

Referring a Student to the Counseling Center

Even when Union College students request help, they are often hesitant and embarrassed to do so. Thus, making referrals is a skill which necessitates tact, sensitivity, and sometimes, firmness. It is best, however, not to make the referral when the student is extremely upset or confused. Wait for the student to calm down before offering this suggestion. Making a referral will be much easier for both you and the student if you can relieve as many of their fears and answer as many of their questions as you reasonably can.

To facilitate a smooth referral, you can let the student know that...

- All information is kept strictly confidential.
- All records are kept separate from academic records and are protected by law.
- Counseling Center services are free.
- Seeking assistance is a healthy behavior. Students often feel that they must deal with their problems alone. You can point out that, while you are sure they are capable of doing so, their efforts might be enhanced by consulting with a professional.
- Meeting with a Counseling Center staff member is in the student's best interests due to the training and diversity of the staff.
- If necessary, you would be willing to walk to the Counseling Center with them (especially if you feel that is the only way to guarantee the student comes in).
- One visit does not obligate the student to more visits. They and the Counseling Center staff member will decide if more meetings would be helpful.

When making the referral, always...

- Provide the student with the Counseling Center phone number, (518) 388-6161, and remind them that you would be willing to walk them over to the Wicker Wellness Center.
- Express your sincere concern for their welfare in behavioral, non-judgmental terms and your willingness to help them.
- Contact the Counseling Center to let us know about the referral if you feel this is necessary. Try to discuss the situation with the staff member before bringing the student in, barring that it is not an emergency. Let the student know that you will be contacting the Counseling Center, and emphasize that you are trying to make the referral easier for the student. Reassure the student that you will be discussing his/her strengths along with the reason for referral.
- It is not uncommon for you to become aware of information that you believe the student's counselor should know. If this situation arises, rather than asking to speak with the student's counselor, it is best to contact the Counseling Center and speak with any counselor, even if the student has told you who they are seeing. Given the limitations of confidentiality, we cannot confirm that the student is being seen, let alone which clinician is seeing him/her. The clinician that you speak with will pass any information on to the relevant parties. This also assures the student's privacy.

After the referral is made...

It is reassuring to know if a student you referred to the Counseling Center has followed through. The best way to achieve this is to directly ask the student. This also shows the student that you are still concerned for their well-being.

We will advise the student to confirm follow through with you. Concurrently, but secondarily, we will seek the student's permission to contact you directly for this purpose. However, there will be times when the student will not grant us permission to contact you and will not wish to share this information with you. In these instances, both the Counseling Center and you must respect the student's wish for confidentiality, despite the discomfort this creates.