't be afraid to talk to him/her if you think that something is wrong. You may be in the best position to notice and address any difficulties that your child is having. Be concerned and persistent!
- **Know the signs and symptoms of emotional disorders as well as the warning signs for suicide.** It is common for mental health problems to appear for the first time during the college years, so you may want to familiarize yourself with their signs and symptoms. In particular be alert if your child reports negative feelings about him/herself (i.e. I don't like myself), the UC Davis environment (I don't have any friends), and the future (i.e. things will never change).
- **Encourage your child to go to the Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)** if one or both of you think it is necessary. Sometimes students can be reluctant to seek help because they are afraid that someone will find out or think they need to be crazy to receive help from a psychologist. Reassure your child that counseling services are provided confidentially and that you support them as they reach out for assistance.
- **Call CAPS (530-752-0871 then "0") if you are concerned about your child's emotional well-being.** It may be helpful to use the list of key campus contacts (see www.caps.ucdavis.edu/resources) as needed..
- **Understand due to laws about confidentiality there are limited circumstances when UC Davis will notify you** regarding your child's mental health.

If your child is applying to college:

- **Think about the "fit" between a college and your child's personality.** Academics are important, but other aspects of a college (e.g., size, location, diversity, extracurricular activities) can impact how well your child thrives in all areas of college life.
- **Understand what mental health services, policies, and programs exist at your child's prospective college(s), especially if s/he has an existing psychological/emotional disorder:**^{1,2}
 - What services are provided by the counseling center? Are there associated fees? Are there a maximum number of sessions allowed per year? Are there specialists (e.g., in treating eating disorders)? Is there a psychiatrist on staff? Does the counseling center provide off-campus referrals?
 - Is there a counselor on call 24 hours a day? If not, what after-hours emergency services are available?
 - Under what circumstances will the college notify you regarding your child's mental health? What happens if you call the college with a concern about your child?
 - Does the college train faculty, staff, resident advisors (RAs), etc. to identify and refer students in emotional distress?

¹ Based on the National Mental Health Association/The Jed Foundation. (2002). [Safeguarding your students against suicide](#). Alexandria, VA: National Mental Health Association.

² Adapted from the Anxiety Disorders Association of America. (2007). [Information for parents: helping a college student with an anxiety disorder](#).

- What kinds of educational programming (e.g., workshops, talks) are provided to students around mental health and wellness?
- What accommodations are available through disability services for students with emotional disorders?
- What is the policy around taking leaves of absence?
- **Learn about other available support structures.** Ask about tutoring, academic and peer advising, education coaching, student activities, and career services as well as psychological counseling. Understand how much support is available in the residence halls, such as the number of resident advisors. Find out how the college helps students to connect with one another.

If your child has been accepted into - but has not started - college:

- **Be honest on the college's medical history form about your child's current or past emotional issues.** These forms provide important information to the health/mental health practitioners (no less important than the rest of your child's medical history), and they are confidential!
- **If your child is currently being treated for mental health problem,** have your child contact CAPS within the first few days of arrival on campus to discuss his/her mental health needs, the short-term services provided by CAPS and long term counseling in the local community. It may be useful to send his/her mental health records to CAPS. The stresses of college can cause existing (or previous) mental health problems to worsen (or re-emerge). In other words, the start of college may not be the ideal time to stop treatment.
- **Find out what mental health services are covered when making decisions about child's health insurance.** You may decide to keep your child's existing health insurance or you may choose to purchase a health insurance plan offered by UC Davis. When making this decision, consider the questions below:
 - Will your child's existing insurance cover an out-of-state provider?
 - Will s/he be able to fill out-of-state prescriptions?
 - What outpatient and inpatient mental health services, emergency care, and prescriptions are covered under each insurance plan?
 - What mental health services are covered by student health fees (e.g., number of sessions, psychiatric care, medication)?
- **Identify whether your child is eligible to register with disability services.** If your child has a diagnosed mental illness, s/he may be eligible to register with the Student Disability Center (SDC) to receive reasonable accommodations. This may include education coaching, academic accommodations, or other services.
- **Be familiar with the resources for parents** provided by UC Davis and know whom to contact if you are concerned about your child. Use the Web pages specifically designed for parents that may link to parent guides or information from a parent advisory council.
- **Read UC Davis' Catalogue.** This will often include a code of conduct that addresses issues such as alcohol or other drug use and plagiarism. It may also include information regarding confidentiality of academic records and leaves of absence.

