

How Do I Help My Friend?

"I think my friend may have a serious emotional problem — how can I help?"

Kudos for wanting to step-up and help a friend in need. Here are a few suggestions to assist:

Reach out, talk to the distressed person, and listen to what s/he is going through. Some people fear that approaching a distraught individual will make things worse. Actually, giving caring and nonjudgmental support may help your friend feel less alone and misunderstood. Think about asking questions that reflect your concern and desire to help; such as, "How long have you been feeling this way?" or "Have you spoken with anyone else about all of this?"

Encourage the person to seek help. Encourage the person to seek help from a professional. If your friend does not want to see a counselor, encourage her or him to speak with someone else trained to provide assistance; such as a dean or member of the Residential Programs staff. You can offer to go with the person to talk with someone. If they refuse help, you may seek assistance from an RA, dean, or member of the counseling staff yourself. Counselors are available to consult with you about how best to help another person.

If you feel worried that the person is considering suicide, don't be afraid to ask. Asking does not increase the risk of suicide occurring. In fact, people are often relieved to have others acknowledge the depths of their feelings. Most people considering suicide are ambivalent about this choice. The behaviors that have drawn your attention are often a cry for help.

Take any concerns about suicide very seriously. A frequent cause of suicide is a major mental illness or psychiatric condition, which requires professional intervention. As a friend, you can offer very important caring and support, but ultimately the individual needs professional assistance. Remember that you cannot determine someone's degree of risk or provide treatment to a suicidal person on your own; s/he needs professional help. Do not agree to keep suicidal thoughts in confidence. It is an act of friendship and loyalty, not of betrayal, to seek needed assistance for a suicidal person.

Regardless of the circumstances, any reference to suicide should be considered serious. If an individual alludes to any details about planning a suicide attempt, immediate intervention is critical. Seek help right away. Remember you can always call Counseling and Psychological Services for advice.

| Online & Off-Campus Resources | On-Campus Resources |
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| Columbia Health – www.health.columbia.edu | After Hours Clinician On Call – 212-854-9797 |
| Go Ask Alice! – www.goaskalice.columbia.edu | Counseling & Psychological Services – 212-854-2878 |
| National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 800-273-TALK | Public Safety – 212-854-5555 (or x99 from a campus phone) |

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