
**Recognizing and Assisting
The Troubled Student:
The Guide for Faculty and Staff**

**Centenary Counseling Center
Lower Level of Rotary Hall (Facing Kings Hwy)
318-869-5466
www.centenary.edu/services/counseling**



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**Adapted from literature from University of Nebraska-Lincoln and
California State Polytechnic University-Pomona**

Faculty and Staff as Helping Resources for Students

The emotional and academic pressures of college life, while manageable and even exhilarating for most students, can be simply overwhelming for others. Such students may not yet have attained the level of maturity necessary to develop adequate coping skills, or they may be struggling with relatively long-standing emotional deficits that are exacerbated by the transition to college life.

To put this into perspective, studies indicate that in a group of 100 college students with equal numbers of men and women, at least:

- **30 students will have divorced parents**
- **15 students will have a substance-abusing parent**
- **10 students will themselves have a substance abuse problem**
- **15 female students will be victims of rape or sexual abuse**
- **6 female students will have an eating disorder**
- **4 male students will be victims of sexual abuse**
- **3 female students will become pregnant during college**

Faculty and staff at Centenary College have a deserved reputation for being caring and supportive, and consequently students experiencing emotional distress may turn to you for help. Or, because of your role, you may find yourself confronted by a disturbed or disturbing student who needs assistance.

These guidelines are meant to help you recognize, intervene, and refer emotionally troubled students to the Counseling Center so that they can get the help they need. Keep in mind that sometimes the issues that students present might also warrant a

referral to other offices, such as Academic Resources, Health Services, or the Chaplain. See **Referring to Other Campus Resources** for more information.

*****In case of a true emergency, dial 911 immediately. Centenary's Department of Public Safety can also be reached at 869-5000. *****

Recognizing Emotionally Troubled Students

At one time or another, everyone feels stressed, depressed, or anxious. However, some behaviors occurring over a period of time can suggest that the problems with which the student is dealing are more than the expected ones. The following are three levels of behaviors indicating this kind of distress.

Level 1. Although not disruptive to others, these behaviors may indicate that help is needed:

- Serious grade problems or a change from consistently good grades to unaccountably poor performance;
- Excessive absences, especially if the student previously demonstrated consistent class and/or work attendance;
- Unusual or markedly changed pattern of interaction, i.e., totally avoiding participation, becoming excessively anxious when called upon, dominating discussion, etc.;
- Other characteristics that may indicate a problem, including
 - depressed mood and lethargic behavior;
 - withdrawing from social circles or groups;
 - written assignments that are disturbing because of the emotional tone or disclosure;
 - excessive activity and very rapid speech;
 - swollen, red eyes;
 - marked change in personal dress and hygiene;
 - anxious behavior; and
 - falling asleep in class or at work.

Level 2. These behaviors may indicate significant emotional distress and also a reluctance or inability to acknowledge a need for personal help:

- Repeated requests for special consideration, such as deadline extensions (especially if the student appears uncomfortable or highly emotional disclosing the circumstances prompting the request);
- New or consistent behavior which pushes the limits of decorum and which interferes with the effective management of your class or work setting;
- Significant rapid weight change;
- An unusual or exaggerated emotional response that is obviously inappropriate to the situation.

Level 3. These behaviors usually indicate students in obvious crisis who need emergency care:

- Highly disruptive behavior (hostile, aggressive, violent, etc.);
- Inability to communicate clearly (garbled, slurred speech, unconnected or disjointed thoughts);
- Loss of contact with reality (seeing/hearing things that aren't present, beliefs or actions greatly at odds with reality or probability);
- Overtly suicidal thoughts (referring to suicide as a current option);
- Homicidal threats.

What Can You Do?

It is important to remember that most of these students are not really different from other students. Most are experiencing situational frustrations, pressures, conflicts, and, in their own way, are asking for help.

Level 3 problems are the easiest to identify and handle in that there are specific procedures for helping students in crisis. Basically, you need to stay calm and know who to call for help. This information is outlined under **How to Make a Referral**.

In dealing with a student who exhibits Level 1 or Level 2 behavior you may choose to approach the student. In other cases, the student may seek your help with a problem. Below are some suggestions which might be helpful for you in dealing with a troubled student.

