

Tips for Making Referrals

If you are concerned that someone is struggling, your goal is not to solve their problems for them, but to confront the issues as directly and constructively as possible in order to help them to seek help before problems become debilitating.

- Ask them how things are going for them; ask what they think might be contributing to the problems they are experiencing.
- Demonstrate your care and concern by listening attentively. People in distress are almost always receptive to genuine expressions of interest, care, and concern.
- Share any concerns about specific observations (i.e., “I’ve noticed . . .”). Being specific shows the person that you care enough to really notice things about them. Additionally, sharing direct observations makes it more difficult for the person to deny that there is a problem. Clearly stating your observations makes it more difficult for the student to deny that a problem exists and also lets the person know that you care enough to notice.
- Ask them what they think might be helpful.
- Suggest resources and referrals. Be specific and provide them with the name, phone number, and location of the services.
- Students may be more likely to access resources if you can provide them with information about the referral or the people in the office. For instance, “I know the counselors have been really helpful to other students in working through these kinds of situations.” OR “I think you might really connect with so-and-so.”
- Some people have negative preconceptions about counseling. Share the following information:
 - Counseling is voluntary and they can terminate the process at any time.
 - Counseling is confidential.
 - Counseling is not about telling someone what to do or how to live. Rather, counselors work to understand and see things from their clients’ perspective, and then collaboratively help them determine the solutions that are right for them.
 - Seeking counseling is a mature choice that suggests that someone is choosing to address their problems rather than run away from them. Seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness.
- Remember that except in emergency situations; the decision whether to accept a referral to counseling rests with the student. If they refuse the referral, it’s usually best to honor that decision.
 - See if you can gain an understanding of the barriers the person might be facing in taking the referral/seeking help. You can then help them identify potential solutions to those barriers.
- If it seems that the person is reluctant to talk or is minimizing real problems, honor their decisions, but acknowledge that sometimes things can become overwhelming and remind them that it can be helpful to have an objective person like a counselor to talk with.
- If you have concerns about their safety, ask directly if they are considering suicide.
- Follow up
 - With the person during the next couple of days after you make a referral.
 - Ask how they are doing.
 - Ask if they decided to make contact with the referral; if they did, ask how that went.
 - With your supervisor (if applicable).
 - Let them know your concerns for the student and the steps you took to be helpful.