Making a Counseling Referral
A Guide for Faculty & Staff

While many students are able to cope successfully with the demands of college, others find the pressures to be overwhelming and unmanageable. As a faculty or staff member, you are in a unique position to identify and help students in difficulty. Your expression of interest and concern may be critical in saving a student's academic career or even his life. The purpose of this handout is to help you recognize some common symptoms of distress and offer suggestions for how to intervene and make a counseling referral.

Confidentiality

It is important to understand that sessions conducted by clinical counselors are confidential in nature. Information cannot be released without a student's written consent. The only exceptions are in circumstances which would result in clear danger to the individual or others, reports of child or elder neglect/abuse, or in a civil or criminal case where information is mandated by court law. Professional counseling staff adhere strictly to this policy.

Information about a student's contact with Clinical Counseling Services can best be obtained directly from the student. Students are not bound by the laws of confidentiality and are therefore free to disclose any information they wish to share.

Tips for Recognizing Distressed Students

Marked Changes in Academic Performance or Behavior
- Poor performance and preparation
- Excessive absences or tardiness
- Repeated requests for special consideration
- Unusual or changed pattern of interaction
- Avoiding participation
- Dominating discussions
- Excessively anxious when called upon
- Exaggerated emotional response obviously inappropriate for the situation

Unusual Behavior or Appearance
- Depressed or lethargic mood
- Hyperactivity or very rapid speech
- Unexplained crying
- Irritability or angry outbursts
- Swollen or red eyes
- Change in personal hygiene or dress
- Dramatic weight loss or gain
- Strange or bizarre behavior indicating loss of contact with reality

References to Suicide or Death
- Overt references to suicide
- Severe psychological pain
- Expressed thoughts of helplessness or hopelessness
- Isolation from friends or family
What You Can Do

If you choose to approach a student you’re concerned about or if a student reaches out to you for help, here are some suggestions to assist you.

**Talk** to the student in private when you both have time and are not rushed or preoccupied. Give the student your undivided attention. Just a few minutes of effective listening may be enough to help the student feel more confident about what to do. Express your concern in behavioral, non-judgmental terms. For example, “I’ve noticed you’ve been absent from class lately and I’m concerned,” rather than “Where have you been lately? You should be more concerned about your grades.”

**Listen** in an open, caring way. Communicate understanding by repeating back the essence of what the student has told you. Try to include both content and feelings. Avoid judging, evaluating, or criticizing, even if the student asks your opinion.

**Help** the student realize that there are options. Suggest resources, such as friends, family, clergy, or services on campus. Recognize that your purpose is to encourage the student to seek help, not to solve the problem.

**Maintain** clear and consistent boundaries and expectations. It is important to reinforce the professional nature of your relationship with the student and the consistency of academic expectations.

**Refer** the student for help. Point out that seeking assistance is a sign of strength and courage rather than of weakness or failure. Share what you know about the referral person or service. It is best for the student to make his own appointment. To make an appointment, use the appropriate phone number listed below. If the student is at risk and needs to be seen immediately, please accompany him to the counseling office on your campus. If you are unable to locate a counselor, contact your campus office of public safety.

**Consult** with a counselor about how best to intervene. A counselor can help you assess the situation, its seriousness, and implications for referral; locate resources, on and off campus; and be available for follow-up concerns.

*In a crisis or emergency situation, a student will be seen immediately on a walk-in basis.*

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**CCBC Professional Counseling Staff**

**CATONSVILLE** – Building K – Room 200 – 443-840-4382
- Dr. Larry Messier
  Licensed Psychologist
- Dr. Karen Wallace
  LCPC (Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor)

**DUNDALK** – Building A – Room 100D – 443-840-3774
- Ms. Heather Griner
  LCPC (Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor)

**ESSEX** – Building A – Room 220 – 443-840-4087
- Ms. Deb Hollander
  LCPC (Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor)
- Ms. Marissa Southwell
  LCPC (Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor)

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