

## Intervention guidelines

While it is not expected that you be a "watchdog" or that you provide a thorough assessment, you may be the first one to notice a student's distress and be in a position to ask a few questions. Following these guidelines can lead to a positive outcome for all parties.

- **Safety First!** Always keep safety in mind as you interact with a distressed student. Maintain a safe distance and a route of escape should you need it. If there appears to be an **imminent danger** to you or the student, **call 911 or Campus Police at 771.2167**.
- **Avoid Escalation.** Distressed students can sometimes be easily provoked. Avoid threatening, humiliating, and intimidating responses. It is usually not a good idea to "pull rank" and assert authority unless you are certain of the student's mental health status. Distressed students are in need of listening and support. Rules can be discussed at a later time.
- **Ask Direct Questions.** Take a calm and matter-of-fact approach. **Ask students directly** if they are drunk, confused or if they have thoughts of harming themselves or others. You need not be afraid to ask these questions. You will not be "putting ideas in their heads" by doing so. Most distressed students are relieved to know that someone has noticed and is paying attention.
- **Do Not Assume You Are Being Manipulated.** While it is true that some students appear distressed in order to get attention or relief from responsibility, only a thorough assessment can determine this. Attention-seekers can have serious

problems and be in danger, too.

- **Know Your Limits.** You will be able to assist many distressed students on your own by simply listening and/or referring them for further help. Some students, however, will need much more than you can provide. Be alert for any feelings of discomfort you may have and focus on getting them the assistance they require. You can do this by praising them for confiding in you, being accepting and nonjudgmental, trying to clarify what they see as the problem area, and indicating that seeking professional help is a **positive and responsible** thing to do. Some emotional signs **you** might experience that indicate you may have over-extended yourself include:
  - Feeling stressed out or overwhelmed by the situation
  - Feeling angry or resentful at the student
  - Feeling afraid
  - Having thoughts of "adopting" or otherwise rescuing the student
  - "Reliving" similar experiences of your own

If you identify any of the above reactions in yourself, it is especially important that you recruit help for yourself and/or seek consultation about the situation.

**Counseling and Psychological Services is open from 8:30am to 4:30pm weekdays. For after-hour emergencies, please contact the Helene Fuld Crisis Center at (609) 396-HELP, Campus Police at 911, and/or a Residence Life staff member.**

Confidentiality is strictly maintained in accordance with all applicable laws and professional ethical codes.



## Counseling and Psychological Services

## A Guide to Making Referrals

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# Responding to distressed students: How to help

**Any** member of The College of New Jersey community might come into contact with a distressed student. Being aware of distress signals, methods of intervention, and a source of help for the student can assure you are ready should that time come. Counselors at the Psychological Counseling Services are available to faculty and staff for consultation. Feel free to **call us at 771.2247** if you would like to discuss any concerns with us.

## When to Refer

1. Refer when you feel that personality differences (which cannot be resolved) between you and the student/employee will interfere with his/her effective progress.
2. Suicide threats or attempts, or the intent to do bodily harm, should always be evaluated.
3. Refer when the student/employee presents a problem which is beyond your level of expertise.
4. Refer if the student/employee is reluctant to discuss the problem with you.
5. Refer if, after a period of time, you do not believe your efforts have been effective.

6. Refer when you observe any of the following danger signals:

- Erratic, bizarre, grossly inappropriate behavior;
- Bizarre thinking patterns, hallucinations, delusions, (e.g., "I am Napoleon"), incoherent speech;
- Extreme reclusiveness, withdrawal from others;
- Frequent, sudden and extreme mood changes;
- Suicidal talk/behavior or self-destructive behavior;
- Evidence of severe tension or anxiety;
- Strong persistent feelings of sadness or anger; and/or
- Frequent emotional responses that are obviously inappropriate or any marked change in behavior which persists

## How to Refer

1. **Let others know by your behavior that you are available and receptive to them.** Often, someone coming for help will first test your openness to him/her before sharing a concern. When you cannot be available, communicate that directly, and plan another time.
2. **Pay attention to the people around you.** People who need help usually communicate this, often indirectly by their behavior.
3. **When you think you see an indirect call for help, inquire.** Do not wait for a crisis to develop. Take the initiative to enable the helping process to begin.
4. **Be direct, gentle and honest.** Use constructive words or summarize problems and

feelings. Allow yourself to show warmth and concern, but in a way that acknowledges the other person's individuality and right to determine his/her own life. Do not patronize, pity or order people around.

5. **Be direct and honest in suggesting counseling.** If possible, personalize your referral.

6. **Be sure to mention that all counseling is confidential.** No one will know that the student/employee is in counseling. Counseling information is not part of the school/employment record.

7. **Suggest the student/employee try counseling once or twice.** Assist in making an appointment. Offer to accompany the person if you feel it is necessary.

8. **Reassure the person that counseling would probably be helpful.**

9. **If in doubt, consult with others regarding a referral situation.** Keep the consultations confidential and limited in number and in scope.

10. **Accept limits to your responsibility:**

- In general, you are not responsible for what others do – they are;
- You cannot prevent all crises and catastrophes;
- You cannot read minds; and
- Unless a person is clearly not responsible or presents a danger to self or others, you cannot rightfully force him/her to get help.