

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF DISTRESS IN STUDENTS: GUIDELINES FOR RESPONDING, CONSULTATION AND REFERRAL

The Office of Counseling and Career Services is a Student Services agency within the Division of Student Affairs. Our mission is to provide the support and guidance necessary to help each student grow and develop emotionally, interpersonally, intellectually and professionally. Our professional staff consists of two licensed professional counselors, a full-time professional career counselor and the Coordinator of Job Location and Development. All registered NSU students are eligible for **free** services.

Faculty, staff, parents and friends of students are often among the first to notice students who are encountering overwhelming amounts of stress in their lives. This stress can seriously disrupt academic progress, personal relationships and daily behavior. Below are some guidelines to follow if you are concerned about a student.

SYMPTOMS TO LOOK FOR

Recent loss of an important person (either by death, separation/break-up)
Depression
Talk of hurting self or others
Withdrawal from peers or family
Agitated, irritable, aggressive
Sleep disturbance
Loss of interest in self-care
Apparent "change" in personality
Giving away/selling possessions
Poor academic or work performance
Inability to deal effectively with the present and preoccupation with the past
Anxiety and worry
Alcohol/ Drug abuse
Irrational beliefs or thoughts
Traumatic family event(s) (separation or divorce of parents, serious illness or death of a family member, physical, emotional or sexual abuse)
History of emotional disturbance (depression, alcohol or drug abuse, eating disorder, anxiety, suicide attempts)

WHEN ADDRESSING YOUR CONCERN WITH A STUDENT

- Remain calm.
- Offer a quiet place to talk and listen.
- Do not promise confidentiality. Rather, inform the student that you will use discretion if seeking outside assistance.
- Be simple and direct. Convey understanding and respond honestly.
- Tell the student of your concern. Be specific about his/ her behaviors.
- Be firm. Set clear limits and provide a plan of action and support.
- Inquire how the student is attempting to respond to the problem. Develop response options together.
- Consider with the student the consequences of "doing more of the same".
- Consult with colleagues, Student Affairs staff or others if you feel you need additional perspectives, before or after approaching the student.
- Suggest a referral to the office of Counseling and Career Services or other campus or community resource.
- Follow up. Offer and be open to further contact.

WHEN TO REFER

Often referral is not necessary and approaching the student with your concerns can make an immediate impact on his/her behavior in your class. However it is time to refer the student when.....

- The problems or requests made are beyond your level of training and expertise.
- There are personality differences, which interfere with your ability to work with a student.
- The boundaries of your role make it unwise to work with students on personal issues.
- The student expresses a preference to speak with someone else about his/her concerns.
- After some time and effort, you feel like you are not making progress in helping the student.

CRISIS OR EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

Occasionally a student may appear to be extremely upset or distraught. Crisis situations may involve a student threatening or attempting suicide, posing a threat to self or others, or being the victim of a natural disaster, or violent crime such as assault or rape. When making a referral for a student in crisis, please inform the Office Manager or whoever answers the phone so that immediate accommodations can be made.

IN THE EVENT OF AN URGENT OR CRISIS SITUATION WITH AN NSU STUDENT

1. Do not leave the student unattended. Have an adult remain with the student until he/she is connected with a counselor.
2. During normal working hours call the office of Counseling and Career Services to discuss a situation or arrange an appointment for the student; or
3. Accompany the student to the office of Counseling and Career Services, and we will arrange for you and the student to see a counselor.
4. After hours you can arrange for the on-call counselor to be contacted by calling University Police **357-5431**. Leave a phone number where you can be reached and location. Stay with the student who is in distress. Do not leave the student unattended.

AFTER THE CRISIS

Remain in contact with your student and aware of any behaviors of concern. Provide the same manner of concern and support you give to all of your students. Continue to respect the boundaries and personal rights of the student and maintain healthy boundaries in the faculty/student relationship. Do not expect immediate improvement. Behaviors, attitudes and feelings take time to change, and the student may show slow progress.

If you wish follow-up information on the student you have referred, please ask that individual to provide the attending counselor in the office of Counseling and Career Services written permission to speak to you. If you do not hear from the counselor, it is likely that permission was denied by the student. Respect the student's right to privacy.

Take care of your emotional health. After a crisis it is not unusual to need to talk to someone to "debrief" (just talk about the event, your reactions to it and how you are feeling about it, "after the fact"). This is a normal response. Our counselors can talk to you without jeopardizing the confidentiality of your student.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality is the foundation for any counseling relationship and is necessary to establish a safe environment in which the student can grow and change. The counseling relationship and the information resulting from the counseling sessions will not be disclosed to others without the written consent of the student.

The exceptions to this rule are as follows:

- The student is at risk for harming him/herself;
- The student is at risk for harming another;
- A minor child or elder is judged to be in danger of abuse or neglect;
- A student's records are subpoenaed by court.

If necessary, students may be referred through this office for psychiatric services with a local psychiatrist for evaluation and medications.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Counseling and Career Services

357-5621

Room 305 Student Union

University Police

357-5431

Infirmary Building

Counseling Staff

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