



Missouri University of Science and Technology

Navigating Student Challenges: Strategies for GTAs

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Division of Student Success: Student Life



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AVC Student Life

We take 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
- Student Involvement
- Dean of Students
- Residential Life
- UCARE/BIT
- Health and Well-Being Collective

Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors

2026

- 46% report anxiety in past year
- 39% report depression in past year
- 45% report stress interfered with their academics
- 23% report overwhelming or unbearable stress (-3%)

Main sources of stress:

- School/Academics: 85% (-5%)
- Time Management: 50% (-2%)
- Financial Concerns: 48% (+7%)
- Future Plans: 50% (+4%)
- Mental Health: 25% (-10%)
- Loneliness: 21% (+1%)

Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors

To whom do you go when personal concerns arise?

2026

- Academic advisor - S&T 14% (+5%); PIP 10% (same)
- Faculty/professor - S&T 10% (+2%); PIP 11% (-1%)
- Friends/peers - S&T 76% (-6%); PIP 77% (-1%)

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)

Defining Success

Campus

- North Star Goals
 - Carnegie R-1
 - Enrollment - 12,000
 - National recognition
- Retention - 92.5%
- UG graduation - 73.4%

Faculty

- Research productivity
- Teaching effectiveness
- Service
- Promotion
- Tenure

Student

- Grades/GPA
- Graduate in 4 years
- Internship/co-op
- Dream job
- Good starting salary
- Leadership positions

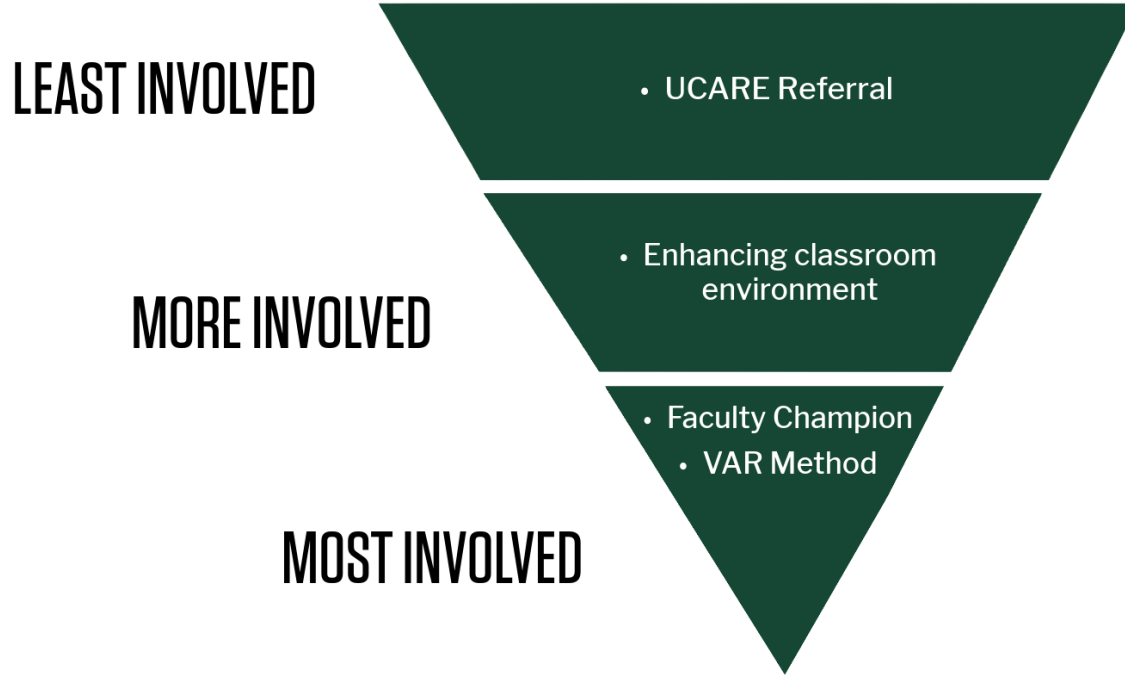
Well-Being is Foundational to Success



Academic Integration

- **Charge:** Promote the **integration of well-being** into the **academic culture** by engaging faculty and enhancing the classroom environment to support student well-being, foster connection and belonging, and contribute to the **holistic success of all**.
- **Strategic Alignment:** SFA2 Student Well-Being and Success; Strategy Group 1: Embed well-being into all facets of campus culture and across organizational boundaries