*What can you do if you are concerned that your child may be thinking about suicide? *
Asking someone about suicide does not put the idea into his/her head.*

- Be direct. Talk openly and matter-of-factly about suicide.
- Be willing to listen. Allow for the expression of feelings. Accept the feelings.
- Be non-judgmental. Don't debate whether suicide is right or wrong, or whether feelings are good or bad. Don't lecture on the value of life.
- Get involved. Become available. Show interest and support.
- Don't dare him/her to do it.
- Don't act shocked. This will put distance between you.
- Don't be sworn to secrecy. Seek support.
- Offer hope that alternatives are available, but do not offer glib reassurance; it only proves you don't understand.
- Take action. Remove means, such as guns or stockpiled pills.
- Get help from individuals or agencies specializing in crisis intervention and suicide prevention.

*From the American Association of Suicidology Fact Sheet: [Understanding and Helping the Suicidal Person](#).

Should you witness, hear, or see your child in imminent danger of harming him/herself, get help IMMEDIATELY by contacting the UC Davis Police Emergency Line (530-752-.....)

If your child exhibits more ambiguous threats (as indicated below) to him/herself, contact CAPS (530-752-0871) and ask to speak to one of our professional staff members. You can reach a professional 24 hours a day by calling CAPS. You can also call 1-800-273-8255 (TALK), the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, for a referral. *

- Threatening to hurt or kill him/herself, or talking of wanting to hurt or kill him/herself
- Looking for ways to kill him/herself by seeking access to firearms, available pills, or other means
- Talking or writing about death, dying or suicide, when these actions are out of the ordinary for the person

Other signs that should be considered as indicators of potential dangerousness include:

- Hopelessness
- Rage, uncontrolled anger, seeking revenge
- Acting reckless or engaging in risky activities, seemingly without thinking
- Feeling trapped – like there's no way out
- Increased alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawing from friends, family and society
- Anxiety, agitation, inability to sleep or sleeping all the time
- Dramatic mood changes
- Expressing no reason for living; no sense of purpose in life

** Individuals who are contemplating suicide or danger to others often give some warning of their intentions to a friend or family member. All suicide threats, gestures, and attempts must be taken seriously*

Additional Informational Resources

- American Association of Suicidology: 202-237-2280, www.suicidology.org
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: 888-363-AFSP (363-2377), www.afsp.org
- American Psychiatric Association: 888-35-PSYCH (357-7924), www.psych.org
- American Psychological Association: 800-374-2721, www.apa.org
- The Jed Foundation: 212-647-7544, www.jedfoundation.org
- National Institute of Mental Health: 800-421-4211, www.nimh.nih.gov
- Mental Health America: 800-969-6MHA (969-6642), www.nmha.org

**UC Davis CAPS
Emergency Card
Parent Contact List**

Contact List for (student's name):

Cell Phone

Dorm/Apartment Phone

Address at School

Address 2

City

State Zip
530-752-0871

CAPS Phone
530-752-2300

Cowell Health Center Phone

RA's Name/Phone or Dorm Reception Desk

Health Insurance Company

Health Insurance Company Phone

Health Insurance Policy Number

Primary Care Physician's Name/Phone

Mental Health Provider's Name

Mental Health Provider's Phone

If your child or someone your child knows is at risk for harm to self or others:

530-752-1234

UC Davis Police/Campus Emergency Number

- National Suicide Prevention Hotline:
1-800-273-8255 (TALK)
- 911

**UC Davis CAPS
Emergency Card
Student Contact List**

Mom/Dad's Cell Phone

Mom/Dad's Home Phone

Mom/Dad's Address

Address 2

City

State Zip
530-752-0871

CAPS Phone
530-752-2300

Cowell Health Center Phone

RA's Name/Phone or Dorm Reception Desk

Health Insurance Company

Health Insurance Company Phone

Health Insurance Policy Number

Primary Care Physician's Name/Phone

Mental Health Provider's Name

Mental Health Provider's Phone

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1-800-273-8255 (TALK)
- 911