

Office of Spiritual Formation & Counseling Services

2nd floor Administration Building
(617) 850-1289

Your Role as a Faculty/Staff Member

Faculty and staff members on campus have the unique opportunity of having ongoing, direct contact with students and are in the position to identify students who are struggling. Faculty and staff members should determine for themselves their personal comfort levels with becoming involved with student problems. Becoming the main source of support to a troubled student sometimes can be overwhelming, frightening, and/or tiring. It is important that you know your own limitations in providing assistance to students and that you are aware of times when the best option is a referral.

Identifying Students Who May Benefit from a Referral

People dealing with personal concerns or problems tend to show signs that they are struggling in some way. The following indicators may be useful in assessing whether or not a referral should be made:

- **Talking about Suicide:** If a student talks or writes about suicide, this should be taken seriously. Suicidal thoughts are in themselves not necessarily dangerous but, if they include actual plans for suicidal behaviors, the severity of the danger to the student increases dramatically. Suicide is often considered as an option when the person feels hopeless, trapped, out-of-control, and/or depressed. To make the assumption that talk of suicide is aimed solely toward getting attention can be a potentially fatal mistake. If you become aware of a student who is thinking about suicide, please make an immediate referral to the Office of Spiritual Formation & Counseling Services. You can also call us for a consultation if you are unsure of an appropriate intervention or if the student is reluctant to take your referral. If a student clearly states the intent to commit suicide, call the Office of Spiritual Formation & Counseling Services (617) 850-1289.
- **Stating a Need for Help:** Students will often come to faculty or staff members with direct requests for assistance. Through talking with the student, you may feel the problems are beyond your scope of knowledge or power to change. Listening carefully to students and their concerns can provide ample evidence to support your decision to refer. If a student comes to you, he/she obviously feels that the relationship with you is important enough to value your opinion and response.
- **Observable Changes:** Some students do not directly tell you that there is a problem but their behaviors can be telling indicators. Distinct changes in academic performance, withdrawal from others, changes in class participation, crying, outbursts of anger, increased or decreased activity, and poor attendance are examples of behavioral changes that you may observe. Severe depression, extreme activity level, conversations that do not make sense, and a marked decline in personal hygiene are examples of possibly serious psychological problems. Any of these observable changes may merit a referral to the Office of Spiritual Formation & Counseling Services.

- **Psychosomatic Complaints:** Students who report physical illness or symptoms that cannot be supported by medical evidence may be experiencing psychological problems. Psychosomatic symptoms are very real for the student and should not be treated lightly. Tension headaches, changes in eating patterns, sleep disturbances, fatigue, stomach aches, and other physical pain symptoms are some examples of psychosomatic complaints.
- **Alcohol and Drug Abuse:** Coming to class or a meeting when intoxicated or high is a sign that drug and/or alcohol abuse is a serious problem. Often people drink or take drugs as a way to cope with and alleviate other problems in their life. Unfortunately, the substance abuse itself becomes a problem, one that interferes with social, academic, and work functioning.
- **Academic Problems:** Students who have noticeable negative changes in their academic performance also may be feeling overwhelmed with other areas of their lives. Some students come to classes with difficulty concentrating, performing well on exams, and achieving academically. If the possibility of a learning disability exists, a counselor can meet with a student for a consultation appointment to discuss evaluation and treatment options.
- **Additional Considerations in Making a Referral:** Along with the factors listed above, faculty and staff members should also take into account the following situations when considering making a referral:
 - A student asks for assistance with a problem that is outside of your range of knowledge.
 - Helping the student with the problem would compromise and/or change the status of your relationship with the student (e.g.: a student asking for money, a place to live, access to contacting you at home if in crisis)
 - The student feels uncomfortable talking to you about the problem.
 - The assistance and support you have already provided does not seem to be addressing the problem effectively.
 - You and the student have personality differences or conflicts that cannot be resolved and would interfere with the help you might provide.
 - You find yourself feeling overwhelmed, overly responsible for, and worried about the personal safety of the student.
 - The student is disrupting others. A referral to the Office of Spiritual Formation & Counseling Services is appropriate if the student is a significant and ongoing disturbance to others.

How to Make a Referral for Psychological Counseling

If a student approaches you with a problem, take the time to listen in a non-judgmental and respectful manner. If you wish to approach the student with your concerns, do so directly and state your concerns clearly. The following recommendations may help to make the process of providing a referral easier:

- Do not attempt to make a referral when the student is so upset and confused that he/she cannot understand or listen to you. Wait until the student has calmed down enough to be able to converse and respond to your suggestions.

