

REFERRAL GUIDE FOR PARENTS, STAFF & FACULTY

The purpose of this booklet is to provide parents, faculty and professional staff with information about Counseling Center services, referral information, and how to assist PSC students most effectively. We, at the Counseling Center, hope that this information is helpful to you throughout the year.

Counseling Center Services

The Counseling Center has a qualified counselor, (and occasionally graduate student interns) who offers counseling services to students. Any full- or part-time student, currently enrolled at Paul Smith's College is eligible for confidential counseling. During this appointment, the student and a counselor will discuss counseling options which may include group, individual, or couples counseling at the Counseling Center or in the community. All services provided by the counseling Center are free and confidential.

The staff is committed to providing counseling services and preventive programs which promote personal, academic and career development as well as the psychological well-being of students. Available services include:

Group Counseling

Individual Counseling

Couples Counseling (at least one member of the couple must be a PSC student)

Crisis Intervention (including sexual abuse and/or assault)

Victim's Assistance

Workshops (including procrastination, stress management, diversity, relationships, etc.)

Referrals to Community Mental Health Care Providers

Informational Brochures & Handouts on Various Topics

Internet-Based Self-Help Information

Consultation Services for Faculty, Staff, and Residence Life

Location: The Counseling Center is located in Weill Student Center 017. The office is open between the hours of 8:00 am-4:30 pm, Monday through Friday. The phone number of the Counseling Center is X6358.

What is Counseling?

Counseling takes many different forms depending on the roles of the people involved. Friends counsel and support each other through advice-giving, listening, and providing whatever assistance is needed. HEOP, academic advisors, and other College offices routinely provide information on issues that are important to the student's life, academics, future, and well-being. Parents, faculty and professional staff working directly with students often are the first to know that a student is struggling academically and/or personally.

The counseling that is offered by the Counseling Center is provided by trained staff who are skilled professionals. When a student meets with a Counseling Center staff person, he/she is meeting with someone who has had years of experience helping students deal with a wide range of personal and academic difficulties. Counseling Center staff work with the student to help him/her identify strengths, locate support resources, and to begin a process of change and growth. This work may occur one-on-one with an individual counselor, or in one of the Center's popular groups where 4-10 students meet together with one or two counselors. Whatever the format, a student coming to the Counseling Center is treated with respect and is seen as an individual with unique strengths and limitations.

Why Students Come to the Counseling Center of the SDC

Students at PSC are wonderfully diverse. They come from many different backgrounds, cultures, states, and families. They cannot be type-cast as simply "a student" since that is but one aspect of their lives. Students come to the Counseling Center for help with concerns such as academic performance, test anxiety, poor concentration for course-work, interpersonal relationships, career decisions, and low self-confidence. They also come for help with issues related to their families, suicidality, past sexual or physical abuse, current physically abusive relationships, drug/alcohol abuse, eating disorders, rape/sexual assault, life threatening illnesses, and intense grief over losses such as the death of a parent, child, or close friend. Over the course of their education, students go through numerous changes, and pressures. During these times of crisis or stress, talking with a counselor at the Counseling Center may be a helpful option.

Your Role as a Parent, Faculty, or Staff Member

Parents, faculty and staff members on campus have the unique opportunity of having ongoing, direct contact with students and are in the position to identify students who are struggling. 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 the best option is a referral.

Identifying Students Who May Benefit from a Referral

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:

1) Talking About Suicide: If a student talks or writes about suicide, this should be taken seriously. Suicidal thoughts are in themselves not necessarily dangerous but, if they include actual plans for suicidal behaviors, the severity of the danger to the student increases dramatically. Suicide is often considered an option when the person feels hopeless, trapped, out-of-control, and/or depressed. To make the assumption that talk of

suicide is aimed solely toward getting attention can be a potentially fatal mistake. If you become aware of a student who is thinking about suicide, please make an immediate referral to the counseling portion of the SDC. You can also call us for a consultation if you are unsure of an appropriate intervention or if the student is reluctant to take your referral. If a student clearly states the intent to commit suicide, call Student Development at X6340 during the day, or Campus Safety (they will contact a counselor) at X6300 at night.

2) Stating a Need for Help: Students will often come to parents, faculty or staff members with direct requests for assistance. Through talking with the student, you may feel the problems are beyond your scope of knowledge or power to change. Listening carefully to students and their concerns can provide ample evidence to support a decision to refer. If a student comes to you, he/she obviously feels that the relationship with you is important enough to value your opinion and response.

3) Observable Changes: Some students do not directly tell you that there is a problem but their behaviors can be telling indicators. Distinct changes in academic performance, withdrawal from others, change in class participation, crying, outbursts of anger, increased or decreased activity, and poor attendance are examples of behavioral changes that you may observe. Severe depression, extreme activity level, conversations that do not make sense, and a marked decline in personal hygiene are examples of possibly serious psychological problems. Any of these observable changes may merit a referral to the SDC.

4) Psychosomatic Complaints: Students who report physical illness or symptoms that cannot be supported by medical evidence may be experiencing psychological problems. Psychosomatic symptoms are very real for the student and should not be treated lightly. Tension headaches, changing in eating patterns, sleep disturbances, fatigue, stomach aches, and other physical pain symptoms are some examples of psychosomatic complaints.

