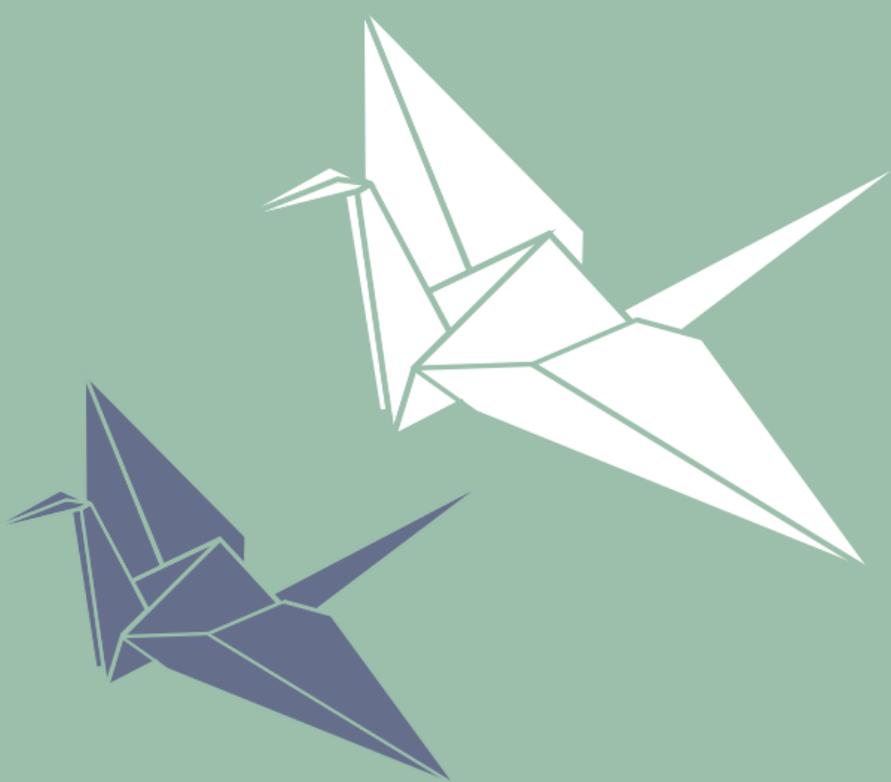


# WHEN YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT A STUDENT

*a guide for MIT faculty*



Faculty members often are among the first to notice signs of distress in their students. Your unique perspective can play a crucial role in identifying students who need additional support and helping them connect with appropriate resources at MIT.

But when should you be concerned? How should you respond? The answers to those questions are right here.



# WHEN SHOULD I BE CONCERNED ABOUT A STUDENT? WHAT SIGNS SHOULD I BE LOOKING FOR?

Someone who is in distress is likely to give off clues that they need help. Here are some things to look out for:

## Academic/work indicators

- Frequent absences from class or lab, especially when this is a change
- Marked decline in academic work or lab performance
- Repeated need for accommodations (extensions, excused absences, time off, etc.)
- Expressions of hopelessness and helplessness in conversations, emails, or postings on social media
- Apathy, lack of energy

## Psychological or physical indicators

- Marked changes in personal hygiene, work habits, or social behavior
- Depressed appearance, isolation, or withdrawal
- Excessive anxiety or panic
- Change in sleeping or eating habits or dramatic weight gain or loss
- Anger, irritability, or interpersonal conflict
- Cutting and other self-injurious behaviors
- Alcohol and substance abuse

## Other factors

- Reports or observations that the student is having a very hard time dealing with family issues, personal losses, romantic breakups, or other interpersonal relationships
- Concerns expressed by others who have immediate and personal knowledge of the student

