AIDING STUDENTS IN DISTRESS
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GUIDELINES FOR AIDING STUDENTS IN DISTRESS

Most college students cope successfully with the demands of college life during their academic experience. But for some students these pressures might become very stressful as they balance their academic, social, work and family obligations. Some may feel isolated, sad, helpless and hopeless. The emotional and behavioral consequences are very visible on any college campus, especially the classroom.

As a faculty/staff member interacting with students, you are in a unique position to identify and help students who are in distress. You are likely to be the first person a student reaches out to for help. Your ability to recognize the signs of emotional distress and potential health issues and to make an initial intervention can have a significant impact on a student’s future well-being.

The purpose of this brochure is to help you recognize some of the symptoms of students in distress, be supportive of their needs, and facilitate appropriate referrals to the Counseling Center and Disabled Student Services. These resources are available to assist and provide consultation with you regarding problems or situations that you encounter with students.
SIGNS OF DISTRESS

Academic Problems

• Career and course indecision
• Excessive procrastination
• Uncharacteristically poor preparation or performance
• Repeated requests for extensions or special considerations
• Disruptive classroom behavior
• Excessive absence/tardiness
• Avoiding or dominating discussions
• References to suicide or harm to others in verbal statements or writing

Interpersonal Problems

• Always asking for help with personal problems
• Dependency
• Hanging around office
• Withdrawing
• Disruptive behavior
• Inability to get along with others
• Complaints from other students

Behavioral Problems

• Change in personal hygiene
• Dramatic weight gain or loss
• Frequently falling asleep in class
• Irritability
• Unruly behavior
• Impaired speech
• Disjointed thoughts
• Tearfulness
• Intense emotion
• Inappropriate responses
• Difficulty concentrating
• Physically harming self
What You Can Do?

A faculty or staff member is often the first person to recognize when a student is in distress and reach out to the student. Faculty and staff are not expected to provide personal counseling to students. Rather, faculty and staff play an important role in encouraging students to use campus resources, including facilitating a referral to the Counseling Center and Disabled Student Services.

We encourage you to speak directly to a student when you sense that he/she is in academic and/or personal distress. Tell them that you are sincerely concerned about their welfare and that you are willing to help them explore their options.

On the following pages are some specific issues you may encounter, and how you can deal with them.
ISSUES FACULTY/STAFF MAY ENCOUNTER

The Academically Underachieving Student

While it is easy to conclude that the academically underachieving student is simply unmotivated, the real situation is often more complicated. Students may be preoccupied with situational and family problems, or have emotional problems that are distracting and disabling. They may have learning disabilities, attention deficit, or substance abuse problems. Previous failures for any reason can engender a hopeless outlook and a defensive attitude of “I don’t care”.

Do:

• Inquire compassionately as to what the problems are.
• Provide enough time for student to open up. Their initial defensiveness might be off-putting to an instructor who values involvement and dedication in students.
• Help student assess the source of underachievement, e.g., distractions, preoccupations, emotional problems, depression, difficulties with underlying academic and study skills, etc.

Empathically address the difficulty of dealing with a failure mentality.

Don’t:

• Take the student problem personally or be insulted that they do not find the class engaging.
• Assume too quickly the problem is mere laziness.
• Punish the student for lack of involvement.
• Dismiss the student and problem as unworkable in one meeting.

The Anxious Student

Dealing with the unexpected and conflict are primary causes of anxiety. Unknown and unfamiliar situations raise anxiety. These students often have trouble making decisions.
Do:
• Let them discuss their feelings. Often, this alone relieves pressure.
• Remain calm and reassure students when appropriate.

   Be clear and explicit.

Don’t:
• Take responsibility for their emotional state.
• Make things more complicated.
• Overwhelm them with information or ideas.

The Substance Abusing Student
A variety of substances are available that provide escape from pressing demands. The most abused substance is alcohol.

Alcohol and other drug-related accidents remain the single greatest cause of preventable death among college students.

Do:
• Share your honest concern and encourage the student to seek help.
• Be alert for signs of alcohol and drug abuse: preoccupation with drugs, periods of memory loss, deteriorating performance in class.
• Get necessary help from University police in instances of intoxication.

