Travel Study and Mental Health

Identifying, Assisting, and Referring Students In Distress

“A Speckled Bird” Presentation
The developing brain + stress =

Frontal Lobe - brain injury and “Executive Functioning”
Young Adulthood & Mental Health

- Diathesis stress model
- Schizophrenia - onset late teens to early 20’s
  - Dual diagnosis
  - Medication Vacation
Signs of Distress Checklist
Signs of Distress:

1. Behavioral Changes
2. Physical Changes
3. Personality Changes
Behavioral Changes

- Decline in the quality of work, assignments not completed
  - Frequent absences from class
  - Inability to sit through classes
  - Disruptive behavior in classes
- Repeated requests for special accommodations such as extensions or postponed examinations
- Turning in course work that has suicidal or homicidal themes
  - Impaired speech or thought patterns
Physical Changes

- Marked change in physical appearance and personal hygiene
  - Dramatic weight gain or loss
- Chronic tiredness, headaches, gastrointestinal problems without a medical explanation
- **Change in sleep patterns**: insomnia, sleeping too much, not needing sleep
- **Disordered eating**: restricting, bingeing, purging, over-exercise
- **Panic attacks**: overwhelming anxiety
Personality Changes

- Extreme sadness and tearfulness
- Severe depression
- Irritability
- Hostility
- Marked anxiety
- Outbursts of anger
- Withdrawn

- Hyperactive
- Excessive dependency on others
- Mood swings
- Confusion, indecisiveness
- Much more talkative than usual, sentences are tangential or incoherent.
Safety and Other Risk Factors..

Document and Consult!
Safety Risk Factors

- Expressions of hopelessness, powerlessness, or worthlessness:
  - Inability to adjust or inappropriate reactions to local cultural norms
  - Secretive about experiencing severe emotional distress

- Verbal statements or notes that have a suicidal or homicidal tone to them:
  - Poor self esteem; extreme difficulty in working out own identity.
  - Lack of close, supportive friends, or family ties
Safety Risk Factors

- **Expressions of concerns about death or life after death:**
  - Increased isolation
  - Death of a close friend or family member

- **Giving away important possessions:**
  - Sexual assault; sexual harassment

- **Self-injurious or self destructive behaviors:**
  - Break-up of a relationship
  - Poor academic performance
  - Intense academic pressures
Safety Risk Factors

- Violent threats against others:
  - Serious illness
  - Substance abuse issues

- Out of Control behavior:
  - Poor problem solving and coping skills
Suggestions for Assisting Students in Distress
Establish a Climate of Trust and Safety, Gather Information & Explore Possible Solutions

- Be friendly without being a “friend”
- Maintain a professional relationship and establish clear and consistent boundaries. Show interest and support
- Offer to see the student in private to minimize embarrassment and defensiveness
- Acknowledge with care that you are concerned about the students welfare
- Use constructive self-disclosure to acknowledge your observations of the student’s situation and express your concern directly and honestly
- Listen respectfully and provide empathy without necessarily agreeing or disagreeing with the students point of view. Try not to minimize his/her pain. Try to refrain from making quick judgments
Establish a Climate of Trust and Safety, Gather Information & Explore Possible Solutions

- Ask follow-up questions for better clarification and understanding. Demonstrate that you understand what the student is disclosing by paraphrasing what the student has told you.

- Assist the student in identifying several options and a plan for action. Review past coping strategies. Explore the possible consequences of the student’s action and non-action. Develop a backup plan.

- Keep the lines of communication open. Arrange time to follow-up with the student.
Suggestions for making referrals
Referrals

- State clearly why you believe a referral would be helpful.
- Be open to listening to any concerns or fears that the student might have about seeking help.
- Try to normalize seeking help by conveying that everyone has problems at times that require assistance.
- Communicate with you are hopeful that change is possible.
Referrals

- Learn about available referral resources so that you can provide specific and appropriate information. Have a list readily available that includes the names, phone numbers, and locations of referral sources.

- Encourage the student to take responsibility for whether he/she will seek assistance.
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