IDENTIFYING AND ASSISTING STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS

COUNSELING SERVICES
A PROGRAM OF COUNSELING & HEALTH SERVICES
DEPARTMENT OF STUDENT AFFAIRS
Room D.102
T: 718.368.5975
F: 718.368.5057
www.kbcc.cuny.edu/Counseling Services/

OFFICE HOURS
Monday 9-7 / Tuesday 9-7 / Wednesday 9-5 / Thursday 9-6 / Friday 9-5
OUR STAFF

Full Time
Dasha Gorinshteyn, LCSW, Director of Counseling & Health Services
Jeanette Cruz, LCSW, Counselor & Coordinator of Faculty and Staff Campus Outreach
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We have graduate student interns working with us each academic year.

We would like to credit Queensborough Community College, Trinity College and East Tennessee State University in the partial development of this manual.
Faculty members are usually the first persons in a college community to observe students who are experiencing personal distress. Some indications of a student experiencing problems are agitated behavior or withdrawal. Student may also reveal problems through personal communication to the faculty, both oral and written. The following general descriptions are made to help faculty recognize and refer students who present with behavioral or emotional problems.

**Agitated Behavior**
- The student speaks out in class without waiting to be recognized.
- The student interrupts other students or the instructor.
- The student walks around the classroom, comes and goes often.
- The student appears emotionally volatile, loses his/her temper, cries easily, or uses profane language.
- The student comes in late, pushes chairs around and becomes disruptive when taking a seat.

**Withdrawn Behavior**
- The student is excessively absent or frequently late.
- The student sits in the back of the room and/or does not participate in class. (Keep in mind that cultural factors, as well as anxiety about speaking class, may inhibit student participation.)
- The student frequently displays drowsiness or sleeps in class.
- The student frequently daydreams as exemplified by inappropriate responses when asked a question.
- The student is engrossed in other reading in class.
- The student might have a vacant stare.
- It is important to try to resist the temptation to "profile" students. However, as faculty you are in an excellent position to recognize behavior changes in a troubled student.
- A student's concerning behavior may be a “cry for help.”
- Student behaviors exist along a continuum that can range in level of concern and severity from distressed, disturbing, disruptive and dangerous.

Because of the enormous emotional and social transitions experienced while in college, it is likely that most students will grapple with a host of issues during their college years. Some of these issues may include fitting in socially, handling problems at home, grief, sexual assault, anxiety, depression, relationship issues, issues of sexual identity, sleep problems, and many more such as bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, etc. The goal is to identify who is in need of services and help them to receive assistance.

Research has indicated that students who report having significant emotional problems over the previous year and had more functional relationships with their advisors, were more likely to use mental health services.

**Signs of Psychological Distress**
Some signs of psychological distress are obvious, but other are subtle or ambiguous.

Obvious signs include:
- Bizarre or strange behavior
- References to harming self or others
- Crying or persistent sadness
- Nervousness, agitation, impaired speech, tics
- High level of irritability
- Marked deterioration
Ambiguous signs include:
- Dependency (e.g. excessive demands on your time)
- Excessive procrastination or very poor work
- Inability to make decisions
- Persistent sleepiness
- Persistent lack of interest
- Monopolizing of classroom discussion

**HOW TO HELP**
Once a student manifests some of the signs of emotional distress, a faculty member may take one or more of the following actions:
- Approach the student and suggest a meeting after class. The meeting should be in a private location.
- Indicate in a supportive manner that you have noticed that the student seems “troubled/upset” or “tuned out.”
- If the student does not want to discuss any personal matters with you respect his/her reluctance and gently indicate that counselors are available in the college.
- If the student indicates a willingness to discuss his/her problems, listen—without making too many responses or suggestions.
- If you think that student would be receptive to seeing a counselor at the college, discuss referring him/her to Counseling Services. You may choose to contact a counselor you know personally or call the office at the following number: 718-368-5975. It is advisable to accompany the student to the office in D-102 versus leaving it to them to come on their own. Alternatively, you can ask that a counselor contact a student if the student knows that you have arranged this.

**HANDLING DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR IN THE CLASSROOM**
A student’s disruptive behavior (i.e. hostile or inappropriate remarks, repeated lateness, frequent interruptions, walking around the room, slamming books on the desk) may present a challenge to the faculty member’s resourcefulness and patience and may subvert the teaching process and interfere with other students’ learning.

