

Identifying Students Who Need Help

What to do if you encounter a student who needs assistance or displays troubling behavior

Referring Students—It Begins with You

As a faculty or staff member, you play numerous roles in the lives of our students: teacher, advisor and mentor, to name a few. Whatever your role, you are an important resource and often the first line of contact for spotting a student in trouble. Some students may openly share their problems with you, while others may not accept that they have a problem until it is too late. By recognizing the signs that may indicate psychological or emotional distress and knowing how to respond effectively, you will be a better advocate for students on the Kirkwood campus.

What to do

Your first step in expressing concern is to set aside a time and private place to talk to the student where you will not be disturbed. You should approach the student as an interested, concerned person, not as an authority figure who knows what is best. You might begin by describing the specific behaviors that concern you. You should avoid global statements such as, “You’ve been acting strange lately.” Such statements give the student no real information and may lead to feeling judged, self-conscious or defensive. If you are worried about talking with the student, bring him/her to the counseling office first.

If after describing the behaviors that concern you, the student does not seem willing to talk, you may want to:

- Tell the student about available services and how to access them. Or contact the counseling office and ask for advice about how to proceed.
- Either way, you should make it clear that you can be available if the student wants to talk at a later time.
- When you are referring students for counseling, you should be prepared for resistance. Students sometimes believe they should be able to work things out on their own. They react as though you are implying they are crazy or sick if you suggest counseling. Your approach to the student and personal attitude about counseling are extremely important at this point.
- Services available to students include counseling for relationship issues, grief/bereavement, anger management, gender identity, codependency, communication skills, test anxiety and more.

Counselors may refer students to community agencies as needed after consultation.

How to Talk to Students About Your Concerns (non-emergency)

Privacy– Talk in private when you and the student have time and are not preoccupied.

Honesty– Be frank about your concerns. Share what you observe without judging.

Limits– Be clear about your role—that it is not to counsel students, but to help them get the support needed.

Timing– If a student is receptive to seeing a counselor, provide the phone number (398-5540) and offer your phone to schedule an appointment.

Examples of beginning a dialogue with a student might include: “Sounds like you’re really struggling with _____. Many people find it helpful to talk in confidence with someone who is outside of the situation. I want to help you get the help you need and deserve.”

Suggest that a student seek help instead of telling or ordering. Inform the student of our counseling services and the reasons why a student visits a counselor.

The Reality Nationwide

The number of students entering college with a prior psychiatric history or a documented disability continues to increase. Many chronic psychiatric disorders present themselves for the first time in late adolescence and early adulthood.



Tips for Faculty and Staff

What to look for:

- Depressive mood or mood swings
- Inability to control emotions and/or behavior
- Repeated absences, procrastination, irresponsible behavior
- Continual requests for deadline extensions, postponed test dates, etc.
- Writings showing extreme hopelessness, isolation or despair
- Social isolation
- Heightened anxiety or panic attacks
- Aggression and/or agitation
- Visible changes in physical appearance
- Confused or disorganized thinking
- Bizarre or inappropriate behaviors
- Signs of abuse—physical, sexual, mental
- Signs of drug and/or alcohol abuse
- Mention of self-harm or suicide
- Difficulty grieving a loss

Please feel free to refer a student any time you have concerns.

Resources

<https://screening.mentalhealthscreening.org/kirkwoodcommunitycollege>

This site offers free and anonymous screenings 24-hours a day. Students may take a questionnaire to see if they have symptoms of depression, anxiety, an eating disorder, alcohol abuse or post-traumatic stress. Once they get the results, the student may want to make an appointment with a counselor to discuss their options.

All counseling services for students are free and confidential.



Dean of Students Office
Counseling Services
www.kirkwood.edu/counseling

Cedar Rapids Main Campus
2092 Cedar Hall
6301 Kirkwood Blvd. SW
Cedar Rapids, IA 52404
Phone: 319-398-5540

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