

Identifying & Referring the Distressed Student

A Guide for Roane State
Community College (RSCC)
Faculty & Staff

The college years can be very stressful for many. In the contemporary climate of competition and pressure, most students adequately cope. Some students find the stress unmanageable and can interfere with learning. In some cases, these students may even disrupt the learning of others.

Your Role

Many students initially
seek assistance from
faculty or staff members.

Guidelines for identifying students in distress:

- Excessive procrastination and very poorly prepared work, especially if inconsistent with previous work.
- Infrequent class attendance with little or no work completed.
- Dependency (e.g., the student who hangs around or makes excessive appointments during office hours).
- Listlessness, lack of energy, or frequently falling asleep in class.
- Marked changes in personal hygiene.
- Impaired speech and disjointed thoughts.
- Repeated requests for special consideration (e.g., deadline extensions).
- Threats to others.
- Expressed suicidal thoughts (e.g., referring to suicide as a current option).
- Excessive weight gain or loss.
- Behavior which regularly interferes with effective class management.
- Frequent or high levels of irritable, unruly, abrasive, or aggressive behavior.
- Unable to make decisions despite your repeated efforts to clarify or encourage.
- Bizarre behavior that is obviously inappropriate for the situation (e.g., talking to something/someone that is not present).
- Students who appear overly nervous, tense or tearful.

Guidelines for Interaction:

- Talk to the student in private.
- Express concern. Be as specific as possible in stating your observations and reasons for concern.
- Listen carefully to everything the student says.
- Repeat the essence of what the student has told you so your attempts to understand are communicated.
- Avoid criticizing or sounding judgmental.
- Consider the RSCC Counseling Center as a resource and discuss referral with the student.
- If the student resists referral and you remain uncomfortable with the situation, contact the RSCC Counseling Center to discuss your concern.

How to Make a Referral to the Counseling Center:

- Suggest that students call or come in to make an appointment. However, it is usually more effective to assist the student by calling for an appointment with the student present. You may request a specific staff member or the receptionist can assign one. Write down the appointment time, date, and counselor for the student.

- If you feel the situation is an emergency or urgent enough to require immediate attention, after identifying yourself as faculty or staff, tell the receptionist that the student needs to see a counselor immediately. It may be necessary for you to walk the student to the Counseling.

If you are concerned about a student but unsure about the appropriateness of a referral, feel free to call one of the RSCC Counseling, Career, and Disability Services offices below:

Roane County Campus

Dunbar Bldg., Room 107

(865) 882-4546

Oak Ridge Branch Campus

Room B-102

(865) 481-2003



(Revised from Virginia Tech Counseling Services.)