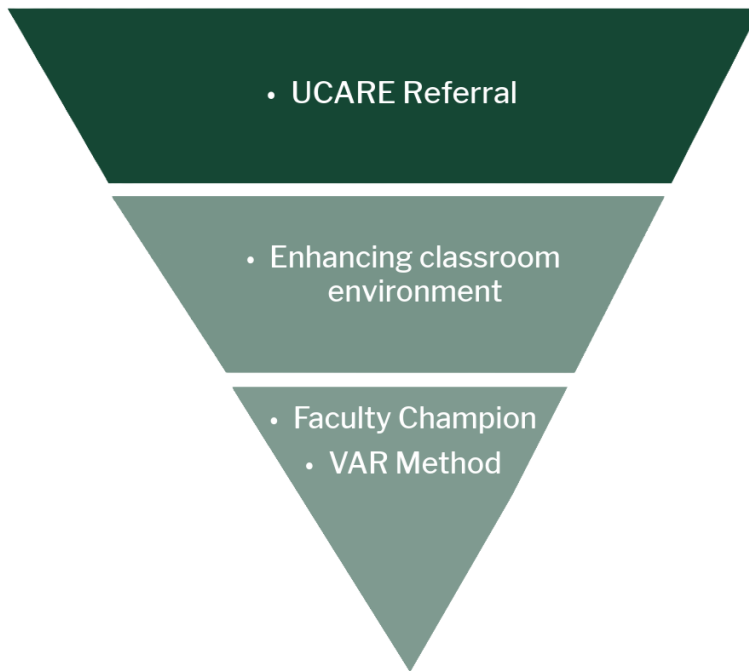
Integrating WellBeing into the Academic Culture



UCARE

Least involved. Most important. Requested of everyone.

LEAST INVOLVED



UCARE— *Just Notice and Refer*

UCARE IS:

- Centralized, coordinated support
- For **any type** of concern
- Safety
- Overall well-being
- Academic success

UCARE IS NOT:

- Punitive
- Mandated (except for imminent risk of harm to self or others)
- Only for isolated or acute situations

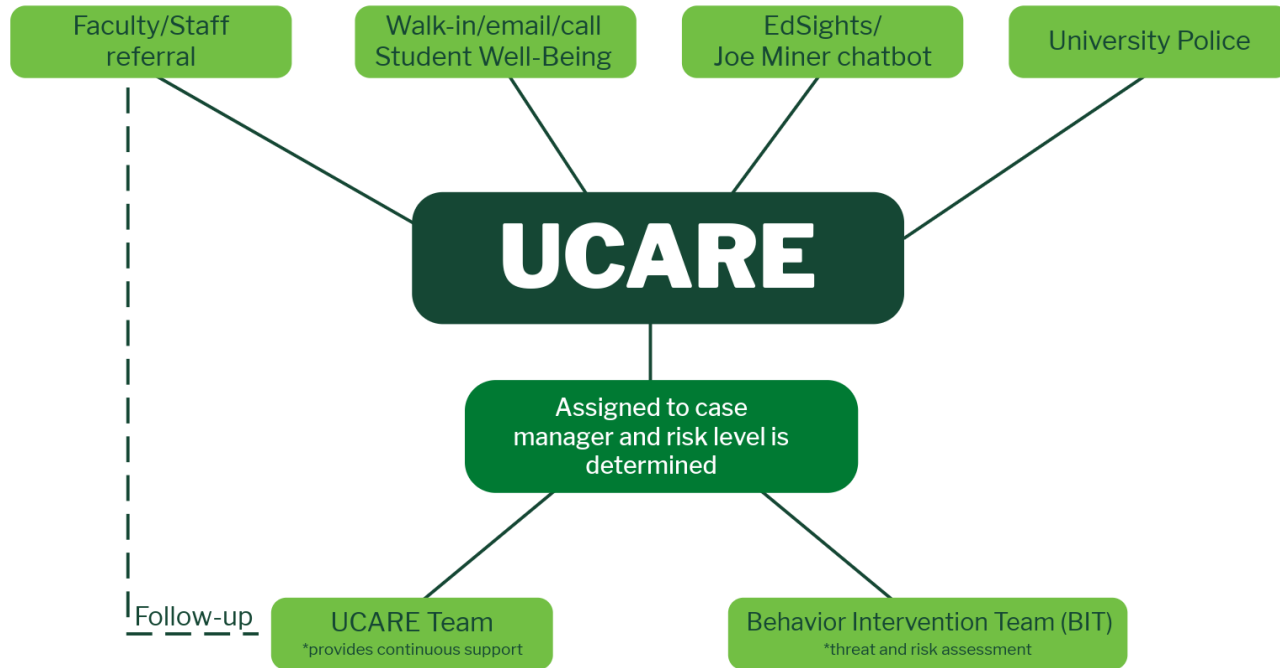


ucare.mst.edu

Recognizing Concerns- Just Notice and Refer

- Missed assignments
- Repeated absences
- Decline in academic performance
- Poor personal hygiene
- Inappropriate or exaggerated behavior
- Alarming or worrisome content in speech or assignments

