



Missouri University of Science and Technology

# Navigating Student Challenges: Strategies for GTAs

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# Student Health and Well-Being



**Jessica Garus, M.Ed., CHES**  
AVC Student Health and Well-Being

The Student Health and Well-Being unit at Missouri S&T takes a collective impact approach to student success, embedding well-being, belonging, and accessibility into campus culture. Through health promotion, prevention, early intervention, and treatment, we ensure students have the support, resources, and access they need to thrive personally, academically, and socially.

- Student Health
- Student Well-Being
- Student Accessibility and Testing
- Engagement and Belonging
- UCARE/BIT
- Health and Well-Being Collective
- Prevention Coalition
- Joe's PEERS

# Outline

- Data and the role of GTAs
- Expanded definition of success and well-being
- Recognizing concerns
- Responding to concerns - dos and don'ts
- Communication/providing language
- Mental Health Crisis Response Guide (Red Folder)
- Self-care

# Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors

- 50% report anxiety in past year
- 42% report depression in past year
- 45% report stress interfered with their academics
- 30% report overwhelming or unbearable stress
  
- Main sources of stress:
  - School/Academics: 90%
  - Time Management: 52%
  - Financial Concerns: 41%
  - Future Plans: 46%
  - Mental Health Concerns: 35%
  - Loneliness: 20%

# Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors

## To whom do you go when personal concerns arise?

2024

- Academic advisor - S&T 9%; PIP 21%
- Faculty/professor - S&T 5%; PIP 14%
- Friends/peers - S&T 72%; PIP 76%

2025

- Academic advisor - S&T 9%; PIP 10%
- Faculty/professor - S&T 8%; PIP 12%
- Friends/peers - S&T 82%; PIP 77%

# Role of the GTA

As Graduate Teaching Assistants, you bridge the gap between professors and students.

Familiarizing yourself with campus resources and encouraging students to use them creates opportunities for students to thrive in and outside of the classroom.

[Serving as a Graduate Teaching Assistant: Tips and Strategies](#) (aspa.net)

# Student Success

## Traditional Definition

- Grades
- High academic achievement
- Retention
- Graduation rates
- Career outcomes

## Expanded Definition

- Well-being
- Connectedness
- Belonging
- Accessibility
- Safety
- Purpose

# Success in the Classroom

## Well-Being and Belonging

[Well-Being in the Classroom – Academic Achievement and Enrichment | Missouri S&T](#)

Classroom strategies:



## Accessibility

[Student Accessibility and Testing](#)

If a student discloses a disability to you or says they think they have a disability:

- Respect their privacy
- Do not try to diagnose
- Refer to Student Accessibility and Testing if seeking accommodative support



# Mental Health Crisis Response Guide

## Signs of Mental Health **DISTRESS**

### Academic:

- Repeated absences
- Decline in quality of work or classroom performance
- Work that indicates disturbing content

### Physical and/or Medical:

- Marked changes in appearance
- Intoxication, hung over, or smelling of alcohol, cannabis, or other substances
- Appearing sick or ill; excessive fatigue
- Repeated reports of headache or other physical concerns

### Personal and/or Concerning Behavior:

- Tearfulness, hopelessness, worthlessness, or shame
- Exaggerated personality traits; more withdrawn or irritated
- Direct comments about distress or difficulties
- Class disruptions or aggressiveness toward others
- Self-injurious or destructive behavior; lack of self-preservation
- Major life changes or experiencing a traumatic event

## Ways to Start the Conversation

### During Mental Health **DISTRESS**:

- Talk to the student in a private, safe location and listen without judgement.
- I've noticed that you seem a bit more withdrawn in class and I wanted to check in to see if everything is okay."
- "I hope this doesn't seem like overstepping, but I've noticed (specific signs) and am worried that you are struggling a bit more than usual. How are you?"
- After starting the conversation, use the V-A-R method: **Validate** their concerns, **Appreciate** them opening up, and **Refer** to appropriate resources.
  - **Validate:** "I see where you are coming from, that sounds really difficult."
  - **Appreciate:** "Thank you for telling me. I know it can be hard to open up."
  - **Refer:** "There are resources on campus that can help you - let's (walk to/call/look up) (resource) together."