- Talk to the student in private when both of you have time and are not rushed or preoccupied. Give the student your undivided attention. It is possible that just a few minutes of effective listening on your part may be enough to help the student feel confident about what to do next.
- If you have initiated the contact, express your concern in behavioral, nonjudgmental terms (e.g., "I've noticed you've been absent from class lately and I'm concerned," rather than "Where have you been lately? Goofing off again?").
- Listen to thoughts and feelings in a sensitive non-threatening way. Communicate understanding by repeating back the gist of what the student has told you. Try to include both the content and feelings ("It sounds like you're not accustomed to such a big campus and you're feeling left out of things."). Let the student talk.
- Work with the student to clarify the costs and benefits of each option for handling the problem from the student's point of view.
- Avoid judging, evaluating, criticizing, unless the student asks your opinion. Such behavior is apt to close the student off from you and from getting the help needed. It is important to respect the student's value system, even if you don't agree with it.
- Help the student see there are options – that there are professionals on campus that can assist him/her.
- Suggest in a caring, supportive manner that the student may benefit from meeting with a counselor at the Office of Spiritual Formation & Counseling Services. You may want to explain the following:
 - Counseling at SF/CS is confidential. This means that information about the student cannot be released to other HCHC offices, family, professors, etc. without the student's written permission (the exception being if the student is in danger of harming him/herself or others).
 - The services are free to currently registered, full-and part-time students.
 - The first meeting is an intake/consultation session where the counselor listens to concerns and then helps the student to identify ways to effectively address these concerns.
- Give the student the Office of Spiritual Formation & Counseling Services phone number (617) 850-1289. The student can call from your office or from home. No appointments can be made for a student by a third party without the student directly speaking to the counselor and asking for an appointment.
- If you feel that the student is in crisis, you can call SF/CS or have the student call from your office. Even better walk the student over to the Office of Spiritual Formation & Counseling Services (2nd floor Administration Building) and have them speak with a counselor immediately.

The Initial Appointment

The first appointment a student will have with a counselor is called an "Initial Assessment." Students can usually set up an Initial Assessment appointment within a week of their call to our center, although this depends on the current demands on our service; at busy times of the semester, it may take longer. If it is an emergency, no matter what point in the semester, students can be seen that day by walking into our office.

Students are asked to come in for 60 minutes for their Initial Assessment appointment to fill out basic informational forms and then meet with a counselor. The counselor and the student discuss counseling options in this first Initial Assessment appointment and decisions are made regarding the next steps for the student to pursue. These steps may include: counseling at the Office of Spiritual Formation & Counseling Services, a medical evaluation referral, a referral to a community mental health center or practitioner or, in emergency cases, a determination that the student should be sent to the psychiatric emergency room at a local hospital for further evaluation.

Some Comments on Confidentiality

The counselors at the Office of Spiritual Formation & Counseling Services are under ethical and legal obligations not to release confidential information. We cannot tell anyone that the student is receiving assistance at Counseling Services. Counselors adhere strictly to confidentiality laws for their profession and can only break confidentiality if the student gives direct written permission, or in situations where someone's life is in danger or a minor is being abused or neglected.

If a student tells us that you referred him/her, gives written permission, and requests it, a counselor will contact you to notify you that the student did attend the Initial Assessment appointment. If you would like more information about a student's contact with Counseling Services, you can directly ask the student. The student can make decisions about how much he/she wants to reveal to others.

Consultation Services

Counseling Services provides consultation services to the entire HCHC community. We are glad to answer any questions that you may have about our services, your concerns about a student, and referral options. Your call will be routed to an available counselor. We can assist you in making an effective Counseling Services referral.

Workshops

Counseling Services also offers workshop presentations that may be of relevance to your class or student group. We offer workshops on "Test Anxiety"; "Time Management"; and "Stress Management" for example, which can be requested for classes. We can also design specific workshops for your group based on its needs and interests. If you are interested in these workshop services, please call (617) 850-1289 for more details. We do request advance notice of at least 3 weeks prior to the date that you would like us to present. While we cannot guarantee that all workshop requests will be met, we will make every effort to do so.

Counseling Services also offers weekly workshops as part of our "[Food for Thought](#)" Workshop series each semester. Topics are based around a semester theme but often include: "Procrastination"; "Communication"; "Conflict Resolution"; "Relationship Issues"; "Diversity"; and many others. We would be pleased to send you a flyer describing our semester workshops. We would appreciate it if you would keep these workshops in mind throughout the semester and refer students to them when appropriate.

Internet Services

Counseling Services provides access to self-help documents, reading lists, and links to many other internet resources on-line via our home page at:

<http://www.hchc.edu>

Self-help topics include stress management, test anxiety, communication, depression, identity, and gender issues.

Emergency Services

When emergencies occur outside of our operating hours, contact:

Counselor On-Call (617) 850-1289

A counselor from the Counseling Services is available for after-hours emergencies. The counselor can be reached by calling the University Police.

Brookline Police (617) 730-2222

University Police can provide assistance if a student is acting strangely or violently. Their officers have experience working with students in crisis and can provide options for further assistance if needed.

Boston Metro Early (617) 383-6522

Crisis Services is a 24-hour hot-line service for anyone in the Boston/Brookline Area. People can call and talk to a trained counselor to determine whether or not there is a serious psychological emergency. The Crisis Services staff will come to the location of the student if suicidality, violence, or psychosis is evident and, if appropriate, will arrange for the student to be taken to a hospital psychiatric emergency room.

Conclusion

The **Office of Spiritual Formation & Counseling Services** staff strives to provide services to Hellenic College Holy Cross students that will enable them to succeed academically, personally, and in life. We know that you are concerned with similar goals and we believe that we can accomplish these goals most effectively the closer we work with each and every one of you. We look forward to hearing from you if you have questions, suggestions, and feedback about our services. We hope that this handout has provided you with helpful information about what the Office of Spiritual Formation & Counseling Services has to offer.