When a student is defiant it is essential to avoid confrontation in the classroom. In this setting, the student may feel a need to save face and may not back down in front of other students. If the student is violent, faculty are advised to avoid escalating the situation, **speak calmly and avoid physical contact**.

Suggestions for dealing with a disruptive student in the classroom:
- Ask the student to leave the classroom with you and escort him/her to a place where you can talk privately.

  **If the student is unwilling to leave the classroom to talk with you or is physically threatening in any way, contact Public Safety and request assistance (x7777 or x5069).**

- After a disruptive episode, the following suggestions are made to help resolve a crisis:
  - The faculty member could make a referral to the Assessment and Care Team on campus. Please go to the following website to complete a report: www.kbcc.cuny.edu/act/
• Often, whether or not the student is not brought up on disciplinary charges, Counseling, the Student Conduct Officer, or the Vice President of Student Affairs meets with the student to explore the circumstances leading up to the crisis or behavioral problem.

• Faculty should keep accurate records of what has transpired in the classroom

*NOTE: Any reference to suicide is serious and a referral to counseling is strongly advised. You should not leave the student alone if he/she manifests suicidal intent. Please walk the student to the counseling office or call Public Safety. Alternatively, students could be walked to the Health Services office in Room A-108.

RECOGNIZING DEPRESSION IN PARTICULAR
Below are some ways of recognizing depression in students:
• Students may report lack of energy, loss of appetite, weight loss or weight gain
• Students may appear lonely and withdrawn
• Students may indicate in writing that they want to end one’s life
• Students may be irritable and short tempered
• Students may share consistently negative thoughts in classroom discussion or may seem hopeless about their future
• Students may demonstrate really poor self esteem
• Students may fall asleep or may be frequently absent from class
• Students from other countries may talk about “culture shock” and being homesick

INTERVENTION
As a faculty and staff member you are often on the front line. A student may feel comforted just by a simple act of indicating that you are concerned. They may feel relief that someone else cares. You may use the following language when talking to a student:
• "I've noticed that you've appeared sad and withdrawn during our last few meetings…"
• "I'm aware that you have fallen asleep in class more often during the past few weeks…"
"I'm concerned about your tendency to come late to class lately and I want to make sure that you are okay…"

OTHER HELPFUL TIPS
• It is not helpful to tell students, "look on the bright side" or "you'll get over it"
• Don't feel afraid to ask if they are suicidal (most likely this is not the first time they have had these thoughts). Studies indicate that roughly 10% of college students had thoughts of suicide in the past year and 1.4% admitted to attempting it
• Be direct and nonjudgmental when talking with students
• It is helpful to know about the counseling center & other services offered at KCC
• Find out if students have resources at home, etc.
• Find out if they have ever used counseling services in the past

Mental illness is protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act. The college can intervene with disciplinary action of some sort when the behavior is disruptive. When the person is ill and the behavior is not disruptive, there is no basis for removal from a class or any other type of disciplinary action.
ON-CAMPUS

Public Safety / Room L202 / 718-368-7777 or 5069
In the event of an emergency which requires immediate attention (e.g. unmanageable agitated/threatening student) notify Public Safety first. Following contact to Public Safety, submit an electronic referral to the Assessment and Care Team (ACT).

Vice President of Student Affairs / The Office of Student Affairs / Room A-216 / 718-368-5563

Assessment and Care Team (ACT)  [www.kbcc.cuny.edu/act/](http://www.kbcc.cuny.edu/act/)

Counseling Services / Room D-102 / 718-368-5975  [http://www.kbcc.cuny.edu/Counseling_Services/](http://www.kbcc.cuny.edu/Counseling_Services/)

Student Wellness Center / Room A-108 (E & F) / 718-368-5975

Health Services / Room A-108 / 718-368-5684  [http://www.kbcc.cuny.edu/healthservices/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.kbcc.cuny.edu/healthservices/Pages/default.aspx)

Women’s Center / Room M-382 / 718-368-4700  [http://www.kbcc.cuny.edu/sub-other/sub-student_current/Pages/womens_resource_center.aspx](http://www.kbcc.cuny.edu/sub-other/sub-student_current/Pages/womens_resource_center.aspx)

OFF-CAMPUS


We listen.