## Signs of Mental Health **CRISIS**

### If a student is in immediate danger to harm themselves or others

- Implied or direct threats of harm
- Concerning phrases ("I won't be around for that")
- Access to lethal means (gun, pills, etc)
- Mention of a suicide plan
- Putting their affairs in order (saying goodbye or making sudden amends with loved ones, giving away personal possessions, etc)
- Dramatic mood change, such as suddenly seeming calm or getting better for no apparent reason

## Ways to Start the Conversation

### During a Mental Health **CRISIS**:

- **Remain calm. DO NOT leave them alone. DO NOT promise secrecy.**
- Reassure the student that help is available, that they are not alone, and that this is not the only option.
- Calmly let them know that you will be taking immediate action as you are concerned for their safety.
- **Call 911**, alerting them of the severity of the situation, including lethal means access.

# Recognizing Signs of Distress

Important signs to pay attention to, because they may indicate a student is struggling and needs support:

- Missed assignments
- Repeated absences
- Decline in academic performance
- Reduced participation in class/club
- Excessive fatigue
- Poor personal hygiene
- Inappropriate or exaggerated behavior
- Alarming or worrisome content in speech or assignments

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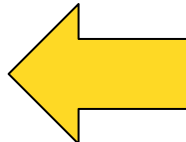
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# Tips for Directly Intervening

## Do:

Use a calm, gentle tone; be firm and specific

Listen and allow the student to share

Acknowledge strengths and validate emotions

Show empathy and suspend judgment

Focus on what you hear, not your reaction

## Don't:

Argue, raise your voice, or take things personally

Focus on the person—address the behavior

Press for “why” or restrict movement

Dismiss or minimize their concerns

# VAR Method

## When A Student Approaches You with a Concern

- **Validate:** Validate their concerns and feelings
  - “I’m sorry you’re going through that, you have every right to feel the way you do”
- **Appreciate:** Appreciate them opening up to you; this can be difficult!
  - “Thanks for letting me know how you’ve been feeling, I can’t imagine how hard it’s been feeling like this on your own”
- **Refer:** Provide support, resources, and hope
  - “I know that group counseling is helpful, can I tell you more about it?  
How else can I support you now?”

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# Recognizing Signs of Crisis

When immediate intervention is needed

- Implied or direct threats of harm to self or others
- Access to lethal means
- Mention of a suicide plan
- Written or spoken references to suicide or violence
- Repeated statements of hopelessness
- Sudden emotional outbursts
- Aggressive or violent behavior

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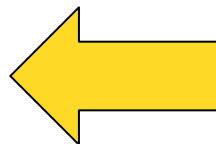
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# How to Start the Conversation

## Ways to talk with a student who needs immediate help

- ▶ Communicate urgency without causing alarm
  - “You’re not alone in this. It’s important we speak with someone who can provide the right support immediately. I can accompany you.”
- ▶ If the student is resistant but in crisis, ensure their safety is the priority
  - “Your safety is very important. I need to involve others to ensure you’re supported effectively.”

# Crisis Decision Tree: How to Respond Based on Severity of the Situation

Is the student in immediate danger of harming themselves or others? (Use the signs on the front page to determine)

YES

NO/UNSURE

Are you still with the student?

Are you still with the student?

YES

NO

YES

NO

Are they calm enough to listen and talk to you?

YES

NO

Call or walk the student to Student Well-Being (573.341.4211, 204 Norwood).  
Outside university hours: Call 911 and ask University Police to respond.

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Outside university hours: provide resources and offer support.

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# UCARE:

## What It Is and How to Submit a Referral

### What is UCARE?

UCARE, housed within the Division of Student Success, is a central point of contact and referral for students who may be experiencing a personal, academic, financial, wellbeing, or other concern. Here's how it works:

1. A concerned individual submits a UCARE referral for a student who is struggling.
2. A Case Manager in Student Well-Being receives the referral, assesses the level of risk, and coordinates a response based on the urgency of the concern.
3. The student is contacted by a Case Manager to evaluate their needs and connect them to supportive resources.
4. The Case Manager updates the referring party when able and/or appropriate.

