

## Noticing Students in Psychological Distress and Referring Them to Counseling Services

*This guide contains helpful information for faculty and staff members about referring a student in distress to Counseling Services.*

University years is a new period in students' lives. They might experience freedom and taking the responsibility of their own life at the same time. Students might have psychological distress because of academic difficulties, family conflicts, relational problems, difficulty to adapting to university life, financial issues and identity crises. While some students can manage dealing with stress on their own, some students might need psychological support during their academic life.

The effects of psychological distress of the students can be observed on campus. As faculty and staff members, you can recognize the indicators of psychological distress of students during classes, advisor meetings, one to one interactions or in the offices and dormitories. In this kind of situations, you might think about referring the student to Counseling Services but feel uncertain or uncomfortable about communicating this to the student.



**KURES**  
Koç University Counseling Services

## How can I (as a faculty or staff member) notice when a student is in psychological distress?

The warning signs of psychological distress can be seen in four different categories:

### **Academic signs:**

- ✓ *Marked decline in quality of course work and grades, especially if this is not consistent with the student's general academic performance,*
- ✓ *Excessive procrastination, continual seeking of extensions,*
- ✓ *Repeated absence to classes, project meetings etc.,*
- ✓ *Essays/papers that have themes of hopelessness, suicidal ideas, bizarre content and social isolation,*
- ✓ *Exaggerated reactions to poor grades (e.g., excessive crying or anger).*

### **Physical signs:**

- ✓ *Deterioration in physical appearance or personal hygiene,*
- ✓ *Unusual weight gain or loss,*
- ✓ *Bruises and cuts on the body,*
- ✓ *Excessive fatigue, lack of energy or sleeping difficulties such as frequently falling asleep in class.*

### **Emotional signs:**

- ✓ *Constant nervousness or sadness,*
- ✓ *High levels of irritability, anger or tension,*
- ✓ *Hopelessness,*
- ✓ *Lack of motivation, unable to enjoy.*

### **Behavioral signs:**

- ✓ *Withdrawal from social interactions and activities,*
- ✓ *Behavior with unprovoked anger, aggression, tension or irritability,*
- ✓ *Extraordinary dependency (e.g., the student wants to spend all the time with you or often asks for appointments during office hours),*
- ✓ *Complaints or worried thoughts from friends or roommates,*
- ✓ *Deterioration of talking, disjointed thoughts,*
- ✓ *Talk of bingeing, vomiting and secretive eating (could be signs of eating disorders)*
- ✓ *Bizarre behavior that is obviously inappropriate for the situation such as talking to self,*
- ✓ *Direct statements (written or verbal) about hopelessness, lack of energy, the meaningless of life, death, suicide or harming others.*

### **How can I make a referral?**

It might seem difficult or uncomfortable to talk to the student about the indicators you observe. However, it is always helpful to be in touch with the student and to express your concern to him/her. Students who have psychological distress might be in need of expression of interest, care and recognition.

If you think that a student has sign/signs of psychological distress, talk to student privately. You can directly mention and be specific about the indicators you observe including your concern (e.g., falling grades, sleeping in the classroom, and avoiding social interactions from friends etc.). Listen to the student carefully.

Your attitude while talking and listening to the students matters. Please do not try to make judgments, comments, diagnosis over the situation. Do not criticize, blame the student or give him/her advice such as “Every young person has such things, this is not a big deal” or “I had bigger problems when I was young”. Do not compare your situation or others’ problems with the student’s situation.

You can inform the student about Counseling Services. Let the student know that Counseling Services is confidential, voluntary and free of charge. You can also emphasize that all cultural, ethnic, religious, and sexual and gender differences are fully respected in Counseling Services. Another point you can state is that getting psychological support is not weakness, but rather a brave step to take.

If the student agrees on receiving psychological help, she/he can send an email to [kures@ku.edu.tr](mailto:kures@ku.edu.tr) (e-mail address of Counseling Services) in order to make an appointment. Alternatively, if the student gives consent, you can send an email to Counseling Services which the student is on cc part and mention that the student would like to make an appointment. Yet, before sending this email where the student is cc’ed please inform Counseling Services about your referral.

Please keep in mind that it is student’s decision to ask for psychological help from Counseling Services. Make sure that you do not insist on convincing the student to go to Counseling Services. If you are uncertain about referring the student to Counseling Services or the student is unwilling to receive help but you are worried, do not hesitate to contact Counseling Services to discuss your concerns. We are always here to help faculty and staff members on students’ psychological distress.

Please note that as Counseling Services, we are unable to share information with faculty and staff members about whether the student is receiving help or not due to **confidentiality** policy.

### Emergency situations:

There might be emergency situations that might require urgent intervention and immediate referral. Emergency situations consist of intention or making plan to commit suicide, harming others imminently, severely aggressive behavior or detachment from reality (hallucinations, distorted talks, and withdrawn from connecting people).

If you think that there is a risk of harming himself/herself or someone else (suicidal plan or severely aggressive behavior), **firstly** contact Health Center and Security. In case of need, you can consult Counseling Services during working hours (07:30-16.30 and 08:30-17.30).

### Important Contact information:

**Health Center:** 0212 338 12 73 - 0212 338 11 00

**Security:** 0212 338 11 22

### Situations That Might Require Imminent Referral

While speaking to students about psychological distress, you might face with some situations that do not require urgent intervention, but might necessitate imminent referral. These situations might consist of suicidal thoughts or statements (written or verbal), being exposed to violence or being threatened (physically, psychologically or sexually), stalking behaviors and inappropriate communication (e.g., e-mails, letters, SMS including threatening or sexually abusive statements).

In such cases, you can talk to the student privately and listen to him/her carefully. Please make sure that you do not make any judgments about the situation. You can refer the student to Counseling Services. Please inform Counseling Services about referral and the situation.

### Services Offered at Counseling Services for Students

As Koç University Counseling Services, we provide individual counseling for university students. In terms of preventive work, we organize seminars, group works and workshops depending on the needs of the students throughout the academic year. In addition, if a student thinks that he/she is being exposed to or has witnessed sexual harassment or sexual assault, she/he can receive consultation on the matters and mechanisms in the process of complaint and psychological support from Counseling Services in case of need within the principle of **confidentiality**.

### Counseling Services Contact Information:

**Email address:** [kures@ku.edu.tr](mailto:kures@ku.edu.tr)

Elif Isın- Akkol (*Counseling Services Manager*): 0212 338 17 49

Gülçin Yılmaz (*Clinical Psychologist & Psychological Counselor*): 0212 338 12 72

Büşra Ertekin (*Clinical Psychologist & Psychological Counselor*): 0212 338 27 77