

REFERRAL GUIDELINES FOR FACULTY AND STAFF DEALING WITH EMOTIONALLY DISTRESSED STUDENTS

**St. Thomas Aquinas College
Office of Counseling & Psychological Services
845-398-4065**

WHEN TO REFER

A referral for psychological help should be considered when you believe a student's problems go beyond your own experience and expertise or when you feel uncomfortable helping a student with an issue. A referral may be made because of the way the student's problem(s) is interfering with his or her personal life or academic work, or because observations of a student's personal behavior raises concerns.

The following list is provided to serve as a guide for assessing coping patterns and responses to stress. The list is not exhaustive, and when in doubt, STAC faculty and staff are encouraged to err on the side of caution and make a referral to Counseling & Psychological Services.

- Prolonged depression, suggested by a sad expression, apathy, weight loss, sleeping difficulty, and tearfulness
- Marked withdrawal, unwillingness to communicate
- Nervousness, agitation, excessive worrying, irritability, aggressiveness, or nonstop talking
- Unexplained crying and/or seemingly impulsive outbursts of anger
- Bizarre, strange behavior or speech
- Talk of suicide, either directly or indirectly such as, "I won't be around to take that exam anyway," or "I'm not worried about getting a job, because soon I won't need one"
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, self-recrimination, personal inadequacy
- Marked changes in personal hygiene
- Undue concern with physical health
- Indications of increased/excessive drinking or drug use
- Marked decline in quality of course work, class participation, quality of papers or test results, increased absence from class, or failure to turn in work

- Extreme dependency on faculty or staff, including spending much of his or her spare time visiting during office hours or at other times
- Comments in a student's paper that arouses concern
- Unrealistic expectations/confusion regarding personal and career goals
- Problems with concentration, memory, attentive skills
- Loss of interest in schoolwork, employment, social activities, absence from class, tardiness, increasingly poor time management
- Loss of appetite, sleep disorder, lack of stamina, persistent fatigue
- Expressed concerns regarding death (or divorce/separation) of family members or close friend
- Problems with interpersonal relations, especially in dating or intimacy situations
- Peer rejection
- Student is continually the target of ridicule and bullying by classmates or others
- Student makes a vague or explicit physical or nonphysical threat(s) to an individual, group, or institution
- Unusual or frequent irritability, suspiciousness, irrational feelings of being persecuted or slandered

Each student experiences and responds to stress differently, and many difficulties that individuals in their late teens and early 20's experience are relatively transient. However, you may become alarmed by even brief changes, which are extreme, or by significant changes that continue for some time. If you are uncertain about the seriousness of the problem, consult the Director of Counseling & Psychological Services about how to evaluate the situation and take the most appropriate steps.

MAKING A REFERRAL

One way of introducing a topic of a seeking professional assistance to a student is to summarize to him or her what behaviors you are concerned about. You can comment on the emotional responses that you have heard from him or her, perhaps with an expression of your concern.

Once a student has agreed that counseling might be useful, there are several possible steps to take, depending on the student's attitude and the urgency of the situation.

- Give the student information about Counseling & Psychological Services and urge him or her to contact the office.
- Offer to let the student use your phone to make an appointment in the moment, so that a public commitment will have been made.
- Accompany the student yourself to make sure he or she arrives at Counseling & Psychological Services, and provide the staff with any necessary information. If possible, call ahead to let the staff know you are coming by with a student.

In speaking to a student about counseling and psychotherapy, it is important to keep in mind some of the negative reactions a student may have to the idea and to try to discuss them with the student. Reassure the student that many people see a mental health professional to help them manage and respond to events in their daily lives. Counseling and psychotherapy provides a chance to explore feelings and solve problems with the help of an objective, sensitive, and concerned listener.

It is normal for a student to be ambivalent about seeing a mental health practitioner. Unless there is a serious or immediate concern about the welfare and safety of a student or others, it should be a student's decision to seek help. Coercing a student to go see a mental health practitioner is not likely to have positive results in the long run; it is better to try to maintain your relationship with a student rather than to force him or her to go to Counseling & Psychological Services.

After a referral is made an appointment will be scheduled for an initial consultation. This will usually be held within a few days from the time a student makes contact, depending largely on the flexibility of the student's schedule. In an emergency, arrangements will be made to see the student on the same day. Initial consultations or intakes are used to assess the situation and to determine what services would be most helpful.

EMERGENCIES

If a mental health emergency arises during normal college operating hours, contact Counseling & Psychological Services (845-398-4065) and/or Campus Safety (854-398-4080). After hours, contact Campus Safety for assistance. If a student is actively suicidal, do not leave him or her alone, but send someone for help to notify Campus Safety. If you believe that a student poses a threat to another individual(s), notify Campus Safety IMMEDIATELY. If you have any questions about a situation, please call Counseling & Psychological Services for assistance. Always err on the side of caution.

Additional Community Resources:

- **Behavioral Health Response Team (Rockland Mobile Crisis)**
845-517-0400
1-844-255-BHRT (2478)
- **Crisis Services**
845-364-2200
- **Rockland Suicide Hotline**
845-354-6500
- **Bergen County CarePlus NJ**
(201) 262-HELP (4357)
- **Center for Safety & Change** (Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault Services)
845-634-3391 (Information)
845-634-3392 845-634-3344 (Hotline)