Don’t:
• Ignore the problem.
• Chastise or lecture.
• In any manner encourage the behavior.

The Depressed Student
These students show a multitude of symptoms, e.g., guilt, low self-esteem, feelings of worthlessness and inadequacy. Physical symptoms include decreased or increased appetite, difficulty sleeping and how interest in daily activities. Depressed students often show low activity levels and they have little energy.
Do:

• Let the student know you’re aware he/she is feeling down and you would like to help.
• Reach out and encourage the student to express how he/she is feeling. The student is often reluctant to talk initially, yet attention from others helps the student feel more worthwhile and comfortable opening up.

  Tell the student of your concern for him or her.

Don’t:

• Say, “Don’t worry,” “Crying won’t help,” or “Everything will be better tomorrow.”
• Be afraid to ask whether the student is suicidal you think he/she may be.

The Suicidal Student

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among college students. Suicidal persons are intensely ambivalent about killing themselves and typically respond to help; suicidal states are definitely time limited and most who commit suicide are neither crazy nor psychotic.

High risk indicators include: feelings of hopelessness and futility; a severe loss or threat of loss; a detailed suicide plan; history of a previous attempt; history of alcohol or drug abuse; and feelings of alienation and isolation. Suicidal students usually want to communicate their feelings; any opportunity to do so should be encouraged.

Do:

• Be available to listen, to talk, to be concerned.
• Acknowledge that a threat or attempt at suicide is a plea for help.
• Take the student seriously – 80 percent of those attempting suicide give warning of their intent.
• Refer the student to the Counseling Center or other appropriate resources to provide additional support.

  Care for yourself. Helping someone who is suicidal is hard, demanding and draining work.
Don’t:

- Minimize the situation or depth of feeling, e.g., “Oh, it will be much better tomorrow.”
- Be afraid to ask the person if they are so depressed or sad that they want to hurt themselves (“You seem so upset and discouraged that I’m wondering if you are considering suicide.”)
- Over commit yourself and, therefore, not be able to deliver on what you promise.
- Ignore your limitations.

The following are suggestions in providing support and encouragement for students:

- Request to see the student in private.
- Briefly acknowledge your observations and perceptions of their situation and express you concerns directly and honestly.
- Listen carefully to what the student is troubled about and try to see the issue from his/her point of view without agreeing or disagreeing.
- Follow-up with the student to see how she/he is doing.
- Strange and inappropriate behavior should not be ignored. The student can be informed that such behavior is distracting and inappropriate.
- Your ability to connect with an alienated student will allow him/her to respond more effectively to your concerns.
- Help the student identify options for action and explore possible consequences; if possible offer to phone or accompany the student to the Counseling Center or the other resources.
- Avoid labeling the student’s behavior or the issues presented.
- Inform the student about what can be gained by meeting with a counselor to talk about their problems.
- Be open about the limits on your ability to help them.

If the student appears to be in imminent danger of hurting self or others, consult the Counseling Center or the police immediately. Do not promise to keep threats to self or others secret.
COUNSELING CENTER

I. How to Make a Referral

When making a referral, please use and complete the Counseling Support Referral/Follow-up form located at www.tncc.edu/sdv/counseling.

A. Beginning the Referral Process

It is recommended that the instructor discuss their academic concerns with the student and inform the student that he/she is being referred. Let the student know you are concerned about them and their well-being. Assist the student in understanding that a referral is not a rejection of them.

Suggestions for working with Emergency/Non-Emergency Referrals:

Emergency Referrals: (when the student is in imminent danger of hurting self or others)

- Take the student seriously; show concern.
- Acknowledge their call for help.
- Ask the student if they are so depressed or sad that they want to hurt themselves or someone else.
- Refer the student to the Counseling Center or other appropriate resources to provide support.

Non-Emergency Referrals:

- Encourage the student to contact the appropriate department directly to schedule an initial interview.
- Offer to let the student call from your office if you believe your extra support and encouragement will help the student make the contact.
- Discuss confidentiality of services that are outlined on the next pages of this brochure.
- Provide information on other appropriate campus resources using the phone numbers listed at the back of this brochure.
B. During the referral process

Once the student has been referred, the Office of Student Success will make an attempt to contact the student and invite him/her to discuss the referral for possible solutions.