### Why submit a UCARE referral?

1. Early intervention: Quick support can help students stay on track mentally and academically.
2. Connecting the dots: UCARE gets referrals from many sources to fully understand the situation and provide the best support.

### When should I submit a UCARE referral?

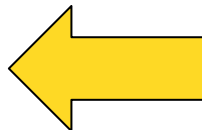
- Submit a referral as soon as you are able to after noticing concerns or signs of mental health, academic, or personal distress
- If you notice signs of a mental health crisis, first ensure the student is no longer in immediate danger, then submit a UCARE referral.
- When in doubt, submit a referral. This allows for appropriate follow up and care no matter the circumstance.
- UCARE is NOT an emergency response resource and should not replace calling 911.

### How do I submit a UCARE referral?

Use the QR code to the right to access the referral form or visit [ucare.mst.edu](http://ucare.mst.edu).

You can also call 573.341.4225 or stop by 203 Norwood Hall (during university hours). Referrals can be submitted 24/7 using the referral form.

**SUBMIT A UCARE REFERRAL HERE →**



# Crisis Information and Resources to Know

## Campus Services

- **Student Well-Being**
  - 573.341.4211
  - 204 Norwood Hall
  - Hours: Monday-Friday, 8am-4:30pm
  - wellbeing.mst.edu
  - wellbeing@mst.edu
- **University Police Department**
  - 911 (emergencies)
  - 573.341.4300 (non-emergencies)
  - 205 W 12th Street
  - Hours: Open 24/7
  - police.mst.edu
  - police@mst.edu

## Phone Numbers to Know

All available 24/7

- **Suicide Prevention Lifeline**
  - Call or text 988
    - For calls, press 1 for Veterans, 2 for Spanish, 3 for LGBTQ+
- **The Trevor Project LGBTQ+ Lifeline**
  - 866.488.7386
- **Compass Health - Mental Health Hotline**
  - 888.237.4567
- **Rolla Police Department**
  - 911 (for emergencies)
  - 573.308.1213

## Websites to Know

- **Equity and Title IX Instance Reporting**
  - equity.mst.edu/title-ix/reporting-option
- **Crisis and Suicide Prevention Resources**
  - wellbeing.mst.edu/crisis
- **Health and Well-Being Resource Directory**
  - wellbeing.mst.edu/resources/directory
- **Missouri S&T Emergency Guide**
  - go.mst.edu/eop
  - For non mental health related emergencies such as fire or tornado.
- **988 Lifeline - Online Chatting with a Counselor**
  - 988lifeline.org/chat
  - Video chatting is available for Deaf/Hard of hearing
- **For Faculty: Promoting Well-Being in the Classroom Tips and Resources**
  - undergrad.mst.edu/classroom-wellbeing



Equity/Title IX  
Reporting



Crisis Resources



Resource Directory



Promoting Well-Being  
in the Classroom

Access more information and an interactive version of the response guide at [wellbeing.mst.edu/crisis](https://wellbeing.mst.edu/crisis)

# Self-Care

Self-care is the practice of taking action to help sustain or improve your own well-being.

## Significance for GTAs:

The quality of guidance you provide can be interconnected with your well-being.



*What does self-care mean to you?*

# Examples of SelfCare

- Practicing healthy coping strategies and stress relief
- Saying no when needed
- Acknowledging your feelings
- Asking for help
- Spending time with people you care about
- Connecting with your peers
- Spending time alone to decompress
- Organizing/tidying/ cleaning
- Getting outside
- Taking care of your body
- Laughing
- Practicing self-compassion
- Positive self-talk

# A lot on your mind right now?

Download TalkCampus for free peer-to-peer  
support with your student email address



