

## Should you get immediate help?

**In case of an imminent life threatening emergency** (for example, if someone is holding a handful of pills or just swallowed them or if someone has, or says they have, a weapon) **call 911 and CUMC Security at 212-305-7979, immediately.**

Do NOT leave the person alone if you feel that they are imminently at risk.

Do NOT stay alone with a person if you feel that you are in danger.

## Not sure how serious the risk is or whether it is imminent?

Follow your gut feelings. If you are concerned about leaving the person alone, then don't.

If that gut feeling or concern comes up at a later time, reach out for assistance then.



## Resources\*

### Emergency Numbers and Hotlines

CUMC Public Safety	305-7979
NYPD	911 or 927-3200
CUMC Student Mental Health Service	496-8491 (days) 305-3400, press 7 (nights)
Student Health Service	305-3400, press 7 (nights)
Lifenet (Hotline)	1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)
National Hopeline Network	1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433)

### CUMC Support Resource Numbers

Public Safety	305-7979
Student Mental Health Service	496-8491 days 305-3400, press 7 nights
Student Health Service	305-3400 (nights, press 7 for help)
Center for Student Wellness	304-5564

### CUMC Student Affairs Deans

P&S	305-3806
School of Nursing	305-2816
College of Dental Medicine	305-3890
School of Public Health	305-3067
GSAS	305-8058
Institute Human Nutrition	305-4808
Occupational Therapy	305-5267
Physical Therapy	305-6907

\* Phone numbers are 212 area code unless indicated

CUMC Student Health Services  
60 Haven Avenue, Ground Floor  
Phone: 212-305-3400  
[www.cumc.columbia.edu/student/health](http://www.cumc.columbia.edu/student/health)

# Concerned About a Student or Friend?

A Guide for those concerned about a Student, Classmate, or Friend who may be Depressed or At-Risk for Self-Harm or Harming Others.

STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY  
MEDICAL CENTER

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## Concerned About Someone?

Are you concerned about a student or friend who is depressed and possibly suicidal? Has a student, friend or classmate expressed a desire to self-harm or to harm another person?

### Understanding the Situation

All suicide threats and attempts should be taken seriously. The depression and emotional crises that so often precede suicide are - in most cases - both recognizable and treatable.

Similarly, those who harm others usually demonstrate disturbed or hostile actions previously—or may even post their plans on the internet.

### Feelings

A person who is depressed and possibly at risk for self-harm or harming others may feel any of the following:

- Lonely
- Depressed
- Despondent
- Isolated
- Desperate
- Hopeless/Worthless
- Extremely Anxious or Frustrated



### Verbal Cues

Someone who is depressed and/or at risk for self-harm may express some of the sentiments listed below—sometimes variations on these themes, which is why it is important to listen carefully to what they say:

- No one understands what I am feeling
- No one would miss me if I were gone
- It's the only way to solve my problems
- I want to die/I want to kill myself
- I can't stand the pain anymore
- I want to hurt someone

### Behaviors

Someone who is depressed and at risk may not be able to verbalize their feelings. Some **behaviors** to look for include:

- Recent impulsiveness/taking unnecessary risks
- Inability to focus or concentrate
- Dramatic change in mood
- Unexpected rage or anger
- Giving away prized possessions
- Withdrawing from activities
- Increased alcohol or other drug use
- Inability to sleep or sleeping excessively
- Poor hygiene (not bathing, wearing dirty clothes)
- Stockpiling prescription or other medications
- Making specific plans for suicide or homicide

## Your Role as a Concerned Person

The risk of not taking action far outweighs the risk of taking action. One of the most important things that you can do is believe what the person is saying and acknowledge their feelings. It is a myth that talking about suicide or violence will "push someone to do it."

### What Can You Say?

- Don't be afraid to ask, "Are you having thoughts of suicide?" You will **not** put ideas in someone's head. You **will** get valuable information about how to go about helping the person. If they answer "yes" to this question, probe for more information. Ask:

- Have you thought about how you would do it?
- Do you have a specific plan?
- What is your specific plan?

NOTE: An affirmative answer to ANY of these questions may indicate that the person is at imminent risk.

- You cannot promise confidentiality, but you can guarantee that only those who need to know will know.
- Acknowledge the person's feelings by reflecting what you heard them say, e.g., "It sounds like you are feeling lonely and misunderstood. That must be painful."
- Assure them that they are not alone; you are there for them and you can help them find people at CUMC who can help.

### What Can You Do?

- If it is an emergency, call NYPD at 911 and/or CUMC Security at 5-7979
- Walk the person to the emergency room or to the Student Health Service (weekdays)
- If it is not an emergency, refer the person to the resources on the back of this brochure.

### What Are You Feeling?

As a caring person you may feel a range of feelings, all of which are normal, and all of which can influence your response to the person, such as:

- Inadequate or as though you can't help
- Scared and overwhelmed
- Determined to help since this person chose you as their confider
- Unsafe or uncomfortable
- Afraid of losing the friendship if you act
- Something unsettling in your gut that you can't describe.

Trust your instincts and your gut. Each situation is unique, and helping someone who is depressed and possibly at risk for suicide or harming others can be an involved process. You are not alone; the resources listed on the back of this brochure are available for you, too.