

How to Refer a Student to Psychological Counseling

University Health, Wellness and Counseling Services

131 Millennium Student Center, 516-5711

www.umsl.edu/services/counser

As a member of the UM-St. Louis faculty or staff, you may encounter students who are in psychological distress. There may be occasions when you will want to refer a student to a professional counselor for assistance. Counseling Services' professional staff are available to consult with you about ways you can help a student in distress, or to assist you in making an effective referral to counseling.

When to Refer Someone to Counseling:

1. If you are concerned that the student is self-destructive, suicidal, dangerous to others, severely depressed, or out of contact with reality.
2. If the student has experienced a number of other problems or symptoms over an extended period of time. Some of the specific issues for which counseling may be helpful include:
 - Depression and/or suicidal thoughts
 - Interpersonal/social problems
 - Self confidence or identity issues
 - Death of a family member or close friend
 - Stress and anxiety (including test anxiety or math anxiety)
 - Psychological trauma and related issues
 - Anger, aggression, resentment
 - Excessive weight loss or gain, or eating disorder
 - Drug or alcohol abuse
 - Difficulty concentrating
 - Juggling multiple roles/time management
3. If you have had contact with the student on several occasions and it appears that the student is unable to find a way to feel better or to make changes in his/her life.
4. If you are starting to feel burdened or overwhelmed by the student's needs.

Making the Referral

Many first-time counseling clients have strong apprehensions about counseling. You may be able to help ease these apprehensions. The following steps can be useful in making a referral:

1. Give your reason for making the referral. State specifically why you are concerned, describing the behaviors and, if relevant, the magnitude and duration of these behaviors. For example, "I'm concerned about you because you've been very withdrawn and unusually quiet in class for the past three weeks."
2. Recommend that the student get counseling. For example, "You and I have talked several times and it seems that things aren't getting better for you. I think it might be helpful for you to talk with a counselor." Suggest Counseling Services as a possible resource or support, rather than telling the student to go because he or she "needs help" or is "causing problems" for others.

3. Ask for feedback from the student. Find out how he/she feels about the idea of going to counseling. If the student responds negatively, listen for the reasons. Being referred for counseling can have many different meanings to the student. For example:
 - Does the student believe that you think they are "crazy"?
 - Is the student concerned about what friends or family members will think of them?
 - Is the student concerned that counseling will go on his/her academic record?
 - Does he/she think that counseling implies "weakness"?
 - Has the student had a bad counseling/therapy experience before?
 - Does the student say that they cannot afford counseling?

4. Reassure them about counseling. You may want to give some reassurance that people use Counseling Services for a variety of reasons. Counselors see many people who can use some help with normal problems in living, or with making an important decision about the future. Receiving counseling can be like taking a "course" on yourself. Having the courage to face problems in counseling involves strength, not weakness. If there has been a negative experience with counseling in the past, reassure the student that not all counselors are the same. At Counseling Services, clients may request to see a different counselor.

It is also important to reassure the student that whatever is said to a counselor will be HELD IN CONFIDENCE and not be on their academic record.

Although there is a small fee for continuing counseling (after the first session, which is free of charge), the fee is waived in situations of financial hardship.

5. Recommend that the student set up an appointment soon by calling University Health, Wellness and Counseling Services at **516-5711**. In some situations, you may want to urge the student to call when they are in your office with you. If you would like to have a specific counselor's name to refer a student to, feel free to call the Counseling Services director to ask about this possibility. (This will be dependent on the student's schedule and counselor availability.)

In an emergency, you can walk a student to Counseling Services' office at **131 MSC**. (In this case, it will facilitate the process to call ahead and let the receptionist know you are coming and provide us with basic information about the situation.) Our staff will also go to your office in an emergency, when the student is not able to come to us.

6. Follow up with the student to see if he/she kept his/her appointment. Recognize, however, that a student may not want to discuss the counseling experience and that the Counseling Services' staff must carefully guard the confidentiality of all client contacts. We must have written permission from a client to let you know whether or not they have come to counseling.

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