

How to Identify, Assist and Refer Students with Personal Problems and/or Disruptive Behavior

Guide for Brooklyn College Faculty and Staff

Personal Counseling Program
0203 James Hall
Brooklyn College
Brooklyn, NY 11210

718-951-5363

Identifying Students with Emotional Problems

There are three general categories of student behavior that can be signs of emotional distress: withdrawal, agitation and/or irritability, and personal communication from the student.

Withdrawal

- Excessive absences
- Noticeable lack of participation
- Continuous daydreaming
- Drowsiness or sleeping
- Disoriented responses when questioned
- Vacant staring
- Lack of cleanliness, sloppy appearance

Agitation or Irritability

- Compulsive speaking or frequent interrupting of your lecture.
- Unprovoked crying or giggling.
- Frequent sarcastic and hostile remarks.
- Sudden appearance of a speech disorder such as stuttering or difficulty articulating words.
- Inability to sit still throughout class meetings.

Personal Communication

- Written assignments reveal personal problems.
- Frequent requests for personal conferences or need to remain with you after class.
- The student tells you directly s/he is having trouble in classes due to anxiety, external problems or internal conflicts.

Assisting Students

The faculty member is usually the first member of the College community to notice a troubled student. Here are a few steps towards helping the student in distress:

Initiate contact by asking to meet with the student at a mutually agreeable time when there will be an adequate period for extended discussion, if necessary.

Meet the student in a relaxed, private setting.

- Give your reasons for seeing the student in an open and direct manner. Give your observations of the student's demeanor in class without making interpretations or conclusions. You might say you have "noticed" or "observed" some aspect of the student's behavior, or that the student "appears" to show some problematic behavior.
- Allow the student to respond; refrain from making a quick judgment or giving advice right away. Make sure that your

responses show you understand the student's dilemma, and that you care about him/her. You might say:

"I think I can understand how difficult things are for you."

"It sounds like you're having a hard time right now."

"I can see it is hard for you even to discuss how you feel."

"I understand that you believe there is nothing wrong. Perhaps I got the wrong impression."

"If you don't feel comfortable talking to me about these matters, perhaps you would find it easier to talk to a counselor, privately and confidentially."

- Try to guide the student to more fully express and clarify his/her feelings and thoughts. Some examples:

"Have there been any changes in your life?"

"We all have feelings like this sometimes. It usually helps to air how you feel, even if you can't resolve your difficulties quickly."

"The harder you try, the less successful you seem to feel."

"Try to put your feelings into words."

"Tell me more about that."

- Decide how you can most effectively help the student. Can you provide direct support to help the student resolve these problems
- Suggest that the student see a counselor in the Personal Counseling and Career Services Center if his/her problems seem too extensive or complex for you to provide direct assistance.

Referring a Student

You may need to help the student recognize and understand that his or her problems require more extensive assistance. Your task will be to help the student overcome fears of, or resistances to, seeking professional assistance.

Some ways of communicating your support are:

"We all need some kind of help at some time, even if it's only talking to someone who can listen without criticism or upset."

"It's a sign of increasing maturity when a person knows it's time to seek some help."

"It takes strength and courage to ask for help."

"Sometimes if you're unsure of what you really want to do, that creates tension and stress inside you."

"The professional services at the College are free and totally confidential. Nothing goes in your record. Nobody can find out what you would be talking about."

"Counseling has been helpful to others like yourself. You can try it and see if it helps."

- Remind the student that all counseling is confidential. If the student is still reluctant, offer to call a counselor or to escort the student to the counselor's office. Should the student feel threatened by your offer, do not pursue it. You can contact the counselor yourself and discuss the situation in confidence.
- If the student accepts your suggestion, give the student the room and phone number of the Personal Counseling Office (1303 James Hall, 951-5363).
- If the problem seems urgent, immediately contact the center Director (Dr. Kuhlman), or another member of the personal counseling staff to let us know who you have referred and your assessment of urgency. Often, students do not communicate the urgency of their problem to the receptionist and may

not be given an immediate appointment unless they do so.

- Walk the student to the Personal Counseling Office, 1303 James Hall (0203J after October '04).
- Bear in mind that a student need not be in crisis for you to refer him or her for counseling. A problem need not be overwhelming to have a negative impact on the student's academic performance. Any problem that is affecting the student's classroom behavior is sufficient reason for you to assist a student and, if necessary, make referral.

Once referred to a counselor, an assessment will be done to determine whether the student can be seen on campus for crisis intervention or short-term counseling. If long-term counseling is necessary, the student will be referred to an appropriate treatment service (low-cost, if necessary).

