

Counseling Services

Faculty/Staff Referral Guide for Students in Crisis

The purpose of this guide is to provide faculty and professional staff with information about counseling services, referral information, and how to most effectively assist Blinn College students who are in crisis situations.

If you are seeking information on how to refer a student for Disability Services rather than Counseling Services, please see the [Disability Services](#) page for the appropriate information.

If you are a faculty or staff member seeking a counseling referral for yourself rather than a student, please see [Faculty and Staff Seeking Counseling](#).

Concerned About A Student?

Faculty and staff members are in a position to play a significant role with students who may be struggling with personal or psychological issues. More importantly, because of their ongoing (and often frequent) contact with students, faculty and staff are often able to observe signs and symptoms of a potential problem long before a student might arrive at our office for services.

It is by no means expected that faculty and staff will “provide counseling” for students. However, all employees at Blinn College should realize that because of the trusting relationship that they may develop with students, they may be approached for support and/or advice of a personal nature. Therefore, it would be helpful for faculty and staff to be able to “spot the signs” of a student who may be having emotional or psychological difficulties, to respond effectively to such students, and to facilitate an effective referral to the Counseling Services Office.

What Is Personal Counseling?

Counseling Services at Blinn College are comprised mostly of academic advisement, transfer information, career and testing services. However, a few counselors are state-licensed (LPC) and can offer a more personal kind of help which addresses non-academic issues. At times, students may encounter issues of such a nature that make it difficult to be academically successful. In this respect, personal counseling is a process in which a Counselor and a student work together to resolve issues that are of concern to the student.

In order to get the most from the counseling experience, students must be an active participant in establishing what goals are important, exploring potential solutions, and experimenting with more effective ways of perceiving or behaving.

The following are issues that college students sometimes encounter for which they might want to seek personal counseling:

- Feeling tense, worried, or depressed
- Concerned about alcohol/drug usage
- Can't concentrate or have difficulty sleeping
- Eating or body image concerns
- Feeling lonely or alienated
- Uncomfortable with people in groups
- Lacking in self-esteem
- Trouble with parent or relationships
- Grieving over the loss of a loved one

Counseling is a collaborative process that involves the development of a unique, confidential helping relationship. Counselors act as facilitators to help students better understand themselves and the world around them. Open and honest discussions of feelings, behaviors, relationships, life experiences, and circumstances with a trained counselor in a safe, confidential environment enables individuals to grow towards greater freedom in making healthy choices and taking appropriate actions for more satisfying relationships, self-concept, academic progress, and life goals.

Personal counseling offered through Counseling Services and the Center for Student Development Offices is provided by skilled mental health professionals trained in the science of human behavior. When a student meets with a designated state-licensed Counselor, he/she is meeting with someone who has had experience helping students deal with a wide range of personal and academic difficulties. A Counselor will work with the student to help him/her identify strengths, locate support resources, and to begin a process of change and growth. This generally occurs in a one-on-one setting. A student coming to Counseling Services Offices is treated with respect and is seen as an individual with unique strengths and limitations.

Academic Advising & Counseling Services Locations

Brenham: Room 206, Administration building, (979-830-4196)

Bryan: Room 157, Science building, (979-209-7250)

Schulenburg: 979-743-5200

Sealy: 979-627-7997

General Guidelines On Responding To Concerns About A Student

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 a referral is the best option.

- Bring up issues and concerns as soon as they become apparent. Ignoring disturbing behavior is unlikely to “make it go away.”
- Have a caring, concerned, nonjudgmental discussion in private, at a time and place that is conducive to a meaningful conversation.
- Listen to the student at least as much as you talk to them.
- Avoid the tendency to be critical or judgmental.
- Avoid the temptation to offer easy solutions to problems; rather, problem-solve with them regarding specific actions they may take to confront their issue(s).
- Know your own limits. While it may be a tempting proposition to “rescue” a student in distress, often deferring to professional help is appropriate and called for.
- 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.
- 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?").
- Often just listening may help.
- Listening in a non-judgmental manner often may be enough to help the student work through the problem and come up with a solution.
- Express your concern regarding the student's well-being.
- Explore what the student has done previously to solve similar situations and how it worked out.
- Allow the student the opportunity to determine what they might do to solve the problem themselves in an appropriate manner.
- Avoid becoming enmeshed (over involved) with the student and their problems.

When To Consider Referring A Student For Personal Counseling

The following are intended as *guidelines* to help you decide when to refer; they are not hard and fast rules, and your personal and professional judgment should always come into play first. However, you are not expected to be a counselor, and when in doubt about whether or not to make a referral, we encourage you to call the Counseling Office or the Center for Student Development.

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. Refer a student for personal counseling when:

- the problem is beyond your expertise
- you are not comfortable with the situation
- personality differences interfere with your ability to help
- you know the student or their family personally and you would not be an objective person to help
- the student is reluctant to talk to you even though they acknowledge they have a problem
- you are stressed yourself, pressed for time or not feeling well
- the student reminds you of someone you know who has a similar problem that hasn't been open to your suggestions
- the danger is immediate and there needs to be direct intervention because of danger to the student or someone else

Examples of student distress that do *not* necessarily, in and of themselves, suggest a referral for personal counseling:

- Discussion of a recent stressful event or situation
- Distress regarding a poor grade, financial aid denial, closed course, or other disappointment/frustration
- Normal distress in reaction to a recent upsetting event or loss
- Tearfulness due to any of the above circumstances