- **TALK** to the student in private and 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 cared about as an individual and more confident about what to do. Even a simple, "How are you doing?" can be helpful.
- **LISTEN** in a sensitive, non-threatening way. If you have initiated the contact, express your concern in behavioral, nonjudgmental terms. For example, "I've noticed you've been absent from class lately and I'm concerned," rather than "Where have you been lately? You should be more concerned about your grades."
- **COMMUNICATE** understanding by repeating back the essence of what the student has told you. Try to include both content and feelings ("It sounds like you're not accustomed to living away from home and you're feeling homesick"). Let the student talk.

- **GIVE HOPE** by helping them realize there are options and suggest resources such as friends, family, clergy, or professionals on campus. "There are some options here; let's discuss some possible solutions."
- **MAINTAIN** clear and consistent boundaries and expectations. It is important to maintain the professional nature of the faculty-to-student or staff-to-student relationship and the consistency of academic expectations, exam schedules, etc. "Let's figure out a way that I can help you while still being fair to the other students", or, "I'm unable to meet with you right now but I will be available this afternoon."
- **REFER** to other resources, such as the Counseling Center, when
 - the problem is more serious than you feel comfortable handling;
 - when you are extremely busy, stressed and cannot find the time to deal with the problem;
 - when you have helped as much as you can and further assistance is needed;
 - when you think your personal feelings about the student will interfere with your objectivity;
 - when the student admits that there is a problem, but does not want to talk to you about it; or
 - when the student asks for information or assistance that you are unable to provide.

"I'm not sure if I can provide the help that you need, but I know who can."

Sometimes Level 2 students may or may not feel distressed but cause distress to others. These students might be disruptive in class or might be behaving in disturbing ways in their personal life, but are not open to a referral. In this situation, confront the

student in a straightforward and compassionate way about the upsetting behavior. Give specific examples whenever you can. You may need to be very explicit about what behavior is problematic and why it is problematic. Often students whose behavior is problematic have trouble appreciating why it's problematic. Suggest alternative behaviors, and as much as possible, do so in a positive way.

Referring to Other Campus Resources

In many situations, students may benefit from a referral to another campus resource in addition to Counseling Services. Here are some other options:

***Health Services-** for students who are suffering from health problems and need to see a registered nurse; <http://www.centenary.edu/services/health>

***Disability Services-** for students who have a disability and need accommodations; <http://www.centenary.edu/services/counseling>

***Career Services-** for students who are distressed about their plans for the future; <http://www.centenary.edu/services/career>

***The Chaplain-** for students who are in need of religious or spiritual counseling; <http://www.centenary.edu/religiouslife/chaplain>

***Academic Resource Center-** for students whose grades are suffering and needs tutoring or other academic assistance; <http://www.centenary.edu/arcs>

***Residence Life-** for students who are having roommate problems or other issues related to on-campus housing; <http://www.centenary.edu/reslife>

***Athletic Academic Support-** for student athletes who are struggling academically; http://www.gocentenary.com/ViewArticle.dbml?DB_OEM_ID=17900&KEY=&ATCLID=1177329

When in Doubt, Consult

If you have specific questions about a student, or are unsure about whether or how to approach this individual to make a referral, call the Counseling Center at 869-5466. Indicate that you are concerned about a student, and ask to speak to the counselor. The counselor can help you:

1. **Assess** the seriousness of the situation;
2. **Learn** about resources, both on and off campus, so that you can provide the student with potential options for obtaining assistance;
3. **Decide** how best to initiate the referral process;
4. **Clarify** your own feelings regarding the student and consider how you can be most effective.

How to Make a Referral

Once you have decided to refer a student to the Counseling Center (869-5466), you can proceed in any of the following ways:

- Suggest that the student call or walk in to arrange for an initial consultation during office hours (Level 1 severity).
- Suggest that the student use your telephone to arrange for an initial consultation while the student is still in your office. When the call is made from your office, you know that at least the initial contact has been made. By making the call him/herself, however, the student is exercising personal responsibility and is more likely to follow through to get help. In addition, your willingness to let him/her handle this part of the process is a vote of confidence and affirms his/her positive coping capacities (Level 1 or 2 severity).
- Call the Counseling Center yourself, while the student is still in your office, and help the student arrange an initial appointment. If you feel this is an emergency situation, please indicate this when you contact us.
- Indicate your willingness to the student to provide the Counseling Center with information about the nature of the problem and the reason for your referral.
- In an immediate emergency (i.e., Level 3 severity), you may decide to accompany the student in person. This can be a significant source of support to a student in crisis. We will see the student as soon as possible. Often just coming into the building and setting up a same-day appointment (if the counselor is with a student) helps to contain an emergency, and it allows for a rapid assessment of what the student needs. If possible, a call that you are bringing a student would be appreciated.