UCARE REFERRAL PROCESS FLOW CHART



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

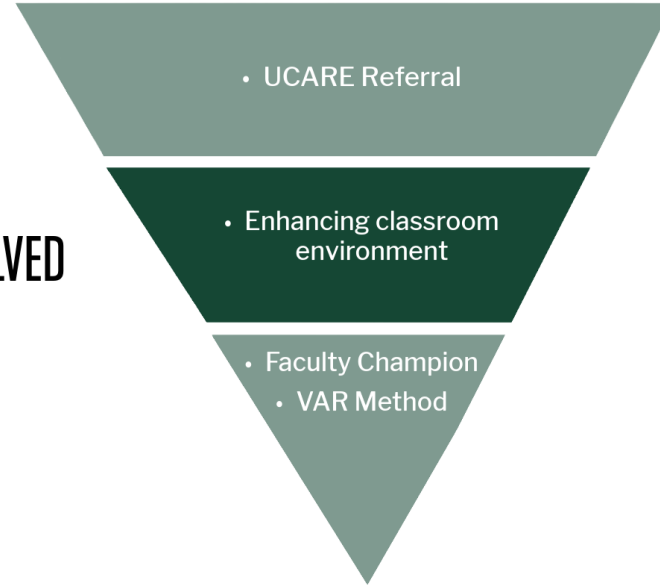
Ways to Start the Conversation

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.

Enhancing the Classroom Environment

MORE INVOLVED



Well-Being in the Classroom Webpage

<https://hwb.mst.edu/classroom-wellbeing/>

- Classroom Strategies
- Faculty Spotlights
- Resources



Well-Being in the Learning Environment

- Learning and using students' names
- Mood check/temperature check for students - "how is everyone feeling today"
- Acknowledging stress (for students and faculty)
- Normalize asking for help and sharing resources
- Adding UCARE and well-being statement to syllabus

Well-Being in the Learning Environment

Accessibility

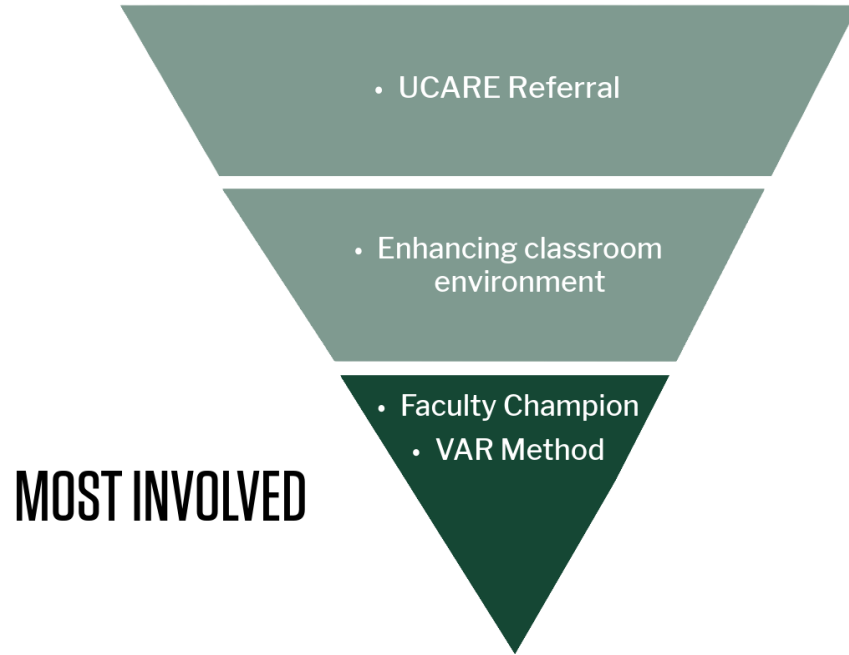
[Student Accessibility and Testing](#)

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



Encouraged Actions to Support Students



Faculty Champions <https://hwb.mst.edu/classroom-wellbeing/faculty-champions/>

COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING AND COMPUTING

Chemical and Biochemical Eng - Joseph Smith
Chemical and Biochemical Eng - Ryan Gilbert
Civil, Architectural, and Env Eng Eric Showalter
Computer Science - Ce Zhou
Earth Sciences and Eng - Ozgur Satici
Electrical and Computer Eng - Minsu Choi
Materials Science and Eng - Arezoo Emdadi
Mechanical and Aerospace Eng - David Bayless
Mining and Explosives Eng - Taghi Sherizadeh
Nuclear Eng - Carlos Henry Castano-Giraldo