Examples of signs that a student may be experiencing more stress than he or she can handle, suggesting consideration of a referral to Counseling Services or other source of assistance on campus:

- Serious grade problems or a decline in the quality of work
- Extreme difficulty making decisions (classes to take, work hours, leisure time)
- Depression suggested by a sad expression, low motivation, change in eating and sleeping patterns, tearfulness, hopelessness
- Excessive worry, agitation, irritability, aggressiveness
- Strange behavior or speech
- Excessive contact with advisor or instructor regarding worries or personal concerns
- Poor hygiene or drastic change in appearance
- Social isolation/lack of support system, particularly in the context of any of the above concerns

Emergency situations which require an immediate referral to Counseling Services or Campus Police:

- Written or verbal expressions of suicidal thoughts and/or intent

- Written or verbal expressions of violence toward others
- Severe loss of emotional control
- Bizarre behavior or gross impairment in thinking ability
- Slurred speech, garbled or unintelligible talk

Making A Referral For Personal Counseling

In many cases, students may be hesitant regarding seeking professional help. They may need to know that you don't see them as a "failure" or as "weak" for doing so. If, indeed, you have decided to refer a student to our office, be prepared to give the student specific information regarding location and how to make an appointment (by calling or stopping by the office). You might try suggesting that the student "give counseling a try" by attending one session. Finally, be humble and realistic; sometimes a seed or two need be planted before a student "hears" others' concerns and actually follows through with a counseling referral. If, however, there is clear and imminent danger to the student or to somebody else, respond more aggressively by contacting campus police.

- 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 Counseling Services Office. You may want to explain the following:
 - Personal Counseling is confidential. This means that information about the student cannot be released to other college 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 session where the counselor listens to concerns and then helps the student to identify ways to effectively address these concerns.
- Give the student the Counseling Services phone number. 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 asking for an appointment.
- If the student does agree to be referred, allow them to make the call from your office or classroom right then. It is very easy to "Just let it go" if you have just told someone how you feel and they have listened. They also will be more inclined to go and keep the appointment, if you say that you are interested in how the meeting went and will ask next time you see them.
- Being honest with them is almost always the very best procedure. Tell them that you are concerned about them and want them to get the best help available. If you are uncomfortable dealing with their personal issue, go ahead and tell them. The student will be pleased that you were at least observant enough to notice they had not been behaving in the same manner recently.

- Depending on the situation, have the student explore their options of people with whom to talk. There are many possibilities such as: a clergy person, a doctor, their parent, an old trusted friend, a grandparent, etc. If they feel they have no one to talk with, suggest someone in the counseling office.
- Assure students that just because they feel they may need help at this time that it does not mean they are seriously ill. Many of us have more than a healthy level of stress at various times during our lifetimes and we all deal with it in different ways at different times.
- If you still have questions about referral, just call the Counseling Office and ask to speak a Counselor or the Counseling Director.
- If you feel that the student is in crisis, when you call, tell the Counseling Services secretary that this is an "emergency" and she will connect you with a counselor immediately. If needed, the student can be seen for a crisis appointment that day.

Crisis Situation

During the hours of 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday, students in crisis may be seen the same day on a walk-in basis. If you are confronted with a student in crisis and wish to refer him or her on an emergency basis, and if possible, please call our office prior to the student's arrival to provide us with some background information. We will gladly consult with you about how to make the referral, and discuss whether immediate intervention is necessary. Whenever possible, please inform the student in crisis that you are sharing information with us. In crisis situations, you may wish to walk the student over to our office personally.

If a faculty or staff member needs to consult about a student crisis occurring after hours, or during a weekend or holiday, other options include:

- Calling the Campus Police at:
 - Brenham – 830-4100
 - Bryan – 209-7600
- Calling 911 (9-911 on campus)
- Calling a Suicide Hot Line at 800-273-8255
- Calling Brazos Valley Rape Crisis Center at 979-731-1000

Confidentiality

We respect and protect the individual student's right to privacy and believe that a commitment to confidentiality is indispensable to effective, successful counseling.

Information which is obtained in the context of a counseling relationship may be released to other individuals and agencies only with the student's written permission. We cannot tell anyone that the student is receiving assistance at Counseling Services.

There are some exceptions to the general policy of confidentiality required by professional practice and by law. These exceptions include situations involving threats to one's self and threats to others.

Counseling Services does not initiate contact with a potential student client because of our respect for an individual's privacy. We ask that faculty, staff, parents, and fellow students refer individuals who could benefit from counseling services. If a potential student client is anxious about coming for counseling, it may be helpful to offer to accompany them to their initial session.

Faculty & Staff Seeking Counseling Services

Although our office provides counseling services only to students, we can act as a referral source to faculty/staff who are experiencing their own personal difficulties. Health care insurance generally allows for visits to psychologists, mental health counselors, etc. Employees can search the health care provider list or ask for a referral.

Other Services

Counseling Services/Center for Student Development:

- Academic Advising
- Study Skills / Time Management information
- Career Counseling
- Vocational Testing (MBTI)
- Transfer information

Office of Disability Services

- Brenham: Room 104, Administration building (830-4157)
- Bryan: Room 157A, Science building (209-7251)

Learning Lab (Tutoring)

- Brenham: Room 13, Academic building (830-4442)
- Bryan: Room 258, Library building (209-7267)

Mental Health information

- www.dr-bob.org/vpc

(This page's concept was obtained from various sources from other colleges on the web and some of the author's input: Robert Lovelidge.)