

Recognizing Dangerous Situations and Having the Difficult Conversations

What is Suicide?

Conversations:

Are you thinking about killing yourself?

Are you thinking about suicide?

Have you ever attempted suicide in the past? (Increases current risk)

Have you thought about how you would do it? (plan)

Do you intend to do it soon (intention)?

What is Sexual Assault?

Conversations:

Have you been sexually assaulted? Have you been raped? Have you been touched in a way that you did not want to be touched?

You look upset, is there anything I can do to help you feel better or safer?

Are you physically injured? Would you consider going to the hospital to make sure that you are physically okay? (Sometimes sexual assault can cause internal injuries, stds, or pregnancy)

Even if you can't talk to me, it might be helpful to talk to someone. The counseling center will not tell anyone about a sexual assault if that is what you need to talk about. Can I help you call them?

The police can help you if you want to consider pressing charges. The police are not bound by confidentiality. Can I help you call them?

Oasis is a support center off campus that can help you if you just want to talk, if you want information about legal issues, etc. Can I help you call them?

If you have been involved in a sexual assault and you think you might want to press charges, you might want to be careful to preserve evidence which means that you should not clean yourself or take a shower. How do you feel about that?

What is Self Injury?

Conversations:

There are lots of reasons that people might injure themselves. I need to know if you were cutting (etc) to kill yourself or for some other reason? (If to kill self or any hint about killing self, proceed to questions under suicide).

If cutting to cope with pain, consider the following questions/comments:

I know that this might be the most effective way to deal with your pain that you know of right now. My friends at the counseling center might be able to help you find other ways to cope too so that you can start to have a choice whether you cut to cope or use something else. Can I walk you over there (today, tomorrow, etc).

What are some things that you might try to do tonight to stay away from cutting? (Make schedule of activities that might be distracting. Do NOT try to process their feelings which might intensify them and make the need to cut stronger). Do NOT pass judgment about whether it is “good or bad” or they “should or should not” cut with regard to morality. You can make it clear to them that you don’t want them to get in trouble and you know that it is against university policy so you hope you can help them to get matched up with counseling center to help find ADDITIONAL (we never talk about taking away their coping skills - that often just happens naturally as a function of gaining other choices) skills.

What is an Eating Disorder?

Conversations:

I’m afraid that you might be coping with some hard things by not eating/using food/over-using exercise etc. Do you think you might have a problem with the way you see your body or use food in your life?

I have friends at the counseling center who can help you feel better about yourself, can I take you there tomorrow/today?

Be sure not to use food or body words but focus on feeling words (i.e., “You seem frail or weak,” rather than “You look thin”)