5) Alcohol and Drug Abuse: Coming to class or a meeting when intoxicated or high is a sign that drug and/or alcohol abuse is a serious problem. Often people drink or take drugs as a way to cope with and alleviate other problems in their life. Unfortunately, the substance abuse itself becomes a problem, one that interferes with social, academic, and work functioning.

6) Academic Problems: Students who have noticeable negative changes in their academic performance also may be feeling overwhelmed with other areas of their lives. Some students come to classes with difficulty concentrating, performing well on exams, and achieving academically. If the possibility of a learning disability exists, a counselor can meet with a student for a consultation appointment to discuss evaluation and treatment options.

Please note that we are not always in a position to make a judgment concerning the validity of concerns such as poor concentration, attendance in class or exams, or a

requested leave of absence. We feel that Professors, Residence Life staff, and others, who have more ongoing contact with the student are in a better position to make decisions about the academic work of a student than the Counseling Center, where we may only see the student for a single initial appointment. In certain cases, where we have seen a student over an extended period of time in individual counseling, we may be able to make recommendations.

7) Additional Considerations in Making a Referral: Along with the factors listed above, parents, faculty and staff members should also take into account the following situations when considering making a referral:

- a. A student asks for assistance with a problem that is outside of your range of knowledge.
- b. Helping the student with the problem would compromise and/or change the status of your relationship with the student (e.g. a student asking for money, a place to live, access to contacting you at home if in crisis).
- c. The student feels uncomfortable talking to you about the problem.
- d. The assistance and support you have already provided does not seem to be addressing the problem effectively.
- e. You and the student have personality differences or conflicts that cannot be resolved and would interfere with the help you might provide.
- f. You find yourself feeling overwhelmed, overly responsible for, and worried about the personal safety of the student.
- g. The student is disrupting others. A referral to the SDC is appropriate if the student is a significant and ongoing disturbance to others.

How to Make a Referral for Counseling

If a student approaches you with a problem, take the time to listen in a non-judgmental and respectful manner. If you wish to approach the student with your concerns, do so directly and state your concerns clearly. The following recommendations may help to make the process of providing a referral easier:

- 1) 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.
- 2) Suggest in a caring, supportive manner that the student may benefit from meeting with a counselor at the SDC. You may want to explain the following:

a) Counseling at the Counseling Center is confidential. This means that information about the student cannot be released to other PSC 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).

b) The services are free to currently registered, full- and part-time students.

c) The first meeting is an intake/consultation session where the counselor listens to concerns and then helps the student to identify ways to effectively address these concerns.

3) Give the student the Counseling Center phone number (327-6340). 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 speaking to the secretary or a counselor and asking for an appointment.

4) If you feel that the student is in crisis, you can call the SDC or have the student call from your office. Tell the SDC secretary that this is an "emergency" and she will connect you with a counselor immediately. If appropriate, the student will be scheduled for a crisis appointment that day.

Counseling Center Procedures For Making a Counseling Appointment

Students can usually set up an appointment within a week of their call to our center. If it is an emergency, students can be seen on the day of their call.

Students are asked to come in for their initial intake appointment to fill out basic informational forms and then meet with a counselor. The counselor and the student discuss counseling options in this first intake appointment and decisions are made regarding the next steps for the student to pursue. These steps may include: no counseling, counseling at the SDC, a medical evaluation referral, a substance abuse evaluation referral, a referral to a community mental health center or practitioner or, in emergency cases, a determination that the student should be sent to the North Star Mental Health Clinic, or the emergency room at a local hospital for further evaluation.

Some Comments on Confidentiality

The counselors at the Counseling Center are under ethical and legal obligations not to release confidential information. Counselors adhere strictly to confidentiality laws for their profession and can only break confidentiality if the student gives direct written permission. One exception, in the case of danger to self or others, involves breaking confidentiality of the student without permission so that student or others are protected.

If a student tells us that you referred him/her and gives written permission, a counselor will call you to notify you that the student did attend the initial intake appointment. If you would like feedback, you can call us to tell us that you have made a referral and we will

directly ask the referred student for permission to contact you. We cannot provide additional information other than the fact that the student did attend the first intake appointment. If you would like more information about a student's contact with the Counseling Center, you can directly ask the student. The student can make decisions about how much he/she wants to reveal to others.

Consultation Services

The Counseling Center provides consultation services to the entire PSC community. We are glad to answer any questions that you may have about our services, your concerns about a student, and referral options. Feel free to call and talk about your concerns regarding a student and, if indicated, how you can make an effective Counseling Center referral.

Workshops

The SDC also provides workshop presentations that you may be interested in providing to your class or student group. We offer classroom intervention workshops on Test Anxiety; Stress Management; Harassment, Time Management; Substance Abuse, Myers Briggs Type Indicator and "Getting What You Want, Wanting What You Get" which can be requested for classes with a maximum of 25 students. We can also design specific workshops for your group based on group needs and interests. If you are interested in these workshop services, please call 327-6340 for more details. While we cannot guarantee that all workshop requests will be met, we will make every effort to do so.

Conclusion

The Counseling Center staff strives to provide services to PSC students that will enable them to succeed academically, personally, and in life. We know that you are concerned with similar goals and we believe that we can accomplish these goals most effectively the closer we work with each and every one of you. We look forward to hearing from you if you have questions, suggestions, and feedback about our services. We hope that this handbook has provided you with helpful information about the SDC's counseling services, resources, and policies.

(Used with the permission of the Division of Student Affairs, SUNY Buffalo Counseling Center, and adapted for Paul Smith's College.)

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