

How To Identify & Refer A Distressed Student



**Michigan State University
Counseling Center**

www.counseling.msu.edu

Division of Student Affairs & Services

FULLY ACCESSIBLE

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How You Can Help

Students may experience a great deal of stress during the course of their academic experiences. While most students cope successfully with the challenges these years bring, some students find the various pressures of life unmanageable or unbearable. As faculty members, teaching assistants and staff, you may encounter distressed students in your office or your classroom. Many of these students have not sought counseling and may be unaware of the services available to them. Your role could be a positive and crucial one in identifying students who are in distress and assisting them to find the resources available to help themselves.

Reasons for Consultations/Referrals

The following signs may indicate a need to refer a student to the Counseling Center:

- Abrupt or radical changes in behavior
- Isolation from others
- Drastic changes in personal appearance or hygiene
- Poor attendance or shift in quality of performance in class
- Low self-esteem, feeling sad or helpless

- Attention or memory difficulties
- Increase in alcohol or drug abuse
- Talking about death or suicidal thoughts
- Chronic fatigue, low energy or falling asleep in class
- Irritability, emotional outbursts or inability to sit still
- Recent loss of a loved one
- Social or personal concerns
- Career choices / selecting a major
- Substance abuse
- Sexual assault
- Relationship concerns
- Racial / Cultural adjustments
- Lesbian / Bi / Gay / Transgender concerns
- Extreme test anxiety

When Approaching a Student in Distress

You may not want to wait for the student to ask for help when she/he is in distress. You can take the initiative - invite the student to speak to you privately. Once together in a private place with the student, listen carefully and comment on what you have observed and express your concern.

If a student discloses a problem, try to allow him or her to discuss it openly. You can convey your support by listening in a calm, accepting, and non-judgmental manner. Acknowledge the student's emotions, let the student talk, and paraphrase what has been said.

Don't feel that you need to be qualified to deal directly with the student's concerns. Let her or him know that professionals are available on campus to deal with such problems and give them the Counseling Center phone number and location. If a student discloses a problem, try to allow her or him to discuss it openly.

Consulting with Counseling Center Staff

We welcome your calls any time to consult with us regarding your concerns about your students. Often as a team faculty/staff and Counseling Center staff are able to find a way to provide assistance to the student. A counselor is always on call to talk to you about the student.

Five Steps to Refer A Student

1. Suggest that the student call or come into the Counseling Center to make an appointment.
2. Give the Counseling Center phone number and location. For the reluctant student suggest they visit the Counseling Center web site.
www.counseling.msu.edu
3. If you wish to be certain the student makes an appointment call the Center while the student is in your office (due to client confidentiality laws, we cannot inform you as to whether or not a student has made or kept an appointment without the student's written permission). Write down the appointment information, time, date, counselor and location of the center for the student.
4. It may be helpful for you to accompany the student to the Counseling Center. Some students may find it comforting for you to wait while they meet with a counselor.
5. Follow-up with the student by inquiring as to whether he or she kept his or her appointment and how he or she felt about the session.

If you are concerned about a student, but are uncertain of the appropriateness of the referral, or the student resists

a referral, feel free to call the Counseling Center yourself for guidance.

The Counselor is always available to talk to a faculty member and work as a team to resolve the concern.

If you consider the situation to be an emergency dial 911 before contacting the Counseling Center. Do not delay getting help for the student's and your safety.

Confidentiality

- The services provided by the Counseling Center are confidential.
- The MSU Counseling Center is committed to providing sensitive, quality services to all students regardless of race, religion, culture, class, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability.

Counseling Center Staff

The Counseling Center is staffed by fully licensed psychologists, counselors and social workers. Selected doctoral and master level interns work under the supervision of licensed senior staff members.

Referral Resources

MSU Counseling Center
207 Student Services Building
517-355-8270
www.counseling.msu.edu

TTY (517) 353-7278

MSU Police & Public Safety
9-1-1 (Emergency)
517-355-2222 (Non-Emergency)

MSU Safe Place
(Domestic Violence Shelter)
517-355-1100 (Business Line)
517-372-5572 (Crisis Line)

Sexual Assault Program
517-355-3551 (Business Line)
517-372-6666 (Crisis Line)

Listening Ear
517-337-1717

The Counseling Center is accredited by the International Association of Counseling Services and has an American Psychological Association approved pre-doctoral internship.