

Managing Student Stress as Courses Move Online

Counseling Center March 2020

You and your students are facing significant change. Across the world, students are transitioning to online education, socially distancing from peer groups and most likely hunkering down in their family homes. We know that change creates stress, but we also know that stress is a normal and even necessary part of life. As everyone makes this new journey through life, greatly affected by the coronavirus pandemic, here are some ideas for how to help students, and yourself, with the transition:

Most importantly, know that as a professor your calm and sure presence will set the course for students to also remain calm. Seeing someone calm will induce calmness in others.

As courses transition to online:

- Consider addressing the normal stress of this transition right from the start.
 - “Last week was a trying week for all of us. We have all been through a lot as we move our classes online but I am here to reassure you that we will be ok.”
- Remind students what is at stake.
 - “We are doing this to flatten the curve and to protect our most vulnerable people. Thank you for helping with this effort. I’m proud of all of you.”
- Be patient with students AND yourself.
 - “This may take a little time to get all the kinks worked out.”
 - “I don’t know the answer to that but I will email you all later.”
- Be reassuring and encourage positivity.
 - “I know this seems like a lot right now but I know that you can do it.”
 - “We will all get the hang of this very soon.”
- Explain any strategies you have for how to be an online student:
 - “Ensure that you have a private space, free from distraction.”
 - “Let others at home know that you will be busy when courses are taught.”
 - “Work to develop a schedule much like the one you had at MU.”

If the entire class seems to be getting riled up, consider

- “Lets all take a moment and take a few deep breaths.” Count it out: “inhale, 1, 2, 3, 4...exhale 1, 2, 3, 4”.
- “I want everyone to stand up, take a quick walk around the room and come back.”

If an individual student seems distressed:

- Find a private time to communicate.
- Ask how they are doing or describe what you are observing, e.g. “you have made quite a few comments about your mood being down. Are you struggling yourself?”
- The student may explain things in a way that leads you to feel no other action is needed. E.g., they may say they are already in treatment or that it just felt good to talk.
- If you remain concerned, have them call the CC to talk to a counselor – contact information is below.
- Follow up later and ask if they got help or need anything else.

- Any student who mentions suicidal thoughts should talk to the CC immediately.

As courses progress consider adding stress management tips (can be found on CC website) during class time and building online community.

Resources from the Counseling Center

From the CC webpage:

If you need help with a mental health issue, please call the Counseling Center at 414-288-7172, 9 am to 3 pm. A counselor will help you determine what resources would best serve you. If you are having thoughts about harming yourself or others, immediately call the Counseling Center. If you are in a life threatening situation, please go to the local ER or call 911. If you are in crisis and on campus after hours, call the Marquette University Police Department at 414-288-1911. For more information about services and resources visit the [Counseling Center webpage](#).

If you are looking for an external mental health provider, use the [Psychology Today Therapist Finder](#), ask your medical provider or contact your insurance company. Call the Counseling Center for referrals in Milwaukee.

Consider using a [mental health app](#) for relaxation, mood tracking, sleep or other issues.

Click [here](#) for resources for students of color.

Click [here](#) for a handout on coping with coronavirus for classroom use.

CARE Team

If you are concerned about a student who is not responding to your efforts to help (i.e., has been referred to the Counseling Center but will not make contact) consider contacting the [CARE Team](#). Please fill out a referral form online or call 288-1412. A care team representative can strategize ways to ensure that the student gets the help they need.

The [referral form](#) and [Red Folder](#) can be accessed online to assist with identifying concerns and with making referrals.