Recognizing warning signs

Recognizing the warning signs of a student in distress does not require special training or expertise. It does, however, require an awareness of the signs they present. This will help you better assess whether someone is experiencing stress or for whom you should refer to the Habif Health and Wellness Center. If you receive a troubling message from a student, try to speak with them in person.

It is not necessary for you to solve the student's problem; you do not have to act as an therapist. Just listen patiently and receptively and "be yourself" as much as possible. Do your best to eliminate the stereotypes of listening to a statistic. You are providing a support when a student can walk away feeling that their concerns have been heard and understood in some cases, you may be the first person who has really listened to the student.

Tips for Making a Referral

• Assure the student that seeking counseling is a sign of strength, not weakness.
• Tell the student why your observations of their behavior have led you to believe that their concern is urgent and requires action.
• Share your knowledge of the referral services and/or the problem.
• Respect the student's right to reject the referral suggestion, or to think about it first.
• When appropriate, encourage the student to take the first step.

Express concern

Explain your observations of their behavior, their mood, or the difficulty or stress they are experiencing. For example:

DO say, "I've noticed you've been slacking off lately."
DONT say, "I've noticed you've been slacking off lately."

If you have immediate concerns about a student's safety on campus, stay with them and notify Habif at 314-935-6695 during business hours (after hours, if they refuse assistance, call campus police at 314-935-5555). If they are off campus, call 911 or have them go to the nearest emergency room.

Make a referral

In addition to the warning signs listed previously, consider referring a student when:

• you feel you have reached the limits of your ability to help the student;
• you identify them too closely with the student and/or the problem;
• a student has physical complaints that may be manifestations of psychological or medical problems;
• a student expresses thoughts of suicide.

Ethically, intervention on your part is required only if a student's immediate safety is in question. This will help you better assess whether someone is experiencing stress or for whom you should refer to the Habif Health and Wellness Center. If you receive a troubling message from a student, try to speak with them in person.

Physical / Psychological

• Visible, sudden increase or decrease in weight
• Obvious substance abuse, such as smell of alcohol, slurred speech, bloodshot eyes
• Marked changes in concentration, motivation, or energy level
• Sudden withdrawal from interactions with faculty, staff, and peers
• Inappropriate or exaggerated behavior, aggressiveness, emotional outbursts, crying

Other factors to consider

• Written or verbal statements that indicate depression
• Direct statements indicating family problems or personal losses (death of a loved one, breakup, etc.)
• Changes in attendance or social behavior
• Concern about a student from peers
• Your own sense, however vague, that something is seriously wrong.

Listen to the student

If a student shares their concerns with you, it is important to simply listen in an non-judgmental way. This will help you better assess whether the warning signs are present, that you should refer the student to the Habif Health and Wellness Center. If you receive a troubling message from a student, try to speak with them in person.

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