



**STUDENTS  
IN  
DISTRESS**

**A Faculty/Staff Guide  
2007-2008**

**Developed by:**

**Student Support Services  
(405) 682-7520  
Enrollment & Student  
Services  
OCCC**



## HOW TO HELP DISTRESSED STUDENTS

As a member of the Oklahoma City Community College faculty or staff you will at some time encounter a student in distress. Your role as a helper in such a situation is not only valuable, but can be crucial. In most cases, you will be able to respond effectively to the students' needs. There will, however, be occasions when you will want to refer students to someone else for assistance.

The information in this brochure is offered to assist OCCC faculty and staff in recognizing signs of distress, and to provide basic principles and guidelines for effective intervention. However, each student presents a unique situation. If you are concerned about a student's behavior and/or health, it is always wise to seek consultation with a professional.

Student Support Services and Student Relations are examples of offices prepared to respond to your questions should you need additional help in assisting a student, or in making an appropriate referral.

**A directory of campus referral sources for frequently encountered student problems can be found at the back of this publication.**

**SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF STUDENT  
DISTRESS**

**Excessive procrastination and very poorly prepared work, particularly if this is inconsistent with previous work**

**Dependency (i.e., the student who hangs around you or makes excessive appointments to see you during office hours)**

**Listlessness, lack of energy, or falling asleep in class**

**Poor attendance in classes**

**Marked changes in personal hygiene or weight**

**Isolation from others**

**Repeated requests for special consideration, for example, deadline extensions or regularly asking for an examination deferral**

**Impaired speech or garbled, disjointed thoughts**

**Behavior that regularly interferes with the decorum or effective management of your class**

**Overly suicidal statements or behaviors (i.e., referring to suicide as a current option)**

**High levels of irritability**

**Inability to make decisions, despite your repeated attempts to clarify and to encourage**

**Alcohol or other drug abuse**

**Bizarre or strange behavior obviously inappropriate to the situation (i.e., talking to “invisible people”)**

**Extreme fearfulness, tearfulness, nervousness, or other emotions displayed *for a prolonged period of time***



### **GUIDELINES FOR INTERACTION**

- **Talk to the student privately.**
- **Listen carefully.**
- **Show concern and interest.**
- **Paraphrase or summarize the student's statement(s) back to them to verify your perceptions.**
- **Avoid criticizing and judging.**
- **Consider the Student Support Services Counselor, Kari Workman, LPC, (ext. 7388) as a resource and discuss a referral with the student.**
- **If the student resists help and you are concerned, consult with the Student Support Services Counselor (ext. 7388).**

**Involve yourself only to the extent that you comfortable.**

### **MAKING A REFERRAL TO THE COUNSELOR**

- **Suggest that the student make an appointment. Give the phone number and location of the counselor's office. Write down the information and give to student.**
- **You can call the counselor's office, Kari Workman, LPC, (ext. 7520 or 7388) while the student is in your office. Allow the student to request an appointment themselves. Make sure the student has the appointment information, time, date, counselor's name, and office location written down.**
- **In an emergency, follow the above procedure, but tell the receptionist that the student needs an "emergency appointment." In an emergency every effort will be made to meet with the student immediately at your location or the counselor's office.**
- **Sometimes it is useful or necessary for you to walk the student to the Student Support Services office. Please keep in mind the student's confidentiality and right to privacy. The office is located on the first floor of the main building near entry 12.**
- **Personal follow-up with the student after the appointment can be supportive.**
- **If you are concerned about a student, but are uncertain of the appropriateness of a referral, or if the student resists a referral, feel free to call the Student Support Services office for a consultation.**

## **A FEW THOUGHTS ABOUT FOLLOW-UP PROCEDURES AND CONFIDENTIALITY**

Students can be assured that counseling sessions with the campus counselor are confidential. As a faculty member, we understand that you might be interested in the progress of a student you have referred. However, our ability to share information about a student is governed by principles of confidentiality as defined by the American Psychological Association and American Counseling Association.

The following examples may clarify this principle:

### **WE CAN**

- Suggest ways to refer students to Student Support Services
- Offer information about psychological concerns and problems in general

### **WE CANNOT**

- Confirm or deny a student's use of our services
- Discuss the content of sessions
- Discuss treatment plans or progress

In some cases, the student may find it in his/her best interest for information to be shared with faculty, staff, a family member, or significant other. This can be done with the student's written authorization, which includes a clear explanation of the purpose and content of any disclosure. An exception would be a counselor's determination of imminent danger to the student or to others.

## **SUCCESSFUL REFERRALS**

**For a referral to be successful the following criteria is important:**

- **The student will need to be ready and receptive to receive the kind of help offered. Readiness is an essential component of effective help; it is not a one-way process.**
- **The student's expectations must correlate with the actual nature and extent of help provided by the referral source.**
- **The referral source must be aware of the student's actual needs due to proper information or effective communication.**

## **FOLLOW-UP ON UNSUCCESSFUL REFERRALS**

**If the referral was unsuccessful, there are several steps you can take. Continue to be receptive to the student, try to determine the reason for the failure, and once again explore options with the student.**

- **If lack of readiness is the problem, be accepting of the student's feelings, but communicate your limitations and encourage the student to consider other options for assistance. It is possible that later or under different circumstance, the student will be more receptive.**



## **SERVICES FOR STUDENTS**

### **Possible Concerns:**

Assertiveness, Anxiety, Death, Depression, Drug and/or Alcohol Issues, Eating Disorders, Family Problems, Low Self-Esteem, Personal Problems, Suicidal Thoughts

Motivation, Note Taking, Organization, Study Skills, Test Anxiety, Test Strategies, Time Management

### **Contact:**

Student Support Services

405 682-7520

[www.occc.edu/support](http://www.occc.edu/support)

(Located on the first floor of the main building near Entry 12.)

- Short term counseling and community referral for students in distress
- Learning support for students with academic distress
- Early Alert System
- Supplemental Instruction
- Accommodations for students with documented disabilities



**Additional Concerns:**

Sexual Harassment

**Contact**

EEOC/ADA Compliance Officer  
Ext. 7605

Student Under The Influence of Alcohol/Drugs

**Contact**

Safety and Security  
Ext. 7691

**STUDENT SUPPORT  
SERVICES**

7777 South May Avenue  
Oklahoma City, OK 73159

Phone: 405-682-7520  
Fax: 405-682-78715  
E-mail: <http://www.occc.edu/support/>