

Session 3



California Community Colleges

Beyond Crisis: Supporting Students with Suicidal Ideation in Everyday Conversations

**Mental Health Action Week
Webinar Series**

**Presented by Monique Mendoza, PhD,
MM Psychology and Solutions, Inc.**

May 8th, 2025





*"I can't tolerate
this anymore":
Help-seeking
behavior for
distress
tolerance*

Dr. Monique Mendoza
Mental Health Action Week 2025

Dr. Monique Mendoza

- Former Director of Behavioral Intervention Teams in Higher Education and a Trauma 1 Hospital
- Subject Matter Expert in Threat Management and Workplace Violence Prevention
- Licensed Psychologist in California for 12+ years
- Organizational Consultant focused on institutionalizing safe initiatives



Learning Objectives

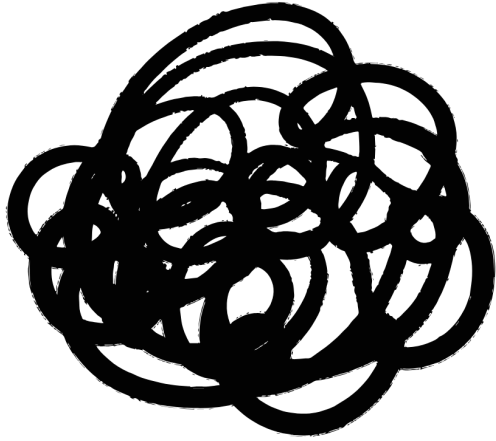


Differentiate between acute crisis and chronic/low-level suicidal ideation to provide appropriate support and referrals.

Apply advanced communication strategies that reduce stigma and normalize help-seeking behaviors for students.

Implement practical distress tolerance strategies and safety planning techniques within the boundaries of a non-clinical role.

Effectively navigate campus and community resources to connect students with appropriate professional support when needed.

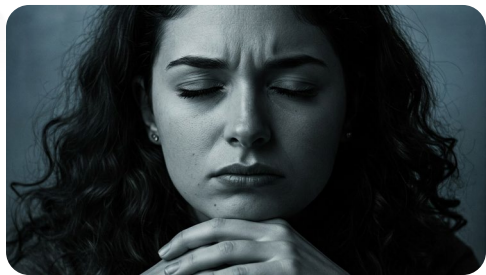


Understanding Student Distress

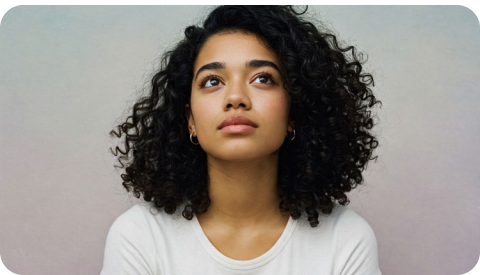




Acute crisis:
Imminent risk, concrete plan,
access to means, timeline for
action.



Chronic ideation: Recurring
thoughts without immediate
intent to act.



Low-level ideation:
Passive thoughts like "I
wouldn't mind if I didn't wake
up tomorrow."

*Chronic/low-level ideation can
fluctuate in intensity over time.*



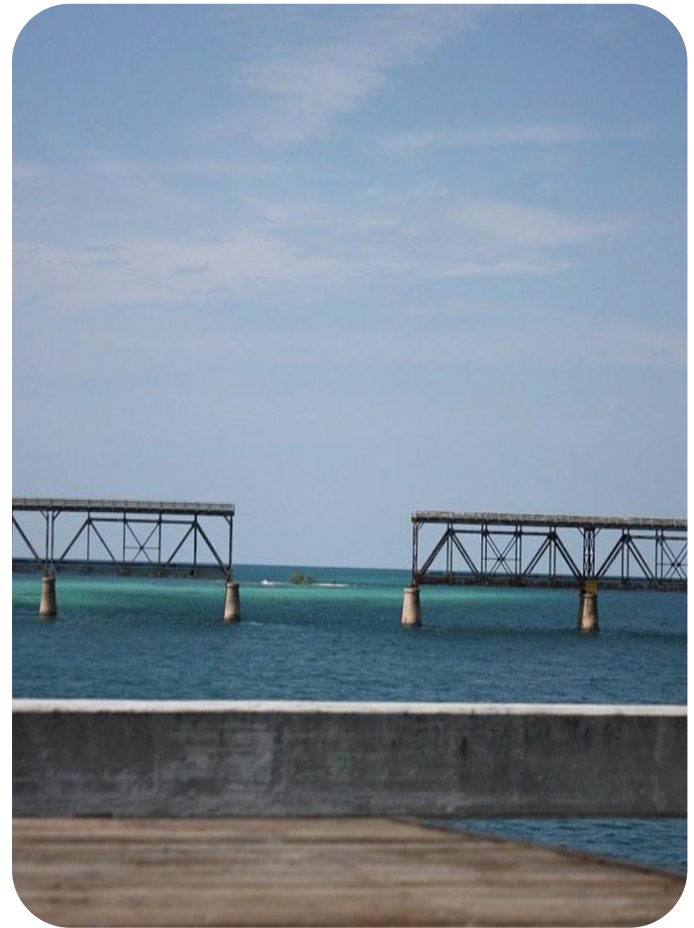
Distinction between acute crisis and chronic/low-level suicidal ideation

Approximately one in five college students will experience suicidal thoughts at some point during their college years.¹



The role of “inescapable” pain

- Students often want the pain to stop, not their life.
- Distress tolerance is the primary goal for many students.
- Serves as a mechanism for students to indirectly communicate need for help.



