Assisting Students with Emotional and/or Behavioral Concerns

Tim Paquette, Ph.D., Assistant Director
Counseling & Consultation Services (CCS)
Division of Student Affairs

Northern Illinois University

CCS Services

- Initial Consultation Appointments
  - Monday - Friday, 11:00 - 3:30
- Individual & Group Counseling
- Crisis Response & Support
- Substance Use Education Program & Eating Concerns/Body Image Assessment
- Consultation
  - With faculty, staff, & TA's/GA's
  - With students, friends, parents, & family members
  - With other mental health and health professionals
- Outreach presentations & programs
- Services are NO COST (mostly) to students

Behavioral Concerns

- Student behavior, especially sudden/significant changes, can be indicative of personal, emotional, & psychological problems
  - Often the “first sign” of concern that something is happening
  - May be more observable at first compared to underlying emotional concerns
  - Can potentially disrupt the learning environment & make it more challenging for you to manage the classroom
  - May cause you to feel concerned about your safety or the safety of others

Emotional Concerns

- Can also disrupt your classroom
  - Sometimes in more subtle ways (sometimes not)
- May cause you to feel concerned about a student’s well-being & personal safety
- Can lead to challenges to maintain professional and/or personal boundaries
  - You might feel pulled to exceed your areas of expertise and the responsibilities of your role

Tips for Interacting with Students of Concern

- Ask to speak privately whenever possible
- Stay calm & keep your emotions in check
- Clear verbal & nonverbal communication
  - Non-threatening, relaxed body language
  - Express your specific concerns & observations
  - Maintain eye contact & listen
  - Ask direct questions if necessary, including any concerns you might have about suicidal thoughts
  - Establish limits/expectations if necessary and specify what needs to happen next
- Ask how you can help/provide assistance
Barriers to Seeking Consultation

• I "should" be able to handle the situation & control my classroom
• I don't want to escalate the situation &/or I don't want to interfere with a student's personal life
• Academic freedom; wanting to encourage open discussions, dialogue, and debate in class
• Misunderstanding of FERPA and what information can be communicated to other parties on campus (FERPA vs. confidentiality)

Consult Early!

• Consultation always available
  • We can help you assess the situation & review next steps
  • We can make recommendations & offer our expertise about how we (or others) can help
• Crisis support for mental health emergencies available 24 hours
  • During the day, call CCS at 815-753-1206
  • After office hours or over weekends, also call 815-753-1206 and you will be directly connected to the CCS on-call service
  • In emergency situations, always call 911 first
• CONSULT, CONSULT, CONSULT 😊

Helpful Information is a Click Away (or you can use the phone too)

• When you are concerned about a student and feel they might benefit from or need counseling support, click the "Seeking Help for Others" link on the CCS website: www.niu.edu/counseling/help-for-others/staff-faculty/index.shtml
• If you feel others outside of CCS need to be aware of a student's non-emergency behavior, contact Student Conduct
• You can also complete a Student of Concern Report on the Student Conduct website (for non-emergency or non-urgent behavioral concerns): www.niu.edu/conduct/incident-reporting/student-of-concern.shtml

The End

Thank You!
Questions, Thoughts, Comments?