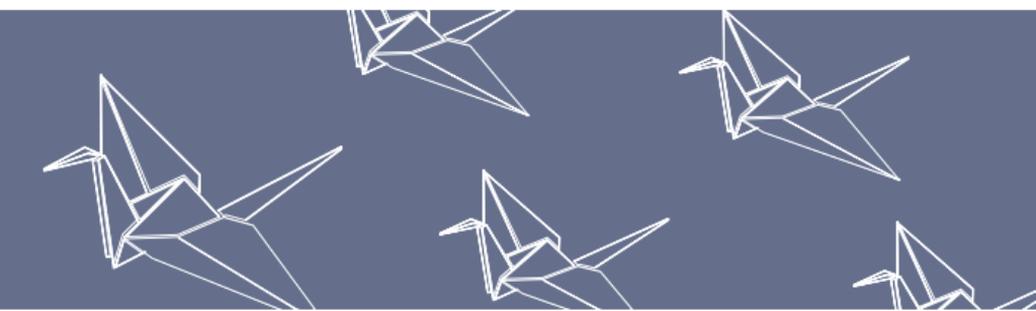
Taken alone, any one of these indicators doesn't necessarily mean that an individual is experiencing severe distress. And some of these clues are more obvious warning signs than others. But regardless of what you observe, if you are feeling worried about someone, never ignore your concerns. Trust your instincts.



## WHAT IF IT SEEMS URGENT?

Anyone thinking about suicide should talk to a Mental Health clinician right away.

- You can contact MIT Police by dialing 100 on a campus phone, or 617-253-1212 on any other phone. The police can arrange to have the person transported to MIT Medical or to a hospital emergency room.
- You can speak with a Mental Health clinician about an urgent concern any time. We are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Just dial 617-253-2916 (days) or 617-253-4481 (nights/weekends).
- The Mental Health and Counseling Service has walk-in hours every weekday from 2 to 4 p.m. (Monday–Friday).



## SOME TIPS FOR SPEAKING WITH STUDENTS

Making the decision to refer a student to MIT Medical's Mental Health and Counseling Service or another student support service can be difficult. It involves making a judgment about a student's emotional or mental state.

A distressed student may resist asking for, or receiving, help. And even if an individual really wants help, he or she may not know how to ask for it or where to find it. As an MIT faculty member, you can make a critical difference by expressing your concerns in a caring, nonjudgmental way. For example, you might say, "You seem to be having a hard time lately," instead of, "You have not been performing well recently in this class." Here are some tips for having this difficult conversation.

- **Be discreet.** Find a private, comfortable place to talk in person.
- **Don't judge.** Share what you have observed, and explain your concerns honestly, but don't be critical or offer advice.
- **Ask open-ended questions and listen.** Try asking, "How is it going?" The student may not answer, but may feel relieved to know that you care, are trying to understand, and are offering to help.
- **Don't feel the need to solve the problem.** If the student shares personal feelings with you, do not feel that you must offer a solution or opinion. The most important thing is to listen and try to understand what the student is going through.
- **Direct the student to MIT Medical's Mental Health and Counseling Service** or to other MIT resources such as Student Support Services (S<sup>3</sup>). Feel free to share the list of resources in this brochure and discuss the various sources of support that are available to members of the MIT community. Reassure the student that you will continue to provide support as a concerned and caring faculty member.
- **Offer help in making a referral or appointment.** If the student agrees, you can make the initial contact with the Mental Health and Counseling Service by calling us at 617-253-2916 while the student is with you. Write down the appointment details, including the time, the location, and the clinician's name. You might even offer to walk your student over to MIT Medical for his or her appointment or during our walk-in hours from 2–4 p.m., Monday to Friday. If you need to reach us at night or on weekends, call 617-253-4481.
- **Gently counter resistance.** The student may resist seeking help for a number of reasons. He or she might feel ashamed, worried about being viewed as weak, or concerned about taking up valuable resources. You can help by explaining that the Mental Health and Counseling Service, Graduate Personal Support and Student Support Services are here to help everyone, regardless of the nature or severity of their difficulties.



You might also want to mention that it's not unusual or odd to seek help. Around 20 percent of undergraduate and graduate students speak with a clinician from Mental Health and Counseling Service each academic year.

- ***Remind the student that it's confidential.*** Everything a student tells a mental health clinician is "privileged information" and cannot be shared with any other person without permission. The only exceptions are if the clinician believes that a patient or other people are in serious danger.