COLLEGE OF ARTS, SCIENCES, AND EDUCATION

Arts, Languages, and Philosophy - Taylor Gruenloh
Air Force and Army ROTC - Nicole Nemetz
Biological Sciences - Dave Westenberg
Chemistry - Jeffrey G. Winiarz
English and Technical Communications - Kelly Tate
Education - Jami Swindell
Environmental Sciences - Dave Westenberg
History and Political Science - Alanna Krolikowski
Mathematics and Statistics - Chad Berner
Physics - Shun Saito
Psychological Sciences - Amber Henslee

KUMMER COLLEGE OF INNOVATION, ENTREPRENEURSHIP, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Business and Information Technology - Cassie Elrod
Economics - Jingyi Liu
Engineering Management and Systems Engineering - David Spurlock

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?”

Mental Health Crisis Response Guide

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Signs of Mental Health **CRISIS**

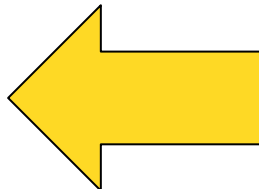
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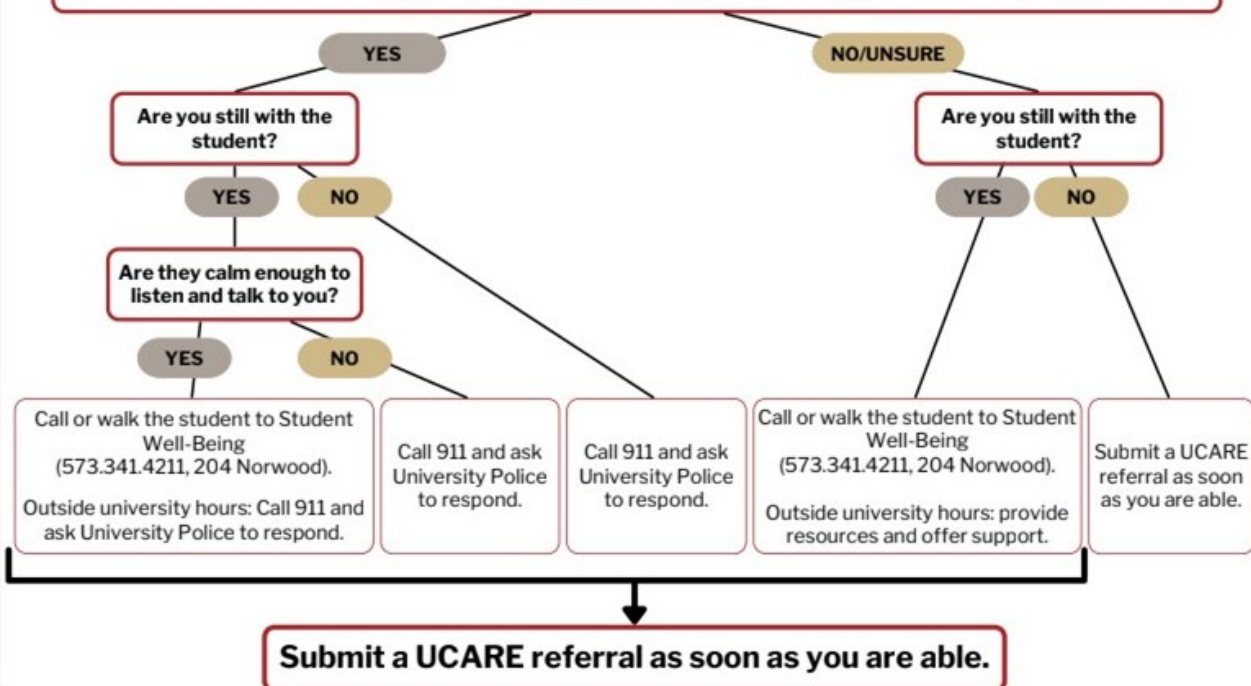
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Crisis Decision Tree: How to Respond Based on Severity of the Situation

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



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?

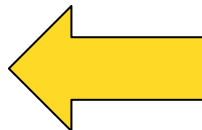
- Submit a referral as soon as you are able to after noticing concerns or signs of mental health, academic, or personal distress
- If you notice signs of a mental health crisis, first ensure the student is no longer in immediate danger, then submit a UCARE referral.
- When in doubt, submit a referral. 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.

