

How to make a referral

- Express your recommendation in a straightforward, matter-of-fact manner.
- Make it clear that this recommendation represents your best judgment based on your observations of the student's behavior.
- Be specific regarding the behavior that has raised your concerns and avoid making generalizations or attributing anything negative to the individual's personality or character.
- Except in an emergency, the student must have the option to accept or refuse counseling. If the student is skeptical for whatever reason, simply express your acceptance of those feelings so your own relationship with the student is not jeopardized.
- Give the student room to consider alternatives by suggesting that perhaps you can talk after the student has had some time to think things over. If the student emphatically says "No," respect the decision and again leave the situation open for possible reconsideration later.
- Offer to let the student call from your office immediately so that a public commitment will have been made.
- Accompany the student to ensure that the student arrives at the Counseling Center and to provide important information. The Counseling Center would appreciate your calling ahead if a student is being brought over or sent directly in an emergency so that plans can be made to have a counselor available.

Counseling Center

Initial Consultation

Once the student contacts the Counseling Center, an appointment is made for an initial consultation, usually within a few days of the time of contact. In an emergency, the student is seen that day. Walk-in times are also available.

First Visit

During the student's first visit to the Counseling Center, information forms are completed. These can be waived in an emergency. During the first appointment, the counselor assesses the student's needs and considers ways the Counseling Center might be able to help.

Services

The counselor might consider individual counseling, groups or workshops, or a referral to private or community counseling services. Some students may leave the initial consultation feeling able to handle the problem without further assistance. If the student and counselor agree that individual counseling is appropriate, regular appointments are scheduled.

The center offers short-term counseling. Typically, students need four or five sessions with a counselor. At the busiest times of the year, it may be up to two weeks before regular appointments begin. Students are encouraged to keep in touch if their level of distress increases prior to scheduled appointments.

Students need to know that services provided at the Counseling Center are free and confidential. Information is released only with a student's written permission. Exceptions to confidentiality may occur if there is clear danger to self or others or in the case of a court-ordered subpoena.

Emergency Referrals

If a student expresses a direct threat to self or others or acts in a bizarre, highly irrational, or disruptive way, have someone stay with the student while you call the appropriate office:

University Police (24 hours)

Transportation and protection

Non -Emergency 703-993-4357

Emergency 911

Dean of Student Services 703-993-2884

Consultation on student conduct

Counseling Center 703-993-2380

Emergency consultation, evaluation, and referral

Sexual Assault Services 703-993-4364

Emergency consultation for sexual assault

Counseling Center Services

Psychological Services 703-993-2380

Learning Services 703-993-2999

Peer Empowerment Program 703-993-2377

Location

Student Union Building I, Suite 364

Hours

Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Tuesday evening, 5 to 8 p.m.

For immediate assistance during non-office hours, contact University Police.

Referral Guide for Faculty and Staff: Helping Students in Distress

Faculty and Staff as Helping Resources

University life can be one of excitement and evolution. At the same time, students may also encounter a great deal of academic, personal, and social stress during their educational experience. While most students cope with the demands of college life, sometimes the pressures can become overwhelming and unmanageable.

Faculty and staff are often in the most direct position to identify students in distress. Moreover, in your role as a faculty or staff member, you are perceived by some students as a mentor, advisor, and source of support. Your expression of interest and concern may be critical in helping a student reestablish the emotional equilibrium necessary for academic success.

This guide is designed to assist you in working with students in distress and connecting them to professional sources of help.

Signs of Distress

Students, like anyone, might experience a crisis when the stress exceeds their coping resources. While being upset, depressed, or anxious in a given situation is understandable, the following signs might indicate that the response is persistent and more than just “situational.”

Academic Cues

- Decline in course work and class participation
- Deficient reading or comprehension
- Poor study habits
- Disruptive behavior in class
- Test anxiety that is incapacitating
- Increased absences from class
- Repeated requests for special considerations
- Creative work or writings indicating extreme hopelessness, despair, anger, or isolation
- Lack of alternative goals when failing
- Chronic indecisiveness or choice conflict

Personal/Interpersonal Cues

- Withdrawal from usual social interaction
- Unwillingness to communicate
- Inability to sleep or excessive sleep
- Unexplained crying or outbursts of anger
- Irritability, aggressiveness, agitation, or nonstop talking
- Excessive or irrational worrying (at odds with reality or probability)
- Loss of contact with reality (seeing or hearing things that aren't there; beliefs or actions at odds with reality or probability)
- Poor communication (garbled and slurred speech; disjointed and unconnected thoughts)
- Feelings of shame, guilt, and/or poor self-esteem
- Suspiciousness or irrational feelings of persecution



Physical Cues

- Dramatic weight loss or gain
- Poor personal hygiene
- Bleary-eyed or hungover appearance; smelling of alcohol
- Deterioration in personal appearance

Threat to Safety/High Risk Cues

- Homicidal threats, expressed verbally or through written content (e.g., assignments, papers, etc.)
- Direct reference to suicide or indirect cues (e.g., assignments, papers, etc.)
- Behavioral cues suggesting a suicide plan (e.g., giving away possessions, suicide note, accessing means to kill oneself, etc.)
- Violent or extremely disruptive behavior
- Stalking behaviors

How to Respond?

The options depend upon the urgency of the situation. For students who are having difficulty, but seem able to cope fairly well, you may choose not to intervene, limit your interaction to the classroom issue, or deal with the situation on a more personal level. If you believe that a situation is an emergency (e.g., threat to safety, high risk cues), you might decide that more active and timely involvement is appropriate.

In an Emergency

- Stay calm
- Contact the emergency referrals at the back of this pamphlet
- Avoid making promises of confidentiality if the student is at risk to himself/herself or others
- Take the student's threat/distress seriously
- Stay with the student until help arrives
- Reassure the student that the situation is temporary

In a Non-emergency

If you choose to approach a student, or if a student seeks you out for help with personal problems, here are some suggestions that might make the situation more comfortable for you and helpful for the student.

- **TALK** to the student in private when both of you have time. Give the student your full attention.
- **LISTEN** to the thoughts and feelings in a sensitive, nonthreatening way. Let the student know you hear him/her by repeating the gist of what the student has told you.
- **BE SPECIFIC** regarding the behaviors that have raised your concerns and avoid making generalizations, criticizing, or judging (e.g., “I noticed you've been absent from class lately and I'm concerned” rather than “Where have you been lately? Goofing off? Being lazy?”)
- **WORK** with the student to clarify options and the costs and benefits of each option.

Referral Process

When to make a referral

Even though a student asks for help with a problem and you are willing to help, some circumstances may indicate you should suggest that the student use other resources. For example:

- The problem or request is one you can't handle
- You believe that personality differences will interfere with your ability to help
- You know the student personally
- The student is reluctant to discuss the problem
- After working with the student, you find little progress
- You feel overwhelmed and stressed yourself