

Identifying and Referring the Distressed Student: A Faculty/Staff Guide

The college years can be very stressful for many. In the contemporary climate of competition and pressure, some students adequately cope with these stresses, but others find that stress becomes unmanageable and interferes with learning. In some cases, these students may even disrupt the learning of others.

Your Role

Many students initially seek assistance from faculty or staff members. Below are guidelines for identifying students in distress:

- ◆ Excessive procrastination and very poorly prepared work, especially if inconsistent with previous work.
- ◆ Infrequent class attendance with little or no work completed.
- ◆ Dependency (e.g., the student who hangs around or makes excessive appointments during office hours).
- ◆ Listlessness, lack of energy, or frequently falling asleep in class.
- ◆ Marked changes in personal hygiene.
- ◆ Impaired speech and disjointed thoughts.
- ◆ Repeated requests for special consideration (e.g., deadline extensions).
- ◆ Threats to others.
- ◆ Expressed suicidal thoughts (e.g., referring to suicide as a current option).
- ◆ Excessive weight gain or loss.
- ◆ Behavior which regularly interferes with effective class management.
- ◆ Frequent or high levels of irritable, unruly, abrasive, or aggressive behavior.
- ◆ Unable to make decisions despite your repeated efforts to clarify or encourage.
- ◆ Bizarre behavior that is obviously inappropriate for the situation (e.g., talking to something/someone that is not present).
- ◆ Students who appear overly nervous, tense or tearful.

Guidelines for Interaction:

- ◆ Talk to the student in private.
- ◆ Express concern. Be as specific as possible in stating your observations and reasons for concern.
- ◆ Listen carefully to everything the student says.
- ◆ Repeat the essence of what the student has told you so your attempts to understand are communicated.
- ◆ Avoid criticizing or sounding judgmental.
- ◆ Consider the Cook Counseling Center (CCC) as a resource and discuss referral with the student.
- ◆ If the student resists referral and you remain uncomfortable with the situation, contact the CCC to discuss your concern.

How to Make a Referral to the Cook Counseling Center:

1. Suggest that students call or come in to make an appointment. Give them the CCC phone number and location at that time. However, it is usually more effective to assist the student by calling for an appointment with the student present. When you reach the CCC receptionist, identify yourself as a faculty or staff member and ask for an appointment for the student. The student's name and ID number are required for the appointment. You may request a specific staff member or the receptionist can assign one. Write down the appointment time, date, and counselor for the student.
2. If you feel the situation is an emergency or urgent enough to require immediate attention, after identifying yourself as faculty or staff, tell the receptionist that the student needs to see a counselor immediately. Give the receptionist the student's name and ID number, then ask to speak with an available staff member.
3. It may be necessary for you to walk the student to the CCC.
4. If you are concerned about a student but unsure about the appropriateness of a referral, feel free to call the CCC for a consultation.

Services Offered at the CCC:

Individual and group counseling
Brief psychotherapy
Couples therapy
Crisis intervention
Psychiatric services
Study skills counseling

Location:

Thomas E. Cook Counseling Center

240 McComas Hall

Blacksburg, VA 24061

(540) 231-6557

Office Hours:

Monday through Friday

8:00 am - 5:00 pm

After Hours Service:

The Cook Counseling Center staff can be reached for emergencies by calling 231-6444 (Schiffert Health Center) outside of regular office hours.

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If you are a person with a disability and desire assistance or accommodation, please notify this office during business hours of 8 am and 5 pm, Monday-Friday.