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



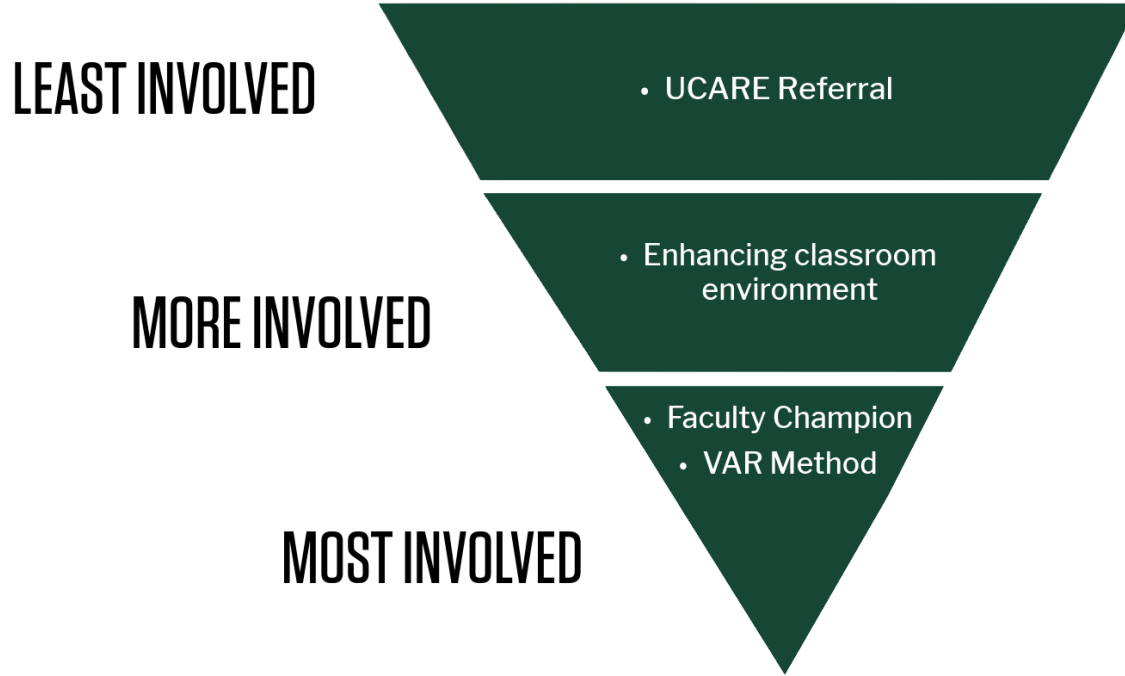
Resource Directory



Promoting Well-Being
in the Classroom

Access more information and an interactive version of the response guide at wellbeing.mst.edu/crisis

Integrating WellBeing into the Academic Culture



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.

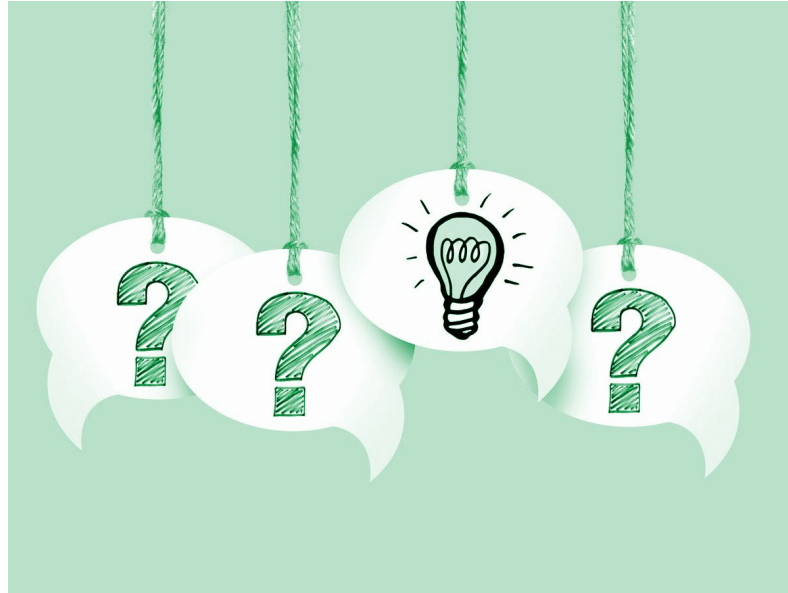


What does self-care mean to you?

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

Thank You!



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