

Guidance for Student Support during COVID-19 Pandemic
University Wellness Center: Well-Being Check

Intended Audience:

Academic Advisors
Faculty and Staff
Friendship Families
Mentors

Introduction & Purpose:

The purpose of this document is to provide general guidance for staff and faculty as you support students during the COVID-19 pandemic. This guidance is not intended to be a substitute for medical or psychological services. Detailed information about referring a student to professional services is found below. As the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly altered the landscape of higher education, and daily life, students will experience emotional and mental health side effects, as well as probable academic performance impairments. This is a normative response to a traumatic situation with unpredictable and uncontrollable features. Regular connection and social support (virtually) are important components of healthy coping, and checking-in with students who you know during this time is important. The guidance that follows provides some basic parameters for structuring a check-in/conversation with your student(s), and can be used as part of a regular advising meeting, a support staff check-in, or a social call.

Goals:

- Engage students on campus in individualized conversations about their well-being in an effort to reduce loneliness, improve mood, and promote help-seeking as needed.
- Check-in about general physical health and provide information about COVID-19 resources as needed.
- Provide a framework, and guiding questions/reflections, for facilitating a check-in.
- Provide specific resources, tools, and referral information.

Guidance:

The guidance provided below is intended to address several possibilities and contingencies: a first-time meeting, a follow-up meeting, a brief physical health check-in, reflective questions to engage in conversation around well-being and mental health, and guidance in case of an emergency. The guidance contains numerous questions, but you will want to balance asking questions with reflective and summative statements. The intention is to have a balanced conversation, not conduct an interview; therefore, the questions are meant for preparation and framing the conversation, not as a script to be read verbatim. Moreover, students may just want someone to listen to them and there may not be significant need for framing nor questions.

Who & How:

Identify one or two students (perhaps more if you are an academic advisor) who you are willing to commit to speaking with once or twice per week. Determine how you will reach out to them (email, phone, social media) and when you plan to schedule your meetings. Keep your meetings brief and engaging, about 20-30 minutes. In collaboration with the student, decide what might be the focus of these regular check-in's and how they can be most helpful and effective. You might decide to focus primarily on academics and time management or wellness practices and stress management. Your focus might also change depending on the student's needs. Be open to feedback from the student so that this time is useful and meaningful.

Scheduling a meeting:

- Sample email:
 - *Dear Student, I hope that you are doing well. I am writing to check-in and find a time to schedule a virtual 30-minute meeting. These are uncertain and unsettling times, and I want to touch base and see how you are doing. Let's plan to meet in the next few days. I am available at XXX. Email or call me to schedule a time to meet.*

Considerations before beginning:

- Locate a private space, free from loud noise & distractions
- Ask student to state their current location (in case of emergency)
- Request a call back number, or make a plan, if Zoom fails or disconnects
- Clock access (make sure you are able to monitor the time)
- Set-up for camera: position yourself not too close & not too far from the camera (comfortably close, not invasive) [Tips for Virtual Meetings](#)
- Body posture, eye contact, voice tone/volume, are still effective tools to convey [empathy](#) online

Basic tenets to frame the conversation:

- Be genuinely curious
- Spread positivity
- Listen mindfully
- Lead with compassion
- Allow space for silence and reflection
- Practice gratitude and savoring
- Celebrate successes
- Welcome questions
- Be open to a wide range of emotion
- Be watchful for signs and symptoms that indicate more support is needed
- Refer when the scope is beyond your training/capabilities
- Practice healthy boundary setting
- Be mindful of your presence: try to come to the meeting calm, centered, and grounded

First meeting guidance: if you don't have an established relationship or know the student well

