

Friend 2 Friend: Fall 2020 COVID Edition

Graduate & Professional Student Version

The 2020-2021 academic year is...different

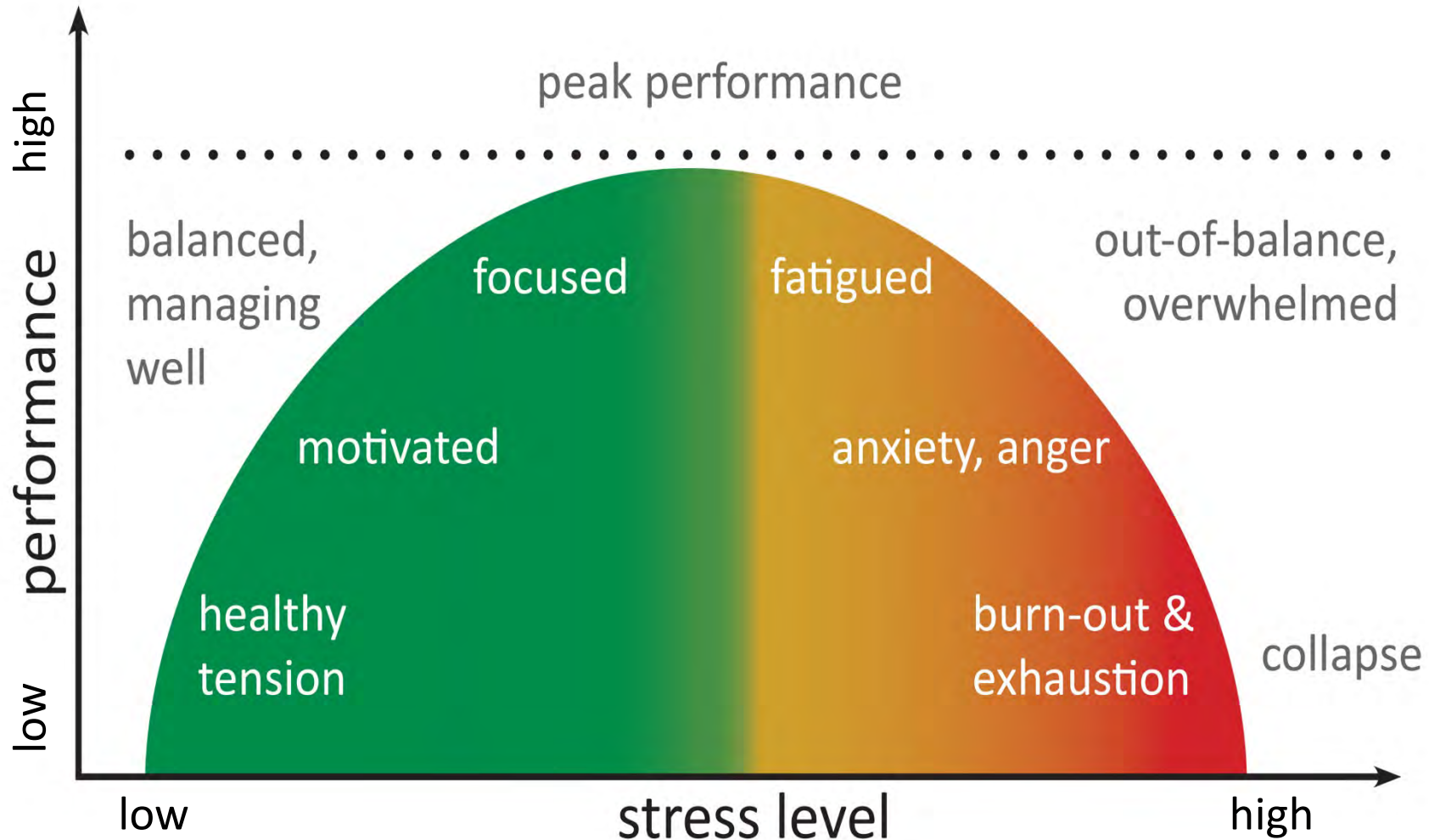
- COVID-19
 - Fear of infection-self & others, loss of loved ones, wearing face masks, reduced socializing and physical contact, xenophobia, loss of experiences, quarantine fatigue, online instruction/ hybrid courses, campus surveillance testing, uncertainty
- Economic crisis
 - New/Increased financial worries - funding concerns, debt; significantly reduced internship and job prospects, uncertainty of global and domestic markets & overall economy
- Nationwide demands and world-wide support to address structural and systemic racism in U.S.
 - Racism and violence by police - departmental practices, policies and attitudes
 - Peaceful protests, agitator counter-protesters and exacerbating, inflated police presence
 - Increase in white supremacy overtly asserting itself and supported by current White House
 - Impacts on all; trauma for BIPOC

Common stressors and challenges to mental health during graduate or professional school

- High expectations
- Sense of competition
- Imposter syndrome
- Micro-aggressions/ bias
- Financial concerns/ debt
- Relationships – new & old
- Career exploration/ indecision
- Balancing multiple demands/roles



The Stress Continuum



Objectives

1. Review signs & levels of distress
2. Consider situations that might cause challenge, stress or distress
3. Note what you can say & do to support someone in these situations
4. Highlight campus resources

1st Level of Distress: Concern

Experiencing 1 or 2 signs for a short period of time.

