The Advisor as Informal Counselor

Part of the role of academic advisor may be as an informal counselor. It is important to be aware of social issues that may arise – and to know the resources for referrals. No matter your educational background/training, be careful to keep the lines clear between your role as an advisor and personal counselor. Students should feel comfortable sharing with you, trusting your confidence, but know the boundaries so that the relationship stays healthy and appropriate to your role as academic advisor.

This list is by no means exhaustive but represents some of the most common issues that students might raise with you, as an advisor:

Rape/Sexual Assault

Self-Harm (cutting, eating disorder, burning, scratching, etc.)

Suicide

Harming others

Threats to safety

Depression/Anxiety

Abuse by family member, boyfriend, friend

Drug use or alcohol related issues

When students are up front about these things and ask for help, it is easier for you to know how to guide them. If a student volunteers this type of information, here are resources you should use:

Self-harm, depression, anxiety, abuse, death in the family, trouble adjusting to college – refer them to the Counseling Center 859-257-8701 (licensed psychologists) or University Health Behavioral Health 859-323-5511 (psychiatrists – can prescribe/monitor medication). In some cases, you might feel you need to actually walk a student over to the Counseling Center or offer to do so even if they don’t take you up on it. Call first, and tell the receptionist that you are bringing a student in crisis. There is an on-call counselor available every hour during the day.

If a student is threatening physical harm to him/herself or others, then you are required by law to call the police immediately.

A student who has been raped or sexually assaulted may not want to report the crime, but he/she could still benefit from taking advantage of resources that the Counseling Center offers as well as the resources of the Violence Intervention and Prevention

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Center (VIP) 859-257-3574. If the student wants to report a crime, then obviously you can help make that call to the police.

If, in conversation with a student, you suspect that something is going on “behind the scenes”, it’s OK to ask (e.g.) “Are you drinking a lot?” or some other probing question to identify the problem. Have resources in mind and be prepared to make a referral if the answer causes you concern.

Safety and Security –

At times, you may feel concerned/threatened by a student’s behavior. This doesn’t happen often so don’t be edgy about this. If an issue arises with a student that makes you feel insecure about safety for yourself or anyone else, there are steps to follow.

- Campus Security Agents (CSA) in all academic units. These are people identified by their position as being in consistent contact with students. The CSA is trained annually on how to deal with student emergencies. You can use this person as a resource if you encounter a student whose behavior is a concern to you.
- There is an Office of Student Concern to whom you can refer any student whose behavior is not in the range of acceptable.
- Should an issue arise in your office, do not hesitate to contact campus security. Find out if your office has a system/code to alert other personnel that you may be in danger. Many offices use signals of some kind either via phone or email.