



Guidelines for Referring Students to a Counsellor

1. You are welcome to consult with a counsellor regarding a student you are concerned about whether or not you have spoken to the student about your concerns. For example, you might find it useful to discuss your observations, options and feelings. The counsellor can help you assess the degree of urgency and explore with you how best to approach the student. Usually you can protect the student's privacy at this stage, as there is no need to divulge his or her name.
2. Signs that indicate a referral may be helpful.
 - a. They ask for help.
 - b. Emotional and/or behavioral signs of distress (crying, restless, irritable, emotional outbursts, anxious, difficulty in communicating, etc.).
 - c. Drastic change in weight or physical appearance (could be results of eating problem, substance use, physical or mental health problem).
 - d. Withdrawal from social activities/interactions, loneliness.
 - e. Problems in academic performance (attendance, class participation, poor grade, trouble completing assignments).
 - f. Going through a break up, separation, relational problems, death of family member or friend.
 - g. Victim of current or past accident, crime, abuse, sexual assault, or harassment.
 - h. Struggling with substance use, gambling, or online gaming .
 - i. Chronic health problems.
 - j. Confusion with identity (developmental, cultural, sexual, gender).
3. Meet with a student in private if you plan to suggest that he/she seek counselling—i.e. in your office rather than in the classroom or the hallway—and never while others are present.
4. How you go about a referral and what you say to the student will be guided by your perception of the degree of urgency in the situation. It may help to consider different levels of referral:

Level 1: Fairly casual—let the student know there are counsellors on campus who can help with the problem and suggest she/he might find it useful to “check out” the service rather than allowing the problem to get bigger.



Level 2: More urgent—the problem has already significantly affected the student’s learning and progress; the student is really suffering and their functioning may continue to decline if they don’t get some help. There may be a time factor relating to withdrawal deadlines or other university or department policies.

Level 3: An emergency—you are concerned that the student is in immediate danger of harming himself/herself or someone else, or the student is very upset and unable to calm down, or he/she is acting bizarrely, seems out of control or out of touch with reality.

5. Remember that except in an emergency situation, it is the student’s choice whether or not to seek help.
6. Make sure that you have current and accurate information about Counselling & Learning Support. For example, it can help to reassure the student that counsellors at the university support all kinds of issues, large and small, and that students can choose to meet with a counsellor just one or twice, or on a regular basis if needed. Also, counselling is confidential with a few exceptions. The exceptions are 1) a judgement that a student is in serious danger of harming himself/herself or another person, 2) if the life or safety of a readily identifiable third person is endangered, 3) if we learn that a minor is being abused or neglect, or 4) if we are required to testify in legal proceedings.
7. If the student is highly emotional or upset when you speak to him/her, wait until they have become calmer—calm enough to hear and respond to your suggestion—before bringing up the subject of professional help.
8. Be direct and specific about what the student has said or written and/or what you have observed that led you to suggest counselling, but try to avoid assumptions and generalizations about the student’s experience or character that go beyond what you’ve directly seen or heard.
9. Be aware that for some students and their families, peers and cultural communities, seeking professional help for personal problems continues to be stigmatized, to be seen as unacceptable, a sign of weakness, something shameful that only “crazy” people do. You can counteract this line of thinking by pointing out that seeking help is a sign of strength and courage, a move toward taking control.
10. Ask the student what she/he thinks about your suggestion and be prepared to really listen to their fears and doubts. Don’t try to argue them into getting help (again, if you judge the situation to be an emergency, stronger arguments and greater persistence may be needed).



11. Unless it's an emergency, it is generally better for the student to book the appointment themselves. However, you might ask if they'd like to make the call right then, from your office, to "strike while the iron is hot."
12. Counsellors often appreciate knowing when a client has been referred by a concerned instructor, in particular if the situation carries some urgency. Ask the student if it's alright for you to call ahead and let a counsellor know about the referral. If the student knows which counsellor she/he will be speaking to, contact that person. If not, contact the liaison counsellor for your department. If you'd like to share additional information with the counsellor, ask the student's permission to do so.
13. In an urgent situation, do not hesitate to bring the student over to the Counselling office (Birch 267) yourself. You may have to spend some time listening carefully to the student beforehand, expressing your care and concern and convincing him/her to seek help. In such a situation, calling ahead is especially important. If you are not able to call ahead or don't manage to get through, please inform the receptionist of the degree of urgency when you come in.