

Helping Distressed Students after Hurricane Harvey

The devastating effects of Hurricane Harvey have affected many TAMUCC students either directly or indirectly. Some students have suffered major losses (e.g., homes, vehicles, personal belongings). Others may be experiencing financial stressors due to lost wages or their families being out of work. It's important to understand that even students who didn't directly experience losses from the hurricane may be experiencing secondary trauma due to witnessing graphic news footage of Houston, Rockport and Port Aransas or having friends/relatives/neighbors impacted by the storm. For some students, the cumulative effects of recent stressors may begin to take a toll on their ability to cope and function on a daily basis. Even students who are normally resilient may struggle due to their sense of safety and security being disrupted by the hurricane.

What You Can Do to Support Students Affected by the Hurricane

- Acknowledge the major impact of the recent hurricane on our Islander community as well as the local community and the state of Texas. Remind students to visit you during office hours or to email you if they are having difficulties or are dealing with extenuating circumstances.
- Include resource numbers & websites on Blackboard or your syllabus. <http://tamucc.edu/islanderhelp/> includes a list of FAQs and helpful resources for students.
- If students inform you that they will be missing classes for hurricane related reasons, try to make every effort to support them in keeping up with course requirements (e.g., encourage them to access the syllabus and lecture notes on Blackboard, offer make up exams or quizzes, extend deadlines).
- Some students may have lost their computer or may lack funds to purchase books right away. Suggest practical solutions (e.g., using campus computer labs, borrowing department copy of textbook, applying for an emergency book loan through Financial Aid). Some publishers may be willing to offer e-books, textbooks or discounts to students affected by Harvey.
- Some students may be experiencing transportation issues. Remind them about the RTA bus system (which is free for students when they show their ID) and encourage them to carpool with friends/roommates/relatives. More info about bus routes and schedules is available at <http://ccrta.org>
- Some students may have more complex and extensive needs. You may refer them to Student Assistance Coordinator, Kristeen Gonzalez, or Associate VP & Dean of Students, Ann Degaish in the Student Engagement and Success Division, UC318, (361)825-2612.
- Students who are stressed may develop physical symptoms. The University Health Center has morning walk-in hours beginning at 8am on Mon, Tues, Thu, Fri (9:30am on Wed). Afternoon walk-in hours weekdays begin at 1:30pm. To speak with a nurse any time, students can call 361-825-2601.
- Distressed students may be prone to indecision or have trouble with problem solving. Do try to be patient and compassionate while helping them to explore solutions. You won't be able to help with every concern or problem but your willingness to listen will likely provide some relief and reassurance.

Recognizing & Intervening with Distressed Students

For some students, signs of distress may be evident immediately. For others, distress may manifest weeks or even months later. Signs of distress may include deteriorating grades, excessive absences or tardiness, disruptive classroom behavior, depressed or anxious mood, agitation, tearfulness, irritability, deterioration in personal hygiene, social withdrawal, talking or writing about feeling overwhelmed, discouraged or hopeless. Generally, when an individual is distressed, his or her problems are complex and do not lend themselves to a "quick fix." It can be important to reassure the student that things can get better and to remind them that there are options and resources available to them. Assisting a distressed student can be emotionally draining and physically taxing for you as well. Be aware of your own boundaries and limitations. In some instances, a student's problem may be beyond your areas of expertise and/or it may not be comfortable or appropriate for you to assist the student with his/her problem. These are situations when making a referral to I-CARE or the Counseling Center is recommended. Interested in more information about helping distressed students? **At**

Risk for Staff & Faculty is an online, interactive training that will teach you how to recognize signs of distress and how to approach and connect distressed students with support services. Available at <http://counseling.tamucc.edu>

Making A Referral to I-CARE

The purpose of I-CARE is to provide a centralized system for faculty, staff, students and parents to refer students who are exhibiting disruptive, distressed, and/or high-risk behaviors. Some examples of students who might benefit from I-CARE support are students who are struggling with sadness, depression, suicidal thoughts or actions, thoughts of harming others, repeated classroom disruption, and those exhibiting signs of an eating disorder or threatening behavior. I-CARE strives to address the needs of distressed students by providing support and helping them to get connected with appropriate resources on and off campus. To refer a student to I-CARE, simply fill out an I-CARE referral form at <http://icare.tamucc.edu/>

Making a Referral to the Counseling Center

If a student needs more help than you can offer, do suggest that counseling might be beneficial. Let the student know that Counseling Center services are FREE and CONFIDENTIAL. Reassure the student that seeking help is a sign of strength and courage not weakness or failure. The Counseling Center is located in the Driftwood Building and walk-in hours are Monday-Friday, 9:00-11:30am and 1-4pm. Additional self-help resources for students are available at <http://counseling.tamucc.edu>. If you aren't sure how to approach or intervene with a distressed student, you can consult with a counselor at the Counseling Center by phone (361-825-2703). Provide a description of the situation that led to your concern. Please provide direct quotes from the student whenever possible. You will be advised of the most appropriate actions to take so that assistance for the student can be coordinated most efficiently. After hours or weekends/holidays, call (361-825-2703) and press "2" to be connected to the after-hours crisis counselor.

Emergency or Urgent Referrals

In cases where a student seems to be in crisis (too distraught to take care of self, violent or threatening behavior, suicidal or homicidal threats or gestures), then it is imperative that you act promptly. For urgent or emergency situations, call University Police at 361-825-4444 or 911.

TAMUCC Offices & Numbers

Admissions: 361-825-7024 <http://admissions.tamucc.edu>

Financial Aid: 361-825-2338 <http://osfa.tamucc.edu/>

Student Engagement & Success 361-825-2612

Counseling Center Crisis Line 361-825-2703 & press "2"

Health Center Nurse Line 361-825-2601

Helpful Resources

FEMA: 1-800-621-3362
www.disasterassistance.gov

Red Cross: 1-800 733-2767
www.redcross.org/get-help

Salvation Army: 1-800-728-7825
www.salvationarmyusa.org

Izzy's Pantry: 361-825-FOOD
UC 204 (2nd floor, end of the hall)