

Helping Distressed Students after Hurricane Harvey

The devastating effects of Hurricane/Flood Harvey affected many UHCL students either directly or indirectly. Some students 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/ Port Aransas, and East Texas 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 community as well as 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.
- 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 or borrowing department copy of textbook). 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 other transportation options (such as Uber) and encourage them to carpool with friends/roommates/relatives.
- Some students may have more complex and extensive needs. You may refer them to the Student Assistance Center or Dean of Students Office.
- Students who are stressed may develop physical symptoms. Health Services has walk-in nursing assessments when they are open are Monday-Thursday 9:00am-7:00pm and Friday 8:00am-12:00pm.
- 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, their 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 the UHCL CARE Team or Counseling Services is recommended.

Making A Referral to the CARE team

The purpose of the CARE team 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 CARE team 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. The CARE team 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 the CARE team, simply fill out a referral form at <https://www.uhcl.edu/dean-of-students/care>.

Making a Referral to Counseling Services

If a student needs more help than you can offer, do suggest that counseling might be beneficial. Let the student know that the services at UHCL Counseling Services are FREE and CONFIDENTIAL. Reassure the student that seeking help is a sign of strength and courage not weakness or failure. Counseling Services is located in the SSCB 3103 and the hours are Monday-Thursday 8:00am-7:00pm and Friday 8:00am-12:00pm. Additional self-help resources for students are available on our website. If you aren't sure how to approach or intervene with a distressed student, you can consult with a counselor at Counseling Services by phone 281-283-2580. 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.

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 ext. 2222.

UHCL Offices & Numbers

Counseling Services: 281-283-2580

UHCL CARE team: 281-283-2273

Health Services: 281-283-2626

Student Assistance Center: 281-283-2722

Admissions: 281-283-2500

Financial Aid: 281-283-2480

Student Success Center: 281-283-2450

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