Crisis Intervention

Students in crisis require prompt attention. A student who is violent, physically hurt, overly distraught, or enraged may be considered a student in crisis.

- Notify the appropriate offices of the College—the Personal Counseling Office (1303 James Hall, (0203J after October '04) 951-5363), the Vice President for Student Life (2113 Boylan Hall, 951-5352) and Security (0202 Ingersoll Hall, 951-5511, 5512)—for assistance. You may want to familiarize yourself with the locations of these offices in advance so that you will know where to go in an emergency situation.
- Maintain control of the situation by staying in communication with the student.
- Be aware of your own tolerance limits. Monitor your own ability to stay calm. If you feel you are going to panic, get someone else quickly.

A student's disruptive behavior may be due to different causes. The student may be hostile and confrontational as a defense against his/ her

Overly Agitated or Enraged Student in Your Office

Students whose emotions have overwhelmed their capacity to act appropriately require time to ventilate their emotions before they can regain control. When you encounter such a person, try to do the following:

- Allow the student to express his or her feelings and do not attempt to use logic to calm him or her down. A few supportive comments from you are adequate. (For more information on handling this type of situation, see *Preventing Violence*, available at the Center.)
- Do not ask too many questions but try to ascertain the facts of the student's distress.
- When the student has calmed down, make a referral as soon as possible. If the student has not regained control by the time help arrives, determine if you should step aside in favor of the people who have responded to your call for assistance.
- If the student does not regain control while in your office call Personal Counseling (1303 James Hall, 951-5363), the Dean for Student Life (2113 Boylan Hall, 951-5352) and Security (0202 Ingersoll Hall, 951-5511, 5512) for help.
- If there is any indication of danger, leave your office immediately. (Do not ignore your "gut" feeling.) Try to walk the student to Security (0202 Ingersoll Hall, 951-5511, 5512), Personal Counseling Office (1303 James Hall, (0203J after October '04) 951-5363) or the Dean for Student Life (2113 Boylan Hall, 951-5352). Suggest that you both go together.

Disruptive Behavior in the Classroom

fear of failure. In this case the student regards the instructor as the obstacle to performing well. A second cause may be the student's

regressing to an earlier pattern of behavior as an (unconscious) attempt to alleviate his/her anxiety. Finally, the student's disruptive remarks or movement in class may be a symptom of an underlying emotional disturbance which s/he can no longer manage as the demands on the student become too great.

It is important to determine what may be the cause of the student's behavior. If you believe s/he is making you an "enemy" to deal with a fear of failure, it is necessary to reassure the student that you want him/her to do well, and that you know that being a student can be demanding. Should you conclude that the student is regressing under stress, remind him/her that you are willing to help, while gently asking that the student accept the responsibility of behaving appropriately in class. If you decide that the student's disruptive behavior is the result of a severe emotional disorder, escort the student to the Personal Counseling Office (1303 James Hall, (0203J after October '04) 951-5363), the Dean for Student Life (2113 Boylan Hall, 951-5352) or Security (0202 Ingersoll Hall, 951-5511, 5512).

Here are some suggestions for escorting a disruptive student:

- Ask the student to leave the class with you and take him/her to a place where it is quiet and there is protection for you. You might escort the student to the Personal Counseling Office (1303 James Hall, 951-5363), the Dean for Student Life (2113 Boylan Hall, 951-5352) or Security (0202 Ingersoll Hall, 951-5511, 5512).
- Choose your words carefully. Be supportive but firm. In asking the student to leave the class with you, you might say, "I need to ask you to come with me where we can talk." Continue to speak in a calm and reassuring manner, saying, "I'm sure we can work this out," or something similar.
- Keep moving away from the classroom at a measured rate and with the belief that the student will follow you. If the student does not follow, go directly to the Personal Counseling Office (1303 James Hall, 951-5363), the Dean for Student Life (2113 Boylan Hall, 951-5352) or Security (0202 Ingersoll Hall, 951-5511, 5512) for assistance.
(Asian Battered Women) (212) 732-5230
Violence Intervention Program

- When you get to a quiet and protected place, initiate conversation by asking how you can help or by asking what just happened.

Suicide Threats

All suicide threats or implied threats should be taken seriously. *Bring* the student to the Personal Counseling Office (1303 James Hall, 951-5363) or, if the center is not open, refer the student to a suicide prevention hotline (212-673-3000) or any hospital emergency room.

