

## **WHEN TO REFER STUDENTS TO COUNSELING SERVICES:**

The college years can be very stressful for many of our students. Some students adequately cope with these stresses, but others find that stress becomes unmanageable and interferes with learning and/or daily functioning. Managing the stresses of college life can be especially difficult for those students who enter college with pre-existing difficulties. In some cases, distressed students may even disrupt the learning of others.

A referral to Counseling Services should be considered when you believe a student's difficulties go beyond your own experience and expertise or when you feel uncomfortable helping a student with an issue. A referral may be made because of the way the student's issue(s) is interfering with his or her personal life or academic work or because an observation of a student's personal behavior raises concerns.

Below are examples of warning signs 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
- Students who appear overly nervous, tense or tearful
- Troubling content in written work
- Repeated requests for special consideration (e.g. deadline extensions)
- 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
- Evidence of self-injury such as cutting or burning
- Disclosure of suicidal ideation or intent to harm self or others

This list is provided to serve as a guide for assessing coping patterns and responses to stress. The list is not exhaustive, and when in doubt, faculty and staff are encouraged to err on the side of caution and make a referral to Counseling Services.

Many students in distress initially seek assistance from their instructors, but some of the distinctions educators are called upon to make are not easy. For example, distinguishing between laziness/willful procrastination and depression is difficult. In addition, deliberate self injury by cutting or burning may or may not be suicidal in intent.

## **MAKING A REFERRAL**

One way of introducing a counseling referral to a student is to summarize to him/her what behaviors are of concern. You can comment on the emotional responses that you have heard from them, perhaps with an expression of your concern.

Once a student has agreed that counseling might be useful, there are several possible steps to take, depending on the student's attitude and the urgency of the situation:

- Give the student information about Counseling Services and urge him or her to stop by Morrison House and complete intake paperwork.
- Offer to call our office for more specific information about scheduling.
- Accompany the student to Counseling Services and provide the staff with any necessary information. If possible, call ahead (etc. 4203) to let us know you are bringing a student.

In speaking to a student about counseling, it is important to keep in mind some of the negative reactions a student may have to the idea and to try to discuss them with the student. Reassure the student that many people seek counseling to help them manage and respond to events in their daily lives. Counseling provides a chance to explore feelings and solve problems with the help of an objective, sensitive, and concerned listener within a safe, confidential setting. It is normal for a student to be ambivalent about counseling. Unless there is a serious or immediate concern about the welfare and safety of a student or others, it should be a student's decision to seek counseling. Coercing a student to go to counseling is not likely to have positive results in the long run; it is better to try to maintain your relationship with a student rather than to force him or her to go to Counseling Services.

After a referral is made, an appointment will be scheduled for an initial consultation. This will usually be held within a few days from the time a student makes contact, depending largely on the flexibility of the student's schedule. In an emergency, arrangements will be made to see the student on the same day. Initial consultations or intakes are used to assess the situation and to determine what services would be most helpful.

## **EMERGENCIES**

If an emergency arises during the day, consult Counseling Services (ext. 4203). After hours, contact Campus Security (ext.3333) for assistance and they will contact the Director of Counseling, Christal Helvering. If a student is actively suicidal, do not leave him or her alone, but rather send someone for help. If a suicide attempt is actually in progress, first call 911 and then notify Security and Counseling Services.