



Students in Distress

A Faculty/Staff Guide 2017–2018

Licensed counselors are available
Mon-Thu 8am-6pm, Fri 8am-5 pm
Office of Student Support Services
(First floor of the Main Building near SEM Entry 3)
PH: (405) 682-7520



How to Help Distressed Students

As a member of the Oklahoma City Community College faculty or staff, you may at times 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 Life 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.

To gain more comprehensive and practical skills in helping students in distress, consider participating in a OCCC Mental Health First Aid Workshop.

- **8-hour training** where participants learn how to recognize symptoms of mental health problems, how to offer and provide initial help, and how to guide a person toward appropriate treatments and other supportive help. Mental Health First Aid does not teach people to be therapists.
- Taught by OCCC licensed counselors.
- Offered three times a year through OCCC Professional Development: <http://www.occc.edu/hr/pd.html>.



Signs & Symptoms of Student Distress

- Excessive procrastination and very poorly prepared work, particularly if this is inconsistent with previous work
- Dependency (i.e. the student hangs around you or makes excessive appointments to see you during office hours)
- Listlessness, lack of energy, or falling asleep in class, may report disturbed sleep
- Poor attendance in classes
- Marked changes in personal hygiene or weight
- Extreme behavior changes (i.e. student is normally very outgoing, but becomes quiet)
- Isolation from others
- Repeated requests for special consideration (i.e. regularly asking for deadline extensions or an examination extension)
- Impaired speech or jumbled, disjointed thoughts
- Behavior that regularly interferes with the decorum or effective management of your class
- Suicidal statements or behaviors (i.e. referring to suicide as a current option, making statements that they don't want to be here, or people would be better off without them, etc.)
- 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 that is 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



Guideline 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 perception and show you are listening
- Avoid criticizing and judging
- Consider contacting the Student Support Services licensed counselors for consultation and referral to counseling services (405) 682-7520
- If the student resists help and you are concerned, consult with a Student Support Services Counselor (405) 682-7520

Involve yourself to the extent that you are comfortable. We are available to assist you and your student, so do not hesitate to contact us and refer.



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 it to the student.
- You can call the licensed counselors, (405) 682-7520, 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, (e.g. student threatens to harm self or others) 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.
- For on-campus emergencies after counseling hours: Contact the campus police if a student is in imminent danger of harming self or others.
- For off campus emergencies after counseling hours: Contact 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number 1-800-273-8255 for assistance.
- Sometimes it is useful and necessary for you to walk the student to the Student Support Services office, which is located on the first floor of the Main Building near SEM Entry 3. Please keep in mind the student's confidentiality and right to privacy.
- 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, American Counseling Association and National Association of Social Workers.

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 to confidentiality 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 through proper information and 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 circumstances, the student will be more receptive.
- You may also refer students to two good resources for mental health and community services in the Oklahoma City metro area. The "Community Resource Guide" found at www.occc.edu/support/Community.html and 211, a toll free number to find local community resources.



The office of Student Support Services provides:

Counseling Services:

Short-term counseling and community referral for students in distress.

Common Counseling Concerns:

- Academic Difficulty
- Anxiety
- Loss of a loved one
- Depression
- Drug and/or Alcohol Issues
- Eating Disorders
- Family Problems
- Low Self-Esteem
- Personal Problems
- Food/Shelter Needs
- Sleep Problems
- Relationship Issues
- Suicidal Thoughts
- Lack of Motivation
- Note Taking and Testing Difficulty
- Test Anxiety
- Time Management
- Organization and Study Skills

Other Student Support Services:

- Learning support for students with academic distress.
- Online intervention system for faculty with student academic/personal concerns.
- Accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

Contact:

Student Support Services (405) 682-7520

www.occc.edu/support

(Located on the first floor of the Main Building near SEM Entry 3)



Additional Resources

Gender-based misconduct, including sexual harassment and sexual assault:

<http://www.occc.edu/1istoomany/policies.html>

Contact

Title IX Coordinator

Regina Switzer, J.D.

regina.a.switzer@occc.edu

(405) 682-7540

Deputy Title IX Coordinator, Main Campus

Christina Atencio, M.H.R.

christina.l.atencio@occc.edu

(405) 682-7813

Deputy Title IX Coordinator, Main Campus

Chris Shelley, Assistant Registrar

christopher.l.shelley@occc.edu

(405) 682-7528

Deputy Title IX Coordinators, Other OCCC Campuses

Link to <http://www.occc.edu/1istoomany/coordinators.html>

Discrimination and harassment unrelated to gender:

<http://www.occc.edu/policy/pdf/1013.pdf>

Contact

Office of Student Life

(405) 682-7523

Director of Equal Opportunity

(405) 682-7540

Student under the Influence of Alcohol/Drugs:

Contact:

Campus Police Department

(405) 682-7872

Student Behavior: Disruptive in Class

Contact

Office of Student Life

(405) 682-7523



Student Support Services

7777 South May Avenue
Oklahoma City, OK 73159

Ph: 405.682.7520 • Fax: 405.682.7871

www.okcc.edu/support