

How to Tell If a Friend Needs Assistance

There may be times when you feel concerned about a friend. Watch for the signs below, as they may indicate that your friend needs assistance.

BEHAVIORAL CHANGES

- Becoming either overly quiet and withdrawn or overly aggressive
- Having difficulty sleeping or sleeping all the time
- Increased use of alcohol and/or other drugs
- Apathy or a loss of interest in activities that were once enjoyed
- Mood swings such as unprovoked anger and hostility or unexplained crying

PHYSICAL CHANGES

- Lack of personal hygiene
- Noticeable weight increase or loss
- Deterioration in physical appearance
- Lack of energy for extended periods of time
- Loss of appetite for extended periods of time

PERSONALITY CHANGES

- Overly unhappy or discouraged attitude
- Irritability or constant anxiety
- Threatening people or property
- Depressed mood

OTHER FACTORS TO CONSIDER

- Any talk of suicide, including any texts, e-mails or Facebook messages with talk of suicide or finality in them
- Preoccupation with death
- Statements of distress, family problems, etc.
- Giving away personal belongings
- Statements indicative of saying goodbye
- Self-injurious behavior, such as cuts on their arms

TIPS FOR HELPING A FRIEND WHO NEEDS ASSISTANCE

- Talk to your friend alone when you have time for a long conversation. Most friends will be willing to talk, but won't come forward because they feel they are burdening people with their problems.
- Use "I" statements to tell your friend what you have observed. For example, use statements such as "I am concerned..." or "I have noticed that..." (Don't use "you" statements, as these may sound accusatory or judgmental to your friend).
- Be supportive, compassionate, and respectful of your friend's feelings. Listen to what they are saying. Try not to interrupt them, and don't offer opinions unless they ask you.
- Turn off all possible distractions, such as your stereo, TV, and cell phone! You need to give your friend your undivided attention.
- Validate your friend's feelings. Give them small signs that you understand and are listening. Nod your head or paraphrase what they have said. Do not minimize what the person is going through.
- Listen to see if your friend is asking for your assistance in solving the problem. If not, just serve as a listening ear. If they are asking for your help, assist them in developing a plan of action.
- Know your limitations. If you feel that you are overwhelmed or uncomfortable, tell your friend that you think he/she should talk with someone in a professional role. Contact the Counseling Center (518-388-6161) with your friend. If we are not the right office, we will help you figure out which office is the best resource. If the Counseling Center is the best option, offer to come in with your friend.
- If there is any talk of suicide or threats against others while you are talking to your friend, contact the Counseling Center, Campus Safety ((518)-388-6911) or Public Safety (911) immediately.
- Remember to take care of yourself. Helping a friend can be very stressful sometimes, and you need take care of your own mental health needs as well. If you begin to feel overwhelmed, you are welcome to visit the Counseling Center to discuss your own issues and needs.

For More Information

The Union College Counseling Center offers caring, confidential help from psychologists experienced in helping students who are concerned about a friend. Call (518) 388-6161 or stop by the Wicker Wellness Center front desk to schedule an appointment.