

General Suggestions

Find a private setting in which to talk to the student about your concern. Allow time to attend to the student without interruption.

Try to understand the student's concerns without necessarily agreeing with him or her.

Determine what the student would like you to do and decide whether this is a role you are comfortable playing. If it is not, say so.

Avoid making commitments you may not be able to keep, such as extending a level of confidentiality you cannot assure.

When a student poses an imminent danger to self or others, this must be reported *immediately* to the Dean of Students or to the counselor.

It is difficult to play a dual role with a student by serving as teacher or supervisor and confidant. This can lead to conflicts and confusion for you and the student.

Consult with the counselor. This can be done without divulging the name of the student. The fact that you have sought consultation is also confidential.

Maintain normal work standards for the student in your classroom or work area, even though you may be flexible on how these are met.

Making a referral

One of the important steps in any relationship in which we try to aid another person is deciding when we have exhausted our ability to be of help. Going beyond this point with students exposes them to increased risk and distress and the helper and the college to the prospect of litigation.

If you decide to refer and there is time to do so, secure the student's permission to talk to someone about the matter. This can be done without divulging the student's name.

Let the student know that in addition to the services available through Student Affairs, several trained therapists are now located in Dillon. If you call someone off campus on behalf of a student, find out whether the office or individual is appropriate to the student's needs, whether fees are charged, the length of a waiting list, and the kinds of activities the student can expect in pursuing this course of action. A visit or call to the campus counselor can often save time on this step.

Report your findings to the student. Let the student decide on the next step, unless the situation involves an element of danger for the student or someone else. Do not let the student's reluctance to begin with someone else weaken your resolve that referral is appropriate.

Have the student make the initial appointment. Help with this if needed.

How Campus Counseling works at Montana Western

Counseling services through the Campus Counseling Program are *free* to all students carrying a course load of seven or more credits.

Referrals for counseling are *not* part of a student's record. Parents are notified only when danger is involved or at the student's request. Counseling records are subject to release under court order. Otherwise, no information is released without the student's written permission.

The first step is to set up an appointment with the counselor. In emergencies we see students immediately or within a short time of initial contact. Otherwise, an appointment with the counselor will be made within the week, depending upon the student's and the counselor's schedules.

Initial appointments for counseling are about an hour in length. Sessions involve assessing the current concern, developing a picture of the student's resources for dealing with it, and understanding what the student has already tried to do. Your comments can aid in this process.

Even though you refer a student, the counselor cannot tell you anything about the student without the student's written permission. We encourage students to tell you how they are progressing.

AT THE FIRST SIGN OF TROUBLE

Suggestions for Faculty and Staff

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Faculty and Staff: a first line of help !

The day-to-day business of attending college can make heavy demands on students. When they try to balance classes, studies, work, and participation in one or more out-of-class activities, their levels of fatigue and stress can mount quickly. Add to this the fact that sleep and privacy are often hard to find in a residence hall, and the potential for problems is compounded. Our experience has shown that even the most capable students are not wholly immune from such distress.

Faculty and staff are in a good position to see early signs of distress. Students often seek out staff members with whom they feel safe and use them as outlets for their frustrations and concerns.

However, unless faculty and staff proactively respond to students they observe to be “in trouble” conditions can quickly deteriorate and the student drops out.

EARLY INTERVENTION IS ONE OF
OUR BEST RETENTION TOOLS!

Trouble Signs

Several years ago, the University of Alaska-Fairbanks developed a structured approach to the signs troubled students often display. Our adaptation of that system follows:

Level 1

Behavior at this level may not disrupt others in your class or work area but may signal that something is wrong and help is needed. For example:

- ❑ Chronic grade problems or a change from consistently good to poor class or job performance.
- ❑ Excessive absences, especially if the student’s previous attendance pattern has been good.
- ❑ Consistently unusual or markedly changed pattern of social interaction, such as extreme attempts to avoid participation, extreme nervousness when called upon, or excessive anger or aggression.
- ❑ Behaviors which are unusual for most students or this student in particular: lethargy, depressed mood, excessive activity, rapid speech, swollen or red eyes, grooming changes, excessive perspiration even in cool weather, and extreme sleepiness.

Things to do at Level 1

Talk with the student about the behavior and its effect upon performance in class or the work area.

If the situation does not immediately improve, refer the student to the Campus Counseling Program for early intervention. Delaying could cost the student their academic success and Montana Western a student.

Level 2

These behaviors may indicate significant emotional distress and a need for professional assistance.

- ❑ Repeated request for special consideration, such as deadline extensions, without adequate explanation.
- ❑ Behavior which exceeds the limits of decorum and interferes with your effective class or work place management.
- ❑ Unusual or exaggerated emotional responses which are inappropriate to the situation.

Things to do at Level 2

Monitor the student, keeping track of the behaviors that concern you.

These students can consume large amounts of time. Set limits on when and for how long you are available to meet with them.

Clarify in your own mind your expectations for acceptable behavior in the classroom or the work place and communicate these clearly to the student.

Unusual emotional responses are sometimes used to distract people from issues at hand. Try to stay on task when dealing with such responses.

Discuss the student with a counselor or refer for counseling.

Level 3

Students displaying these behaviors are in crisis and in need of immediate care.

- ❑ Highly disruptive, hostile, aggressive, or violent behavior.
- ❑ Inability to communicate clearly as evidenced by garbled or slurred speech, or unconnected thoughts.
- ❑ Hallucinations or paranoid thinking.
- ❑ Talk or hints of suicide as an option for a present difficulty.
- ❑ Threats of killing or otherwise harming someone.

Things to do at Level 3

Depending on the level of immediate threat, contact one of the following:

Police	911
Dean of Students	‘7900, or 925-9782
Campus Counselors	‘7388 , ‘7180, or ‘7181.

for instructions on how to proceed.

Have someone with the student at all times.

After the crisis passes, meet with one of the contacts listed to discuss your own reactions.

If the disruption occurred in class, consider inviting a counselor to facilitate a debriefing.

