

## **Helping the Emotionally Distressed Student A Referral Guide for Faculty and Staff**

As a faculty or staff member at the University of Illinois at Chicago, you are in a unique position. Students may look to you as a role model and as a resource for help with their problems. You play a significant role in students' motivation and success.

Because of this unique position, you will often be the first one to recognize signs of distress in a student. This guide, *Helping the Emotionally Distressed Student*, is designed to introduce you to the services of the Counseling Center, to help you identify some sources of student distress, and to give you some information on how to assist and refer students for counseling or other help.

### **THE COUNSELING CENTER**

The Counseling Center is a comprehensive psychological services center, providing evaluation, counseling, consultation, and referral to UIC students. We offer individual, couples, and group therapy, as well as, psychoeducational workshops. Our services are confidential and available at no charge for currently enrolled students. We are also available to faculty and staff for consultation. The Center is accredited by the International Association of Counseling Services, and its doctoral internship is accredited by the American Psychological Association.

The Center staff includes licensed and board certified psychologists and psychiatrists, clinical therapists, psychology interns and externs, a social worker, and trained paraprofessionals. The Center has been serving the University of Illinois at Chicago for more than 35 years, and it is part of the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs.

### **SIGNS OF STUDENT DISTRESS**

Some common signs of student distress which warrant a referral to the Counseling Center include : Depression or references to suicide, Significant life changes or crises, Blocks to learning, Sudden changes in behavior patterns , or other issues, as described below:

#### **1. Depression or References to Suicide**

Most of us have experienced brief episodes of depression in our lives. However, depression which lingers and interferes with normal patterns of functioning is likely to require professional intervention. Some common signs include:

- Persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness
- Significant changes in eating, sleeping, spending, grooming, or other daily activities
- Social withdrawal or excessive dependency
- Feelings of worthlessness or lack of control
- Chronic feelings of fatigue, difficulty concentrating and remembering
- Agitated or irrational behavior
- Crying or angry outbursts at unexpected times
- Indications of alcohol or drug abuse

- Explicit or implied thoughts of suicide or despair

ALL references to suicide must be taken seriously rather than discounted or ignored. It is wise to check out any concerns with the student and to consult with the Counseling Center. If a student identifies a specific suicide plan, an immediate referral for help can be critical.

## **2. Significant life changes and crises**

Life presents us all with sudden unexpected changes or crises, and discussing them with a professional does help. Examples of such concerns include:

- Death or illness of a family member or friend
- Divorce of parents or other family conflicts
- Breakup of a significant relationship
- Inability to accomplish an important goal
- Experiences of past or current trauma

## **3. Blocks to Learning**

Psychological difficulties may impair a student's ability to learn. Examples include:

- Excessive fears of criticism and/or rejection
- Perfectionism or other obsessive worries
- Incapacitating test or performance anxiety
- Distractibility or inability to focus attention
- Procrastination or loss of motivation
- Persistent flashbacks of traumatic events
- Learning disabilities
- Under-developed study skills

## **4. Sudden Changes in Behavior Patterns**

Changes in a person's familiar patterns of functioning are often a sign that other problems exist. Behavior that indicate underlying concerns include:

- Problems in relationships or other social interaction
- Mood shifts
- Hyper-activity, restlessness, confusion
- Unexplained absences from school or work
- Recurrent or unexplained physical ailments
- Significant shifts in involvement with activities

## **5. Other Issues**

Other issues not covered in this flyer, but handled by the Counseling Center include:

- Eating problems
- Panic and anxiety conditions
- Sexual assault
- Substance use concerns
- Family problems
- Discrimination or other forms of oppression

### **PRACTICAL TIPS FOR HELPING A DISTRESSED STUDENT**

1. If possible, arrange a private time to talk with the student.
2. Discuss your observations that led you to become concerned. Avoid being judgmental or making assumptions about the cause of their apparent distress.
3. Keep the tone of your talk supportive, reassuring, and empathic.
4. Let the student respond to your concerns.
5. Re-emphasize your support and care, regardless of how she/he responds. LISTEN.
6. You may want to mention that you have seen other students struggle with similar issues, and that the multiple stressors associated with attending college can be overwhelming.
7. Students do not have to struggle with their issues on their own. If appropriate, mention that there are additional people on campus who can help and offer to assist the student in making these contacts.
8. Mention that receiving services at the Counseling Center is strictly confidential as protected by law.
9. Though the student may reject your offer of support or referral, remain supportive and remember that you need not be alone in your efforts to help. Feel free to consult with the Counseling Center staff before and/or after you speak with the student.

### **CONSULTING WITH THE CENTER STAFF**

If you have a student that you are worried about, please feel free to give us a call and consult. We will be happy to talk with you about possible courses of action and how to best help your student. Just call **312 996-3490** and ask to consult with a liaison or any available staff member. In the case of an urgent situation where you might want to walk a student over to our office, please call ahead if possible so that we can make sure there will be someone to meet with you when you arrive.

### **COUNSELING CENTER HOURS & LOCATION**

We are open from 8:30am to 5pm Monday through Friday, except for university holidays. We are located in Suite 2010, Student Services Building. Appointments can be scheduled or consultations obtained by calling **312 996-3490**. We try to respond to crisis situations without delay.

### **EMERGENCIES**

If a crisis occurs outside of regular business hours, call the UIC Police at **312 355-5555**, the UIC Hospital Emergency Room at **312 996-7297**, the national Suicide Prevention hotlines at **800-SUICIDE (800-784-2433)** or **800-273-TALK (800-273-8255)** 24 hours a day, or the Counseling Center's InTouch Hotline at **312 996-5535**, Sunday through Friday, between 6 and 10:30pm.