- **Signs of Concern:**

- Physical distress: anxiety, sadness, crying, panic attacks, significant weight change, neglecting hygiene and living space
- Feeling overwhelmed by academics, world events or other stressors
- Lack of motivation, procrastination
- Problems eating or sleeping: too little or too much
- Engaging in self-harm
- Irritability, anger, fights, arguments
- Social withdrawal: skipping classes, clinic, meetings or social events
- Personal loss or traumatic life event
- Experience of microaggression(s) or other bias
- Increased alcohol or other drug use

- **Response options:**

- Talk with person directly
- Refer to campus resources; help with connecting
- Tell someone else who can help

Response option: concern level

Talk with the person privately

- Ask open ended questions: “How are things going?” “How are you feeling?”
- Listen attentively to the response. Encourage the person to talk. Don’t give up if they are slow to talk. Allow for silences.
- Point out specific signs of stress/ distress you’ve noticed (e.g. mood, absences, lack of attention to detail, etc.)
- Ask about support; normalize help-seeking.
- Comment in a supportive, non-judgmental manner (e.g. “It sounds like you’ve really been dealing with a lot. I’m here for you.”)
- Ask what the person thinks might be helpful. Help them get connected to appropriate resources or support.
- Decrease stigma around help-seeking: “Many students have found it helpful to talk with someone in student services,” appropriate use of self- disclosure
- End the conversation in a way that allows either of you to come back to the subject at another time.

***If there are signs of a safety risk, ask directly about suicide.*

Response options: concern level (cont.)

- **Refer** person to
 - Academic, health-related or social support resource
- **Consult with/ tell someone else who can help**
 - Student Services Staff in your school or program
 - Cornell Health
 - Ombudsman

Ithaca Campus Resources for Graduate & Professional Students

- **Academic Support**

- Faculty or other mentor
- Student who's been in your program longer
- Graduate or Professional School Student Services Staff
- Librarians

- **Cornell Health** (24/7 phone consultation)

- Medical services
- Counseling & Psychological services
 - Individual & Group counseling
 - Medication management
- Let's Talk drop-in consultation
- Let's Meditate drop-in sessions
- Nutrition Support & Body Positive Cornell
- Patient Advocate
- Student Disability Services

- **Social Support**

- Social or professional student organizations
- The Big Red Barn
- Cornell United Religious Work
- Cornell Minds Matter
- Asian Asian-American Center
- LGBT Resource Center
- Undocumented and DACA Student Support
- Women's Resource Center

- **Additional Support**

- Bias Response: biasconcerns.cornell.edu
- Hazing: hazing.cornell.edu
- Sexual Harassment and Assault
 - share.cornell.edu
 - Victim Advocate
- Caring Community website

Talk & Text Mental Health Resources

Ithaca and National Talk-lines

- ▶ Cornell Health On-call Counselors (24/7)
607-255-5155 option #2
- ▶ EARS Peer Counselors **607- 255-EARS (3277)**
- ▶ Ithaca Talk/Crisis-line (24/7)
607-272-1616
- ▶ Ithaca Advocacy Center Talk/Crisis-line (sexual or domestic violence)
24/7 **607-277-5000**
- ▶ National Talk/Crisis-lines (24/7)
1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- ▶ Trevor Lifeline at **1-866-488-7386 (LGBTQ)**

National Text-lines

- ▶ Text **HELLO to 741741** to connect with a trained ***crisis counselor***
- ▶ Text **STEVE to 741741** to connect with a trained ***crisis counselor of color***
- ▶ Text **START to 678678** to connect with a confidential Trevor counselor (***LGBTQ***)
- ▶ National suicide prevention lifeline ***CHAT***
<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat/>

Free, confidential and/or anonymous and you don't need to be suicidal to call/text

Concern level example #1: How could you respond?

A first year student in your program comments: “This isn’t *at all* what I thought this program would be like. It’s kinda depressing”

1. Acknowledge that it *is* a very different academic year for everyone, then say something like: “It feels like a big let down (or other feeling(s) expressed). Tell me more about what it’s been like for you.”
2. Validate and empathize. Then ask “If there was one thing that might help what might that be?”
3. Reflect back what they say. Then ask “if there was one first step toward making that happen, what would it be?” Continue to elicit/reflect back ideas. If appropriate, share a resource that could help.
4. If the person is resistant to identifying things that might help, they likely just want to be heard. Continue to offer support, empathy, validation, and ask permission to keep checking in with them. Many times, this is the best intervention in and of itself!