- Opening: I'm so glad to be here and have this time with you today. My role is to reach out and connect with you on a regular basis, however often it might be helpful, and to talk with you about whatever might be on your mind. My hope is that we'll both find this to be a helpful relationship during a time when we are all physically disconnected due to COVID-19.
- Let me tell you a little about myself...
- Tell me a little bit about yourself...
- What's been a highlight of your week? Or Rose & Thorn (one good thing, one challenging thing)?
- Acknowledge conditions of pandemic, normalize expected emotional responses, inquire about their response to the stress. Overall, how are you managing during this time of social distancing?
- What's it like for you to be on (or off) campus right now?
- Tell me about your transition to remote learning? What is going well? What are you finding challenging?
- What is a typical day like for you?
- What might be helpful for us to focus our time on today?
- What would you like to get out of our check-in's? [engage in goal-setting if appropriate]
- Resources to help guide/frame future check-in's rooted in positive psychology:
 - [Positive Psychology Life Coaching Tools](#)
 - [Activities for Flourishing](#)
 - [Positive Psychology Activities](#)

Follow-up meeting guidance:

- General check-in: How are you today? What has your day been like so far?
- Overall, how is your physical health? Have you been experiencing any symptoms that concern you?
 - If they endorse this question with concerns about COVID-19 symptoms, please follow the guidance below.
- How are your classes going? Time management strategies? Daily routine established?
- Overall, how are you managing your stress and mood? Any particular challenges or accomplishments? [*try to get specific details about strategies and skills: what tools, practices, or behaviors are you using to cope?*]
- Tell me about a highlight from this week (or since the last check-in)? Something that went well or something that brought you some peace or happiness.
- Gratitude and savoring - What are you grateful for today? Have you had an opportunity recently to slow down and reflect and savor a moment or experience?
- Who have you spent time with lately? How has that been for you? [*listen for quality and quantity and encourage accordingly*]

- Do you have other (virtual) social plans this week? If not, should we talk about how you might make some social plans?
- How are you moving and feeding your body? [*listen for any concerns around nutrition and hydration*]
- When was the last time you went outside and got some sunshine/fresh air? Spent time in nature?
- How has your sleep been lately? [*listen for consistent sleep patterns/routines*]
- Any habits that you're concerned about? [*listen for excessive use of numbing strategies: media, social media, substances*] If yes, what is your plan for making a change? If they are struggling to manage compulsive numbing, make a referral to CAPS: 931-598-1325.

Mental Health Guidance

- If the student endorses mental health concerns (e.g., problems with mood, anxiety, disordered eating, difficulty with activities of daily living), please make a referral to CAPS: 931-598-1325.
- If the student endorses suicidal thoughts:
 - Stay on the call with the student until you get them connected with a professional
 - Express concern & explain that you need to get them connected with someone who can help
 - With the student still on Zoom, call:
 - CAPS (during business hours): 931-598-1325
 - Sewanee Crisis Line (24/7): 931-598-1700
 - National Suicide Prevention LifeLine: 1-800-273-8255
 - If you are disconnected from Zoom & the student was not connected with professional support, call 911

Physical Health Guidance: Concerns about COVID-19 Symptoms

- Ask directly about any COVID-19 symptoms [CDC: Symptoms](#):
 - Fever or Subjective Fever
 - Cough
 - Shortness of breath
- If a student endorses any COVID-19 symptoms, refer them to the UWC for a telehealth appointment immediately: 931-598-1270. If off campus, refer them to their local primary care provider or testing center.
- If student endorses any acute COVID-19 symptoms, call 911 immediately:
 - Persistent pain or pressure in chest
 - Trouble breathing
 - New confusion
 - Inability to arouse
 - Bluish face or lips

Resources:

COVID -19 Prevention

- [CDC: How to protect yourself, your family, your home](#)
- [CDC: How to manage your stress & anxiety](#)

COVID-19 Care

- [CDC: What to do if you are sick](#)
- [CDC: Caring for yourself at home \(pdf\)](#)
- [CDC: Caring for someone at home](#)
- [CDC: Cleaning and disinfection recommendations](#)
- [American Psychological Association Resources](#)

Well-Being Resources

- **UWC Social Media: [@uwcsewane](#) (Instagram & Facebook) [@wellnesscommons](#) (Twitter)**
- [Strategies to Thrive in Uncertain Times: Free Webinars](#)
- [Discover the Power of Self-Compassion: Free Classes](#)
- [Greater Good Magazine](#)
- [The Science of Well-Being: Free Class](#)