

# Counseling Service Lewis & Clark

A guide for faculty and staff

**F**aculty and staff are often among the first in the Lewis & Clark community to become aware of students' emotional or behavioral problems and concerns. Unresolved personal issues can interfere with a student's academic success. Likewise, academic stress can trigger emotional or psychological problems. This resource guide provides suggestions on how you, as a faculty or staff member, might most effectively respond to students who are experiencing emotional difficulties and how you can use the Counseling Service as a resource.

## About the Counseling Service

The purpose of the Counseling Service is to complement Lewis & Clark's academic mission by helping students achieve success—personally, socially, emotionally, and academically—during their college years and beyond.

More than 20 percent of Lewis & Clark undergraduate students visit the Counseling Service each year. Significant numbers of law and graduate students also use the service. The most common issues for students are anxiety, depression, relationships, and academic issues.

Specifically, the Counseling Service provides the following resources:

- Individual, confidential counseling for stress, depression, family and relationship issues, loneliness, sexual assault and harassment, sexuality choices, alcohol and drugs, and other concerns.
- Periodic educational and therapy groups, depending on student needs and staff availability.
- Workshops and classroom presentations on topics such as stress management, adjustment to college, acquaintance rape, diversity issues, communication, self-esteem, and sex and intimacy.
- Training programs for faculty, staff, and student groups in areas such as motivation, stress management, communication skills, suicide awareness and prevention, and adjusting to overseas programs.
- Crisis intervention for psychological emergencies such as suicide threats, assaults, severe depression, or anxiety.
- A resource library of self-help books, handouts, and CDs that may be checked out.
- Consultation with students, faculty, and staff about behavioral and emotional problems of individuals about whom they are concerned.
- Referrals to community resources when appropriate—psychiatrists, psychologists, counselors, and therapeutic programs.
- Limited psychiatry services.

Counseling services are available to all students. In addition, faculty and staff may obtain referrals to community mental health providers.

# Warning Signs of Possible Problems

It's normal for all of us to act a little unusual at times. But certain behaviors, when they occur frequently, suggest more deep-seated psychological concerns. The following are some common signs that a student may be having difficulty and may benefit from counseling or some concerned questions from you:

*Mood:* Extreme sadness, anxiety, anger, mood swings.

*Physical signs:* Deteriorated grooming habits or physical state; pronounced weight changes; signs of substance abuse, such as dilated pupils, unsteady gait, slurred words, or smell of liquor on breath.

*Performance:* Concentration difficulties; deteriorated performance on tests and assignments; unexplained lateness or absences.

*Social behavior:* Extreme or inappropriate withdrawal or dependency.

*Speech:* Irrational or unusually rapid or slow speech; frequent references to problems, worthless or guilty feelings, death, or suicide.

*Note:* You don't have to pry to detect such difficulties. Students usually signal their distress quite clearly.

## What you should do:

- Take all of these signs seriously. Don't disregard what you've observed.
- If possible, meet privately with the student. Allow sufficient time for the meeting.
- Point out specifically the signs you've observed. Say you're concerned, and ask for a response. For example: "I wanted to talk to you because I notice you've been late recently, you never participate in class anymore, and you seem troubled. I'm concerned about you and would like to know if my concerns are valid."
- Discourage quick dismissals ("I'm fine—it's nothing.") Say you really want to know what's wrong.
- Listen to the student's explanation. Be open-minded about what you hear.
- Decide if the problem is an "ordinary" problem, or an emergency. An ordinary problem is anything that troubles the student but falls short of an emergency—the student's basic safety is not endangered.

### In an emergency:

- During office hours, call the Counseling Service at 503-768-7160.
- After hours (or when Counseling Service staff are unavailable), call Campus Safety at 503-768-7777, or a hospital emergency room.

**With ordinary problems, follow these steps:**

1. Inform the student about the Counseling Service located on campus: “Did you know we have professional counselors on campus to help with problems like yours? The Counseling Service is located in Templeton Campus Center next to the Student Health Service. You can call or stop by to schedule an appointment.”
2. If necessary, address the student’s fears about counseling. It may be useful to keep the following points in mind: Going to a counselor doesn’t mean you’re crazy or weak. It’s actually a sign of good health to recognize and get help for a problem. . . . All sessions at the Counseling Service are confidential. . . . The counselors are trained professionals. They’ve worked with hundreds of students. . . . If you didn’t like the counselor you saw last time, you can ask to see a different counselor this time.
  - Respect the student’s decision about counseling. If the student doesn’t go right away, he or she may reconsider later.
  - If a student is reluctant to go to the Counseling Service, remind him or her that student insurance covers limited off-campus therapy. Also remember that some students prefer to seek help with certain problems from another Lewis & Clark resource such as the dean of the chapel’s office.

## Responding to Students’ Concerns

When you become concerned about a potential problem with a student, it is helpful to be an active listener. You may also call upon Counseling Service staff for additional help.

### Active Listening

Active listening is simply the process of allowing a person to say what’s on his or her mind. When someone has actively listened to you, you probably felt that the person really understood what you were saying and feeling. Since students frequently first seek out a faculty or staff member, active listening is a useful way to uncover a student’s true concerns, so you or possibly a member of the Counseling Service staff can offer appropriate help.

Some suggestions on active listening:

- Let the student set the pace of the conversation. This gesture builds trust.
- Listen closely to what the person is saying and how he or she is saying it. Pay attention to both content (what the person is saying) and feelings (how the person feels about what he or she is saying).
- Ask open-ended questions—questions that cannot be answered by an easy “yes” or “no.”
- Respond to the student by paraphrasing back to him or her the content and feelings of your conversation. For example, “What I hear you saying is . . . (your rephrase of the issue at hand). Is that correct?”

- Avoid asking “why.” That question often makes people feel they need to defend their feelings. Instead ask, “Can you tell me more about what is going on?”

### **Consulting With Counseling Service Staff**

If you have questions about how serious a situation with a student might be or about how you might respond, consult with a member of the Counseling Service staff. Simply give us a call. We give priority to your inquiries.

When the Counseling Service is called to intervene in a psychological emergency, we may take the following steps:

- We may ask the person to come directly to the Counseling Service. We may ask you to accompany the student, if it would be helpful.
- We may involve other appropriate parties (e.g., health professionals, parents, Campus Living) to help care for the student.
- In situations where the person is potentially harmful to himself or herself (suicidal) or to others, or is unable to care for himself or herself, we may recommend hospitalization at one of the area’s inpatient psychiatric units. Involuntary hospitalization is rare and occurs only when there is an imminent risk and the person refuses to go to the facility voluntarily.

## **Confidentiality and Limitations**

The Counseling Service follows professional standards of the American Psychological Association. Regarding confidentiality, these standards prevent us from telling anyone—including faculty, staff, and parents—anything about a student’s visit to the Counseling Service, even the fact that he or she has been to our office, unless that student gives us specific permission to do so. An exception is made when there is a threat of significant harm to the student or others.

If you want to confirm whether a student has already visited the Counseling Service, the best approach is to ask the student directly.

In addition, the Counseling Service does not generally initiate contact with a student about whom there is concern, because the student could perceive such an approach as intrusive. We have found it much more effective for the faculty or staff member, who probably knows the student best, to contact the student directly. We encourage you to honestly state your concern and the reasons behind it, and to use some of the suggestions described earlier about referring the student to the Counseling Service. We invite you to consult with us at any time about this issue.

*Counseling Service*

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