Students may also worry that seeing a counselor could affect future job prospects or security clearances. You can assure them that information about mental health is kept confidential. For more information, visit [medical.mit.edu/mentalhealth](https://medical.mit.edu/mentalhealth)

- ***If asked, answer student questions about hospitalizations or withdrawals from MIT.*** Here are the facts: Mental health hospitalizations are very unusual at MIT, and nearly all hospitalizations are voluntary, meaning that the student agreed that he or she was at risk and would benefit from intensive treatment. Students are hospitalized involuntarily only to avoid the likelihood of serious harm to themselves or others. At many other schools, any student who is hospitalized is automatically given a medical withdrawal from school. But that's not true at MIT; rather we assess each case individually to determine what's best for the student.
- Know that your offer of help may be rejected. Try to end your conversation with the student in a way that will allow you or the student to bring up the subject again. You might say something like "Let's touch base again" or "Please keep me posted."

**Ask us for advice.** Remember, you are always welcome to call the Mental Health and Counseling Service to discuss concerns about an individual. It does not violate medical confidentiality or the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) for you to share these concerns with us. However, our staff cannot share information about the student without the student's written authorization.

# SUPPORT SERVICES ON THE MIT CAMPUS

## MENTAL HEALTH AND COUNSELING SERVICE

E23-368

617-253-2916

[medical.mit.edu/mentalhealth](https://medical.mit.edu/mentalhealth)

MIT Medical's Mental Health and Counseling Service provides consultation; crisis intervention, and treatment, including individual and group psychotherapy and medication management. Staff members have expertise in addressing a variety of issues such as stress, isolation, academic pressure, eating problems, insomnia, fatigue, alcohol and substance abuse, and general problems of daily living. The Mental Health and Counseling Service sometimes refers patients to outside providers or helps them make connections with other helpful resources within the Institute community.

## STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES (S<sup>3</sup>)

617-253-4861

[mit.edu/uaap/s3](https://mit.edu/uaap/s3)

Deans in S<sup>3</sup> frequently consult with faculty and staff who have concerns about specific undergraduates or situations. S<sup>3</sup> is a low-key place for students to ask for help. The S<sup>3</sup> deans can talk with students about a wide variety of concerns, write "extenuating circumstance" notes for students who cannot attend class or complete work due to personal or medical issues, and consult with professors about excused absences during the last two weeks of classes. S<sup>3</sup> also processes withdrawals and readmissions to the Institute.

## GRADUATE PERSONAL SUPPORT (GPS)

617-253-4860

[odg.mit.edu/gps](https://odg.mit.edu/gps)

Staff in the Office of the Dean of Graduate Education provide advice and counsel on a variety of issues including faculty/student relationships, conflict negotiation, funding, academic progress, interpersonal concerns, and a student's rights and responsibilities. They can also help with excused absences.

## VIOLENCE PREVENTION & RESPONSE

617-253-2300 (24-hour hotline)

[medical.mit.edu/vpr](https://medical.mit.edu/vpr)

Violence Prevention & Response (VPR) is a campus resource for preventing interpersonal violence, including sexual assault, dating and domestic violence, stalking, and sexual harassment. VPR offers support to survivors, including emotional support and help in obtaining medical and legal assistance.

# OTHER MIT RESOURCES

Community Wellness at MIT Medical

617-253-1316

[medical.mit.edu/services/community-wellness](https://medical.mit.edu/services/community-wellness)

Urgent Care at MIT Medical

617-253-4481 (24-hour help line)

[medical.mit.edu/services/urgent-care](https://medical.mit.edu/services/urgent-care)

MIT Medical/Lexington

781-981-7080

[medical.mit.edu/lexington](https://medical.mit.edu/lexington)



Campus Police

617-253-1212 or 100 (from campus phones only)

Dean on call

Call Campus Police: 617-253-1212 or 100 (from campus phones only)

Ambulance Services

Call Campus Police: 617-253-1212 or 100 (from campus phones only)

Chaplains

[studentlife.mit.edu/rl/mit-chaplains](https://studentlife.mit.edu/rl/mit-chaplains)

See phone directory for individual chaplains.

