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BY VICTORIA HOU ([HTTP://COLUMBIASPECTATOR.COM/CONTRIBUTORS/VICTORIA-HOU/](http://columbiaspectator.com/contributors/victoria-hou/)) | OCTOBER 21, 2018, 10:38 PM

Content warning: This article contains mentions of suicide.

When Kirk Wu died, I knew Facebook was going flood with posts about his passing. Some were genuinely heartfelt and mournful, but many said something to effect of, “I didn’t know him but I am heartbroken. You can always come talk to me if you need anything.” I knew to expect the same from Deantini as well, whose email instructs grieving students to “reach out for support.” And without fail, every single one of these messages include mental health and suicide hotlines at the bottom.

When Kirk Wu died, I did not call a hotline, because when something like this happens, I don’t think I’ll ever turn to some stranger over the phone or the random guy who posted “message me anytime!” on Facebook and unload my struggles onto them. I will always turn to the people I trust, and I don’t think I can trust some guy who posts on Facebook with fleeting, surface-level sympathies and words that seem insincere.

When Kirk Wu died I did not call a hotline. Instead, I cried for two hours. Although I was not close to him and will never understand exactly why he committed suicide, I empathize with how he must have felt and know the pressures, stress, and exacerbated mental health issues that comes with being a Columbia student all too well. I cried, and then I spent four hours in my friend’s room sharing our own mental health stories and talking about how we felt.

I’ve struggled with mental health ever since middle school, but I have never thought about utilizing hotlines when I’ve had a particularly rough time, mainly because I feel severely uncomfortable explaining my issues to some stranger, impersonal and foreign, at the other end of the telephone line. When I’ve talked to other students who struggle with mental health, they tell me the same: that they’ve never used or have rarely used these

phone numbers. So seeing these included at the end of every “sympathetic” post seems to demonstrate to what extent the administration and Columbia as a whole misunderstand how people with mental health issues struggle and cope.

Columbia has a mental health problem.

(<https://www.columbiaspectator.com/news/2017/04/30/yir-2016-2017-following-suicides-administrators-and-students-reassess-mental-health-resources/>) This is no secret. And it seems like the administration knows—and is, at least, trying to combat it, however ineffectively. A few days before Kirk’s passing, Dean Valentini announced Live Well, Learn Well (<https://www.columbiaspectator.com/news/2018/10/11/columbia-to-implement-suicide-prevention-gatekeeper-training-for-core-faculty-among-other-upcoming-plans-for-mental-health-reform/>), an initiative to combat the mental health crisis we have here. But when every email from the administration ends with reminders about CPS—a poorly structured, underfunded resource (<https://www.columbiaspectator.com/news/2016/09/07/health-fee-raised-hire-new-cps-medical-services-disability-services-staff/>)—and mental health hotlines, it tells us, the mentally ill students at Columbia, that our issues can be resolved with a phone call to Nightline or an appointment with CPS made three weeks in advance (<https://www.columbiaspectator.com/opinion/2018/10/18/cps-is-here-for-you-in-three-weeks/>).

They’re obviously potential resources that one can use if they want to, but they are by no means the be all, end all solution to the mental health crisis on campus and should not be treated as such. These “resources” put an undue burden on the people grieving or struggling to take that extra step to reach out and seek help. This expectation is unrealistic and gravely misunderstands the emotional pressure of struggling with mental health. Simply put, when you know that your friend is going through a rough time, you don’t wait for them to come to you—you reach out to *them*. Why can’t Columbia do the same for its students? Instead of asking students to reach out to their RAs, CPS, or the Office of the University Chaplain, these resources could easily send out their own emails expressing support and empathy. Having more intimate communities such as the ones in our own residence halls be a source of support would be leagues more effective and comforting than just having resources listed at the end of Deantini’s statements.

At the end of the day, what we can and should do is be candid with the people that are close to us. I think about the one phrase in Deantini’s email that I found solace in: “you may find comfort in gathering with your community.” This sentiment is the one that should have been emphasized—rather than the massive list of “resources” tacked on at the end of an email or Facebook post.

I saw a Google document floating around on our class page on Facebook about our best memories of Kirk and what people will miss most about him. Something like that—genuine memories and feelings—is what will truly help all of us through this hard time.

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