

HELPING STUDENTS IN DISTRESS

WHEN TO MAKE A REFERRAL

Even though a student asks you for help with a problem and you are willing to help, there are circumstances when you should suggest other resources.

- You are not comfortable in handling the situation
- The help necessary is not your expertise
- Personality differences may interfere with your ability to help
- You know the student personally (friend, neighbor, friend of a friend) and think you may not be objective enough to help
- The student is reluctant to discuss the situation with you
- You see little progress in the student
- You feel overwhelmed or pressed for time

HOW TO MAKE A STUDENT REFERRAL

- Be frank with the student about the limits of your time, ability, expertise, and/or objectivity
- Let the student know that you think she/he should get assistance from another source
- Assure them that many students seek help over the course of their academic career
- Assist the student in choosing the best resource
- Try to help the student know what to expect if she/he follows through on the referral

BEFORE MAKING A REFERRAL CONSIDER

- What are the appropriate and available resources for the student?
- With whom would the student feel most comfortable?
- Who will make the initial contact, you or the student?

CONSULTATION IS AVAILABLE

If you have concerns about a student, counselors at the Counseling Center (ext. 6060), are available for consultation. Some of the ways we might help include:

- Assessing the seriousness of the situation
- Suggesting potential resources
- Finding the best way to make a referral
- Clarifying your own feelings about the student and the situation

IN AN EMERGENCY

Try to stay calm. Find someone to stay with the student while calls are made.

For students expressing a direct threat to themselves or others, or who act in a disruptive, a bizarre, or highly irrational way, call:

**Mercer Police
24 hours
678-547-6911**

**Counseling Services
678-547-6060**

**Campus Health Services
678-547-6130**

**Office of the Dean of Students
678-547-6824**

Counseling Services

Helping Students in Distress

Tips for Faculty and Staff



**Graduate & Professional
Campus
3001 Mercer University Drive
Atlanta, GA 30341**

Atlanta, Henry & Douglas

678-547-6060

FACULTY & STAFF AS HELPING RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

SUICIDE IS THE 2ND LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH IN STUDENTS

Given this statistic, it is especially important that we be aware of what we can do to prevent such a tragedy.

This brochure is provided to assist you in becoming aware of signs of a distressed student, things that you might do to help the student, signs of suicidal ideation, and when and how to make effective referrals for additional help.

WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE

There are basically four types of warning signs.

Situational: stressful or traumatic experience

Depressive: changes in usual behavior, inability to concentrate, socially withdrawn, easily agitated, apathy, crying, sense of worthlessness, appears sad, abusing substances

Verbal signs: direct or indirect, verbally or in written material (e.g. assignments, papers, etc.)

Behavioral: giving away possessions, writing a suicide note, acquiring means to commit suicide, organizing business and personal matters, suddenly resigning from organizations or clubs

Look for a cluster of clues. A suicidal person who gives warning signs will most often present more than one clue.

When the situation is not clear:

- Share concerns with the student directly to find out
- Consult a health care professional, such as the counselors at the Counseling Center or the doctors and nurses at Campus Health Services

TIPS FOR RECOGNIZING TROUBLED STUDENTS

At one time or another, everyone feels depressed or upset. However, there are three levels of student distress which, when present over a period of time, suggest that the problems are more than the “normal” ones.

Level 1 – Although not disruptive to others in your class, these behaviors may indicate that something is wrong and that help may be needed

- Serious grade problems
- Unaccountable change from good to poor performance
- Change from frequent attendance to excessive absences
- Change in pattern of interaction
- Marked change in physical appearance
- Marked change in mood, motor ability, or speech

Level 2 – These behaviors may indicate significant emotional distress, reluctance or an inability to acknowledge a need for personal help.

- Repeated request for special consideration
- New or regularly occurring behavior which pushes the limits and may interfere with class management
- Unusual or exaggerated emotional response

Level 3 – These behaviors usually show that the student is in crisis and needs emergency care:

- Highly disruptive behavior (hostility, aggression, etc.)
- Inability to communicate clearly (garbled, slurred speech, disjointed thoughts)
- Loss of contact with reality (seeing/hearing things that are not there, beliefs or actions at odds with reality)
- Overt suicidal thoughts (suicide is a current option)
- Homicidal threats

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

RESPONSES TO LEVEL 1 OR LEVEL 2 BEHAVIOR

- Talk to the student in private when you both have time
- Express your concern in non-judgmental terms
- Listen to the student and repeat the gist of what the student is saying
- Clarify the costs and benefits of each option for handling the problem from the student's point of view
- Respect the student's value system
- Ask if the student is considering suicide
- Make appropriate referrals if necessary
- Make sure the student understands what action is necessary

RESPONSES TO LEVEL 3 BEHAVIOR

- Stay calm
- Call emergency referral on the back of the pamphlet

DO'S AND DON'TS IN RESPONDINGS TO SUICIDALITY

- **DO** show that you take the student's feelings seriously
- **DO** let the student know that you want to help
- **DO** listen attentively and empathize
- **DO** reassure that with help he/she will recover
- **DO** stay close until help is available or risk has passed
- **DON'T** try to shock or challenge the student
- **DON'T** analyze the student's motives
- **DON'T** become argumentative
- **DON'T** react with shock or disdain at the student's thoughts and feelings
- **DON'T** minimize the student's distress