

Strategies for Resident Assistants, Head Resident Assistants, & Minerva Mentors

Residence hall staff members are often called upon to assist in situations that residents see as very important. Sometimes this can be difficult, because you are serving many roles: that of a student, RA/PAL, social individual, and more.

Below are some strategies that might help in your position.

Be Approachable/Show You Care

If residents see you as accessible and approachable, they will be more likely to come to you when they are having difficulty. They are more likely to use you as a resource if you have a visible presence in the residence hall, are available in your room (with an open door), and are present at meals. The way you choose to interact with residents on a day-to-day basis indicates your willingness to help one of your residents in a time of need. By showing your residents that you are accessible, you are showing them that you care. Taking the time to knock on a resident's door who appears to be isolated and does not have many friends communicates concern and interest and establishes a basis for future contact.

Stay Alert

Try to be alert to changes in the residence hall, such as how your residents are feeling, signs of unhappiness or stress, and/or changes in living patterns. For example, a resident who has not been sleeping well, eating, or taking care of their hygiene may be demonstrating that they may need help. If you notice significant changes in habits or appearance, remember that there are plenty of people to discuss your observations with (your RD, Area coordinator, a psychologist at the Counseling Center) or you can talk with the resident. If a roommate or another resident reports a problem, it is best to follow up with the resident themselves. Doing so lets the resident know that you, as well as other people care about them, which will help them in facing a difficult time.

Try to Understand the Issue

Residents may come to you with a clear idea of what is bothering them. They may be failing an exam, thinking of transferring, or having a personal problem. Many students at Union feel that they do not belong here, or that they are at the 'bottom of the heap' compared to their peers. Seniors may be concerned about what will happen to them after they graduate. Sometimes students are not sure what is bothering them. They may present to you with a feeling such as feeling 'blue,' anxious, lonely, or bored. Try to get the student to elaborate on the feeling, and if possible give specific

complaints. This will help you (and the student) get a better understanding of what they are feeling. If possible, try to get the student to identify why they feel they way they do. Again, this helps to clarify their feelings.

See Each Problem as Unique

Remember that each person and problem is unique. Even though similar issues present themselves, the way they are manifested and dealt with are much different. Listen to what the resident is experiencing and go from there.

Remember You Are Not Alone

Feel free to contact the Counseling Center at any point in time at 518-388-6161. Sometimes students may present to you with a problem you are uncomfortable with or are not sure how to handle. We will gladly consult with you on these issues or help you in making the referral.