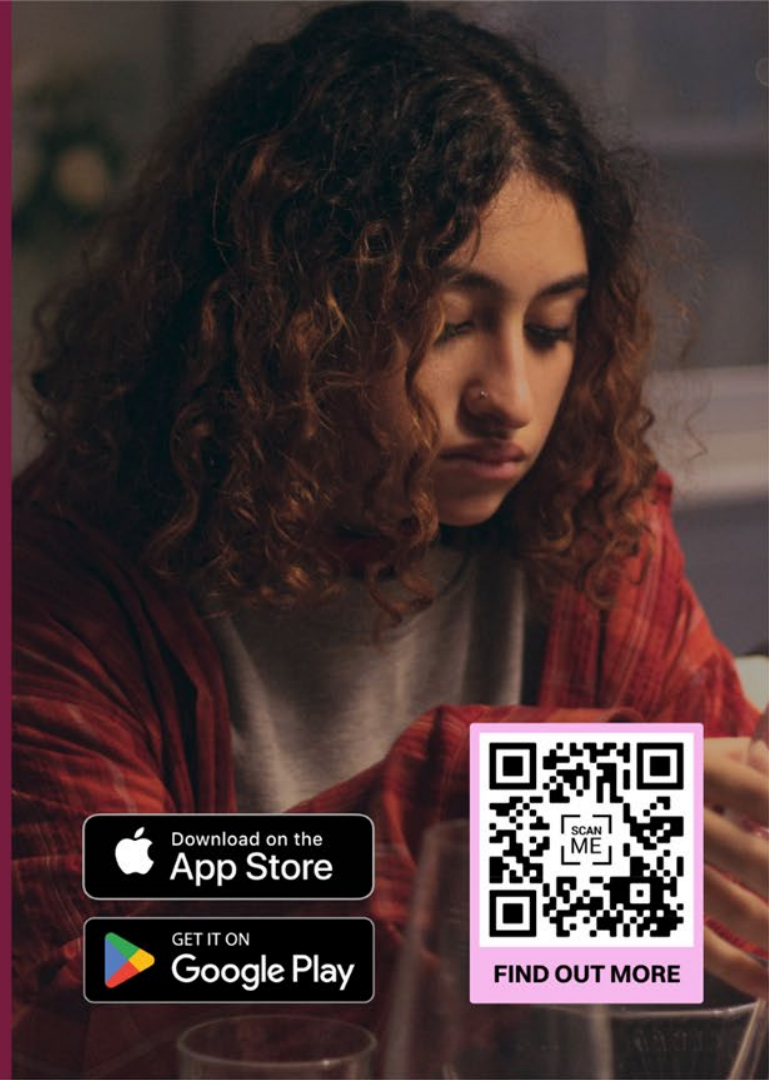
Download on the  
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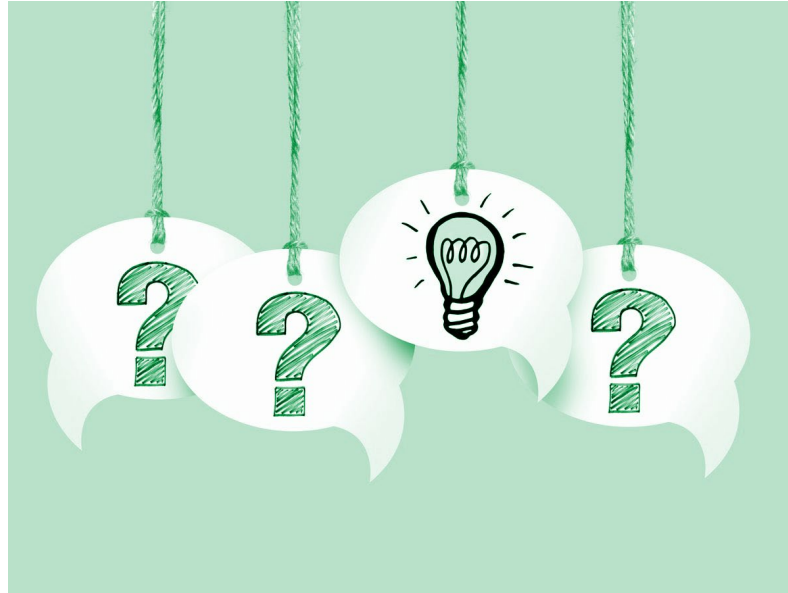
GET IT ON  
Google Play



FIND OUT MORE



# Thank You!



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