*****Additionally, do not hesitate to call 911 or contact Public Safety at 869-5000 for emergency assistance. In the event of an immediate life-threatening situation, ask for officers or ambulance first! *****

What Happens When a Student Goes to the Counseling Center?

Students should be encouraged to arrange for a consultation by calling 869-5466 or stopping by the Counseling Center during office hours. Centenary provides short-term counseling to students at no charge. Students are seen as soon as possible, although during periods of high demand there may be a delay. In emergency situations, however, every attempt will be made to see a student that day.

Students are asked to fill out confidential information forms before meeting with a counselor. During the initial session, the counselor will assess the student's concerns and needs. Students need to know that communication with us is confidential. We cannot discuss a student, his/her situation, or even the fact that counseling is being received at the Counseling Center without the student's permission. The only exceptions to this are imminent suicide, homicide, or suspected child or elder abuse, and even in these circumstances disclosures are limited to those who can provide immediate assistance. We are not compelled to report underage drinking or substance use.

If the counselor and student agree that individual counseling is appropriate, the student and the counselor will meet on a regular basis, usually weekly for approximately 50 minutes each session. It is possible that the student will be referred to another counselor off campus if the student requests to be referred or if the counselor believes that more intensive and/or long-term treatment is needed. It is also possible that the student may leave the initial appointment feeling able to handle the problem on his/her own. We cannot require a student to accept any suggestion we make unless professional judgment indicates that psychiatric hospitalization is mandatory.

How to Follow-Up after a Referral

Once a referral has been initiated, it is reasonable and prudent to follow up with the student. Depending on the nature of your relationship with the student, you may also find yourself wondering, “How is it going?” If this is done in a non-intrusive way, such a question may be well received. The student’s right to privacy, however, should always be respected.

If you wish to give us information about a student you referred, you may do so, and we treat this information as confidential. However, we may use professional discretion in discussing this with the student, and will discuss this with you first. Please remember that the counselor-client relationship is confidential, so we will not be able to release information about a specific student without permission from the student unless we determine that the student or someone else is in physical danger.

Whenever a student visits the counseling center for the first time, we request their written permission to acknowledge their referral, if applicable. If the student agrees, then we will then contact you and let you know that the student made his or her appointment.

Remember, you can help!

Additional Resources

The Centenary Counseling Center webpage, located at <http://www.centenary.edu/services/counseling>, offers some links to additional resources such as:

- **Online Mental Health Screenings**, which are offered at no charge and can help students determine whether they may be suffering from depression, anxiety, eating disorders, alcohol dependency, and more: <https://www.mentalhealthscreening.org/screening/login.asp?keyword=CENTENARY>
- **Online College Mental Health Fair**, a virtual health fair that provides helpful, in-depth information from a variety of national mental health organizations: <http://www.revolutionhealth.com/healthfair/?msc=A62825>
- **ULifeline**, an anonymous online resource where students can learn more about emotional health and ways to help themselves if they are struggling with their thoughts or feelings: <http://www.ulifeline.com/main/Home.html>
- **The Jed Foundation**, the nation's leading organization on preventing suicide and promoting mental health among college students: <http://www.jedfoundation.com/>
- **Mental Health and Athletes**, which provides information from the NCAA about the specific mental health needs of student athletes: http://www2.ncaa.org/portal/media_and_events/ncaa_publications/health_and_safety/mental_health_issues/index.html

There are also three crisis phone lines, one local and two national, that are recommended for students in crisis and the faculty and staff members who are assisting them:

- **Local Crisis Line:** 1-877-994-2275
- **National Crisis Lines:** 1-800-SUICIDE (784-2433)
1-800-273-TALK (8255)