The non-linear nature of suicide



- From fleeting thoughts to concrete plans, there is a continuum of suicidal thoughts.
- Common stressors can exacerbate suicidality in a college setting.

- Enrollment in college can often be viewed as a protective factor
- Access to multiple academic and health resources.



What's impacting distress tolerance for college students?

Lonely students are nearly 4x more likely to experience severe psychological distress.

The suicide rate among 13- to 30-year-olds is growing fastest among Black people White Hispanics, and Asians/Pacific Islanders.

More than 40% of LGBTQ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year,

including more than half of transgender and nonbinary youth.

Resilient students with positive coping strategies are able to bounce back from academic challenges.



New Message

April 14 2025, 8:15 PM



To | Alex Garcia - Cosmos Resource Center

Cc Bcc

Subject Re: Stop by next week's study sesh!

Hi Alex,

As you know, I've been trying to complete my capstone project this semester. I also didn't turn in the analysis paper that was due yesterday. I've been trying to work on it, but I just can't focus on anything right now. Everything feels pointless. I keep thinking about how I'm probably going to fail this class anyway, and maybe I'm not cut out for college at all.

I just can't keep on track. When will this all end?

Now, I'm worried about Spring Finals that start next week. Do you really think the study session is even for someone like me? I'm buried in work and I'll probably be the most helpless student there. Thanks tho.

Simon Mercer



The role of non-clinical staff



- Defining appropriate boundaries
- Understanding the limits of your role
- Creating a supportive campus culture
- Building a network of support rather than being the sole helper



Reactions to disclosures of suicidal ideation are normal.

Noticing our physiological response.

Understanding your own reactions and managing them professionally

Recognize your personal boundaries and limits.

Individual strategies for taking care of yourself when engaging with a distressed student.



Moving beyond basic listening skills



Instead of...

You sound really stressed.

Try

I hear that you're feeling like things can't get better. These feelings can change with support, and I'd like to explore what might help make tomorrow feel more manageable. Is that ok with you?



Creating environments that reduce stigma around mental health



Integrate casual check-ins about emotional well-being that crack through, "I'm fine."

Try

"How's your energy level been this week?"

or

"What's been helping you recharge lately?"



Making the link to support with urgency and care



Thank you for trusting me with this. These thoughts are important to address, and I'd like us to take some steps today to make sure you're safe and supported.

I'm concerned about what you've shared, and I want to make sure you have support. Let's talk about connecting with the counseling center. I can walk you over or we can call together right now.

This is important, and I want to make sure you get the right support. Let's pause what we were doing and focus on getting you connected with someone who can help with these thoughts.



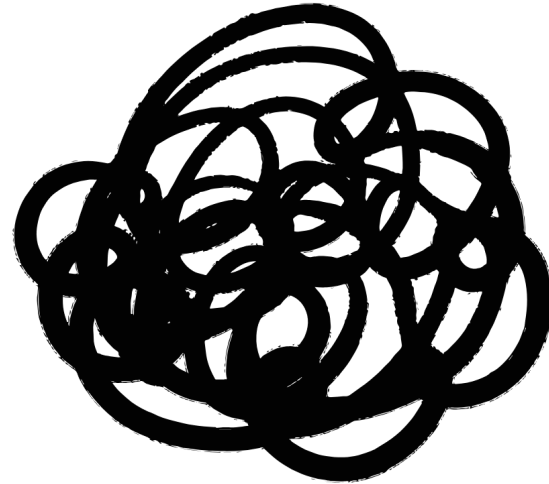
Encouraging students to identify escalating distress early

Personal
Distress
Signature Map

Behavior
Pattern
Recognition

Body-based
Strategies

Brief, Healthy
Distraction



Key Takeaways



Your Role Matters

You're a critical bridge to professional help, while modeling healthy boundary setting.

Words Have Power

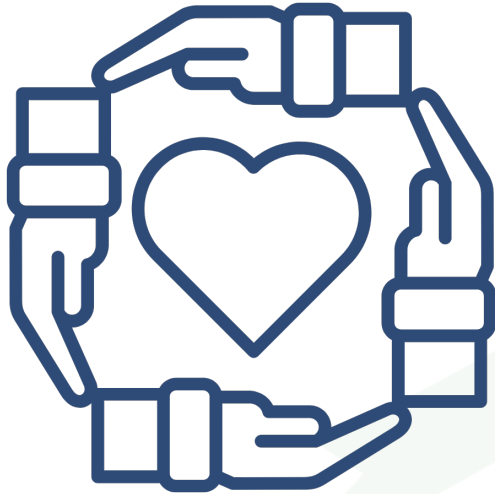
The right communication approach creates safety without escalation.

Structure Creates Safety

A basic plan can turn moments of crisis into pathways to support.

Power
OF
Words

"When 'I Can't Tolerate This Anymore' Becomes a Starting Point, Not an Endpoint"



During this Q and A, we'll dive deeper into:

- Translating moments of crisis into opportunities for connection
- Practice responding to statements like "I can't tolerate this anymore"
- Develop concrete strategies to help students build distress tolerance skills
- Build your confidence in supporting students through their darkest moments