

P-CAST

Supporting a Loved One After a Mental Health Crisis

Understand Your Student's Privacy Rights

- The federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) protect the privacy of education and health records for students who are 18 y/o and older.
- Consider having a conversation with your student about whether they will give permission to sign a release of confidential information.
- Parents and loved ones *are* legally permitted to share information about their student with the university and college counseling staff. If you're worried about your student, consider contacting [Counseling & Psychological Services](#) at (619) 594-5220.

Check In, But Remember Boundaries

- Don't ask direct questions about grades or if your loved one is taking care of themselves. Instead, ask questions like, "How are you?," "How can I be supportive?," "What do you need from me in the current moment?"
- Though it can be extremely stressful to be far away from a loved one after they have experienced a mental health crisis, avoid constantly calling/ texting. While it's important to check in and communicate your support, checking in too often might make your student feel stressed and/or overwhelmed.
- Consider having a conversation with your student about a check-in method that works for both of you. (E.g. Set a day/time 1-2 X each week for a phone call or FaceTime; Ask permission to have the contact information of a friend you can contact if you're worried/ unable to reach your student; Ask your student if they're willing to text you an emoji of how they're feeling if they don't feel like talking.)

Communicate Your Love and Support

- Though it can be tempting to jump in and "fix" the situation, what your student needs is your love and support. Instead of offering solutions or discussing your personal experience, focus on listening to your student, reflecting back their experience ("It sounds like you're feeling _____"), and communicating [empathy](#).

- Individuals coping with a mental health crisis often struggle with feelings of shame and guilt. Moreover, students sometimes worry their parents or loved ones will be upset or stressed. Communicate to your loved one that they have your love and support no matter what.

If Your Student Is Taking a Leave of Absence

- Sometimes a student needs to take a break from school to focus on their mental health. If this is the best option for your student, remind them that taking a break to prioritize their mental health is a sign of strength, not weakness. Ask your student how they feel about taking a leave of absence and listen with empathy.
- Before your student returns home, consider removing or locking up any lethal means such as medications and firearms.
- For more information on taking a leave of absence, visit the [Office of the Registrar's website](#).

Remember To Take Care of Yourself Too

- Supporting a loved one who is struggling with their mental health can be stressful and overwhelming. Make sure you take time to care for yourself by engaging in self-care and seeking your own mental health support if needed.
- For information about support groups in your area, visit the [National Alliance on Mental Illness's website](#).

References and Additional Helpful Resources:

- [Starting the Conversation: College and Your Mental Health](#)
- [A Guide for Parents and Families: Supporting Your College Student Through Mental Health Challenges](#)
- [Supporting Mental Health From a Distance: When Should a Parent Intervene?](#)