

When--and How--to Make a Referral to Counseling

As a Safe Zone participant, you may on occasion interact with persons who have questions or concerns related to sexual orientation. Some of these persons may be emotionally distressed; however, it is important to keep in mind that you are not expected to take on a counselor role in your work as a Safe Zone ally. Remember also that you will not be the only source of help available to any person who may come to meet with you.

When should I refer someone for mental health counseling?

You should consider referring someone to counseling if they are exhibiting any of the following behaviors:

- Threats of harm to self or others
- Inability to follow through on responsibilities (e.g. classes, work)
- Feeling “stuck” and unable to cope
- Repeatedly seeking you out for help
- If you feel overwhelmed/burdened by the person and their problems
- Symptoms of depression--sad mood, insomnia, feelings of guilt, inability to concentrate
- Significant loss or trauma
- Disordered thoughts or speech
- Substance abuse

How can I suggest that someone seek counseling?

- Describe the person’s behaviors/statements that concern you. It can be helpful to note the magnitude and duration of these behaviors. For example, “I’m concerned about you because you have come to my office in tears twice this week.”
- Give your reason for making the referral and then recommend that the person get counseling. “You and I have talked several times, and it seems that things are not getting better for you. I think it would be helpful for you to talk with a professional counselor.”
- Ask for feedback from the person. Find out how the person feels about the idea of going to counseling. If the person responds negatively, listen for the reasons.
- Reassure them about counseling. Explain that counselors see many people who can use some help with problems in living, such as those who need to make an important decision about the future. Having the courage to face one’s problems in counseling indicates strength, not weakness. You might also mention that counselors are legally and ethically required to respect client confidentiality, and that several of the counselors at Counseling Services are Safe Zone participants.
- Recommend that the person set up an appointment soon by calling Counseling Services at 516-5711. In some situations, you may want to urge the person to call from your office. In an emergency, you can walk someone to the Counseling Services office at 126 MSC (in this case, it will facilitate the process to call ahead and let the secretary know you are coming.)
- If you see the person again, follow up to see if he/she kept his/her appointment. Recognize, however, that a person may not want to discuss the counseling experience, and that the Counseling Services staff will carefully guard the confidentiality of all client contacts.