ULifeline

[ulifeline.org](https://www.ulifeline.org)

Mental health information for students

Medlinks

[medlinks.mit.edu](https://medlinks.mit.edu)

Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender at MIT

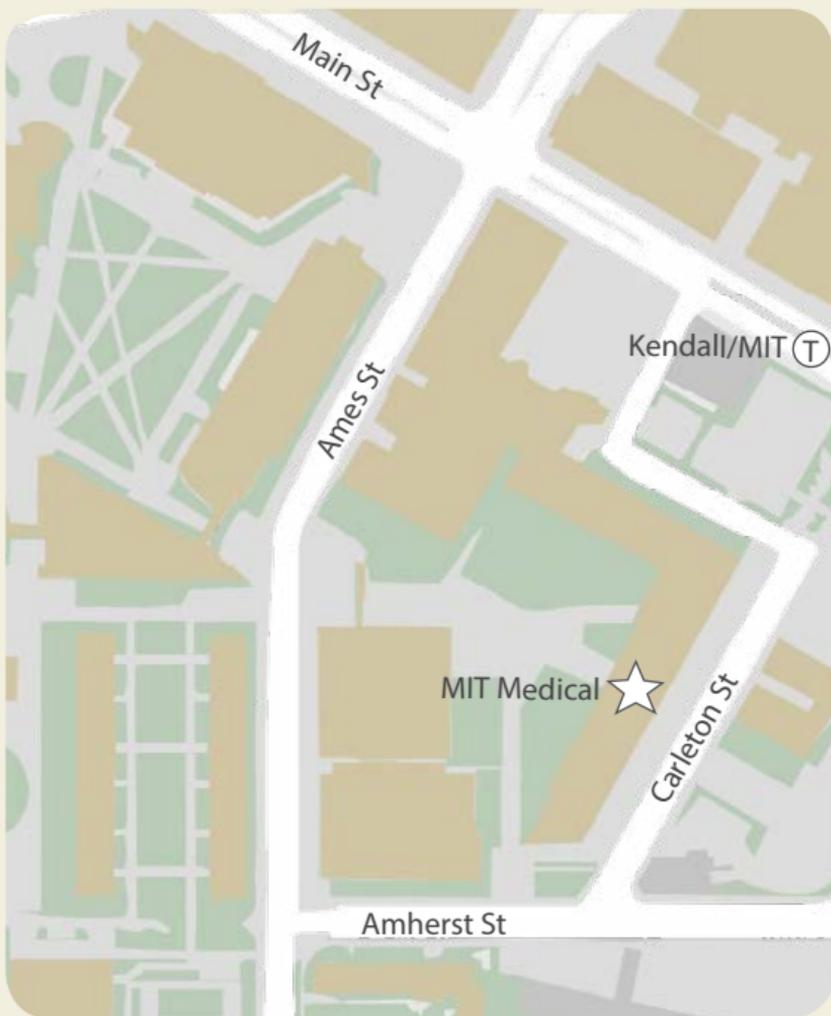
[lbgt.mit.edu](https://lbgt.mit.edu)

MIT Ombuds Office

[ombud.mit.edu](https://ombud.mit.edu)

The housemasters, GRTs, or RAs in each living group may also be a useful resource for a student in distress.





## MENTAL HEALTH AND COUNSELING AT MIT MEDICAL

E23 - 3rd floor  
25 Carleton Street

### HOURS

Monday – Thursday, 8:30 a.m. – 7 p.m.

Friday, 8:30 a.m. – 5 p.m.

*Walk-in hours for urgent concerns:*

Monday – Friday, 2 – 4 p.m.

### CONTACT

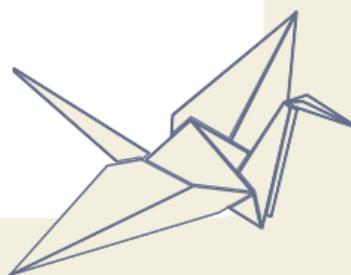
617-253-2916

#### Urgent Concerns

days: 617-253-2916

nights/weekends: 617-253-4481

[medical.mit.edu/mentalhealth](http://medical.mit.edu/mentalhealth)



**MIT Medical**  
Care for our community



**Massachusetts  
Institute of  
Technology**