Concern level example #2: How could you respond?

A new lab/clinic mate shares feeling homesick and lonely.

1. Acknowledge and validate their feelings by saying something like: “I think I get it. It’s really hard and completely normal to feel lonely sometimes while working toward an advanced degree, even during “non-pandemic” times! Not to mention adding in physical distancing, masks, not being able to visit family & friends, and hybrid classes into this mix...it can be really hard to make new friends and feel like you belong here right now. I know that many people are feeling this way, you are not alone in this, and try not to be too hard on yourself.”
2. Ask: What’s one thing that might help you feel more connected? Maybe try one of the Big Red Barn activities?
3. Might also offer: “Would you like to grab food with me and go sit in the Botanic Gardens to eat and talk?”

2nd Level of Distress: Urgent

- **Signs of Urgent Situations:**

- Concern level signs lasting more than a week
- Worsening symptoms of psychological distress (e.g. anxiety, depression)
- Expressions of hopelessness
- Talk of suicide or harm to others
- Writing about death, dying, suicide
- Person has not slept in past 72 hours
- Out-of-touch with reality

- **Response options**

- Get immediate assistance from a mental health provider
 - Cornell Health 607-255-5155
 - Ithaca Crisis Line 607-272-1616

Urgent level example : How could you respond?

A new student in your program you've started to become friendly with is visibly upset and tells you that they think admissions made a mistake, they aren't smart enough to be here, they can't seem to stop crying and they think they should just stop attending classes and give up.

1. Listen, allow for pauses and then acknowledge what they've shared by saying something like: "You're really hurting right now and questioning if you belong here. It's super hard to feel this way. Tell me more about what's been going on for you."
2. Listen again, then say: "I've had similar feelings too, as have many students during their first semester of graduate or professional school. I want you to know that I'm here for you. Let's take this one step at a time. What do you think might help?"
3. Reflect back any generated ideas. Then, if appropriate, ask if it would be helpful to share info about student services staff for your program, upcoming socially-distanced social activities or Let's Talk virtual drop in hours.
4. Then say something like: "I want to revisit what you said about feeling like you want to give up. I'm wondering, have you been thinking about killing yourself?"

Next steps based on the person's response

No! I'm not suicidal – I just want to feel better, like I belong here.

- “Of course you want to feel like you belong here. And I can assure you that you do belong, admissions did not make a mistake.
- It takes time to figure out how to learn this advanced material, how to study and read and complete advanced-level assignments, procedures and exams.
- There are lots of resources that could be helpful; can I share a few with you? Most everybody needs a little help at some point.
- What do you think might be most helpful for you right now? Which resource will you try?
- Make a plan to check back in with the person to see how the resource worked out for them.

Well, I have struggled with some thoughts but I would never act on them.

- It's completely understandable to have these thoughts when you're feeling so unsure of yourself and overwhelmed. I want you to know that it's ok to share these feelings, and I appreciate you sharing this with me.
- I'm concerned about you and I think it would be best for me to connect you with someone at Cornell Health who is a professional and can help you with this better than I can.
- With your permission, we can make the call together. I'll talk first and then if you're comfortable, I'll have you talk to the provider directly so we can come up with a plan for going forward. How does that sound to you?

Next steps & possible outcomes when you call Cornell Health in an urgent-type situation

- Cornell Health provider will assess the situation to make a recommendation for possible next steps:
 - Schedule *regular* session with a Cornell Health mental health provider (virtually) for the same or next day
 - Provide hotline/textline numbers for use until appt
 - Make plan for transport to hospital if determined necessary for safety

When to ask about suicide

- Expressions of hopelessness, giving up - “no one understands”, “things will never get better”, “what’s the point?”
- Talking or writing about death, dying or suicide
- Loneliness, social isolation – “no one to talk to”
- Giving away possessions
- Sudden bright mood after long depression
- Your own gut level feeling

Remember: Asking directly about suicide does not increase the risk that the person will act even if they have/ are having thoughts of suicide.

And the answer tells you what your response options are.

3rd Level of Distress: **Emergency**

- **Sign of Emergency Situations:**

- Immediate threat of harm to self or others

- A friend/ acquaintance texts you to say they've taken a lot of pills, and when you call them right back they are slurring their words & seem significantly intoxicated
- You're out on a walk and you see someone pacing and mumbling in front of the Stewart Ave bridge

- **Response options:**

- Get immediate assistance (from police)
 - Call 911 OR CUPD 607-255-1111

Conclusion

- If you notice something → say/do something.
- Familiarize yourself with campus resources
- Remember → Things CAN get better! Your support of a friend helps; mental health *treatment works*.

For more information, visit health.cornell.edu