Important Phone Numbers at Brooklyn College

Safety and Security Office	951-5511
Personal Counseling	951-5363
Dean for Student Life	951-5352
Brooklyn College Emergency Medical Service	951-5858
Brooklyn College Student Health Clinic	951-5580
Dean of Undergraduate Studies	951-5771
Dean of Graduate Studies	951-5252
DES/SEEK Counseling	951-5931
Academic Advisement Center	951-5471
Women's Center	951-5777

Off-Campus Resources

Battered Women and Co-Dependency

Co-dependents Anonymous (CODA)	(212) 685-3002
Domestic Violence Hotline (Coalition for Abused Women)	(1-800) 942-6906
En Espanol	(1-800) 942-6908
Families of Alcoholics (CARES)	(1-800) 984-0066
Nar-Anon	(212) 496-4341
NY Asian Women's Center (Latin Battered Women)	(212) 360-5090

Children / Child Abuse

Child Abuse Hotline (1-800) 342-3720

Crisis Intervention

American Red Cross (Disaster Services) (212) 787-1000

Domestic Violence Hotline (1-800) 942-6906

En Espanol (1-800) 942-6908

Parent Helpline (212) 472-8555

Poison Hotline (212) 340-4494

Special Victims Unit, Manhattan (212) 694-3010

Brooklyn (718) 735-0516

Suicide Hotlines (212) 673-3000

(718) 389-9608

Victims Services Agency Hotline (718) 783-3700

(212) 577-7777

Food / Nutrition

Community Food Resource Center (212) 344-0195

City Harvest Hunger Hotline (212) 533-6100

Food Stamp Information (718) 291-1900

Needy Family Food Distribution Program (718) 291-1900

HIV Services and Information

National AIDS Hotline (1-800) 342-2437

NYC Dept. Of Health AIDS Hotline (212) 447-8200

Gay Men's Health Crisis Hotline (212) 807-6655

Housing and Shelter

Covenant House (under 21 years of age) (212) 727-4000

Covenant House (for children in need of housing) (212) 613-0300

Homeless Hotline (1-800) 994-6494

Brooklyn Mental Health Emergency Resources

Substance Abuse / Compulsive Disorders

AA in Spanish (212) 964-2560

Bedford-Stuyvesant/Crown Heights area:
Interfaith Hospital, Psychiatric Emergency (718) 604-6565

Borough Park area:
Maimonides Community Health Center (718) 283-7879
(718) 283-8106

Canarsie / Flatlands area:
Kings County Hospital, Psychiatric Emergency (718) 245-3131
Brookdale Medical Center, Psych. Emergency (718) 240-5761

Williamsburg/Bushwick:
Woodhull Hospital, Psychiatric Emergency (718) 963-8439

Miscellaneous

Health Science Center at Brooklyn (718) 270-1000

Heat Line (718) 291-1900

Mayor's Actionline (City services complaints) (212) 788-9600

Medicaid Information (718) 291-1900

Missing Persons (212) 374-6913

Rape / Sexual Assault

Bellevue Hospital Rape Crisis Program (212) 562-3435

Crime Victims Hotline (212) 577-7777

NYC Sex Crimes Report Line (212) 267-RAPE

Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital,
Rape Crisis Intervention Program (212) 305-9060

New York Hospital Rape Crisis Program (212) 746-3104

St.Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital Rape Crisis Program. (212) 604-8068

St.Vincent's Hospital Rape Crisis Program (212) 604-8068

Runaway Hotline

National Runaway Switchboard (1-800) 621- 4000

Alcoholics Anonymous (718) 339-4777

Alcohol Hotline (212) 252-7022

Cocaine Abuse Hotlines (1-800) 444-9999

Co-dependents Anonymous	(212) 685-3002
Compulsive Gambling	1-800) 522-4700
Crack Hotline/NYS Dept. of Health	(212) 374-5725
National Council on Alcoholism	(1-800) NCA-CALL
National Institute on Drugs	(1-800) 662-HELP
Overeaters Anonymous	(212) 206-7859
Substance Abuse	(1-800) 234-0420

Women's Health / Family Planning

Planned Parenthood at the Margaret Sanger Center	(212) 274-7200
Pregnancy Healthline	(718) 230-1111
Teen Pregnancy Networks--Staten Island	(718) 447-7666

Welfare / ADC

Welfare, food stamps, heat assistance, Medicaid	(718) 291-1900
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PC.BROOKLYN.CUNY.EDU

Much of the material in this guide was originally adapted from "How to Identify, Counsel and Refer Students Who Need Special Help," prepared by Dr. Matthew Lanna and the Counseling Center Staff of Mercy College, and used with the permission of Dr. Rhea Riso, Director of the Counseling Staff.

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