Interventions may include a referral to an appropriate outside agency or other campus resources such as career resources, financial aid, tutorial services, Math or Writing Center, participation in Success Seminars, academic advisors or counselors, and division dean.

C. After the referral process

The referring faculty will be notified that a consultation has taken place and what steps were suggested to improve the academic situation.

College policies on confidentiality of student information will be respected and no personal matters will be shared without the permission of the student. However, the benefits of better communication with the instructor may be one of the recommendations discussed with the student.

II. Scheduling an Appointment

To schedule an appointment, a student can visit the Counseling Center at Griffin Hall, Room 201, or call the Center at (757) 825-2800 between the hours of 8 a.m. and 7 p.m., Monday through Friday. Initial appointments are usually available on the same day a student contacts us or very soon thereafter. Emergency appointments are also available.

III. First Session

The student will be asked to complete paperwork prior to meeting with a counselor, which provides us with basic personal information. After that, the student will meet with a counselor for approximately 20 to 30 minutes to assess their situation.

If it is determined that personal counseling is appropriate, the student will be referred to a therapist or therapy group for ongoing help.

Sometimes the students will be referred to another agency on campus or in the community for treatment. In some instances, the student’s concerns are effectively addressed in the intake session and no further psychological help is needed.
IV. Outreach and Consultation

The Counseling Center staff and faculty provide workshops and programs to the TNCC community on various topics. These workshops and programs may be customized to meet your needs.

Topics include:

**Personal Development**
- Anger Management
- Campus Safety and Security
- Depression
- Money Matters
- Time Management
- Family Matters (Parenting)
- Health Matters
- Relationships

**Academic Development**
- Computer Skills
- Memory & Concentration
- Study Skills– Math
- Test Taking– Essay Exams & Multiple Choice Exams
- Test Taking– Math Exams

**Academic Success**
- Note taking
- Study Skills–Reading
- Test Taking– Final Exams (All classes)
Personal/Individual Consultation

Example Form

Confidential

To: Counseling Services at (check one)
- Main Campus (Hampton) 757.825.2827
- Historic Triangle Campus 757.253.4755

From: (Faculty or Staff Member) (Phone) (Mail)

Date:

Re: (Student) (SSN/EmplID) (Course)

I have spoken with this student about his/her:
- Insufficient preparation for class
- Insufficient class participation or attendance
- Personal conflict with another student or me
- A personal concern
- Non-compliance with class structure or rules, code of conduct & expectations
- Other

Other information (if any):

______________________________

, this referral is NOT disciplinary in nature nor is it mandatory that you follow through with the referral. However, I want you to be a successful student at Thomas Nelson Community College. I encourage you to follow-up by either:

- Calling the office checked above & schedule an appointment with a counselor or
- Dropping by the office checked above & scheduling an appointment with a counselor or
- Talking with the counselor by the phone when he/she calls you regarding this referral.

Would you like to receive follow-up information concerning the student’s progress as a result of your referral?

Yes ( ) No ( ) Comments: _______________________________

Would you like this referral to remain confidential? Yes ( ) No ( )

Referral Follow-Up:

College policies on confidentiality of student information will be respected and no personal matters are shared without the permission of the student. However, the benefits of sharing information with the professor may be one of the recommendations discussed with the student.

DISTRIBUTION: White-Student, Canvas-Counselor, Pink-Faculty or Staff

A step on the path to SUCCESS at Thomas Nelson Community College
Academic Misconduct/Disruptive Student
Faculty Referral Form

Example Form

Academic Misconduct/Disruptive Student
Faculty Referral Form

Faculty Name: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________

Department: ___________________________ Phone: ___________________________ E-Mail: ___________________________

Course Name: ___________________________ Section #: ___________________________ Semester: ___________________________

Student Involved in the Misconduct (please fill out a separate form for each student involved):

Name ___________________________________ Student # ___________________________ Phone: ___________________________

Description of Incident (dates, location, names of witnesses):

___________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________

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___________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________

If additional space is needed, please use the back or attach additional sheets.

Have you met with the student to discuss this situation?  __Yes  __No  __Scheduled To Meet ____________ Time & Date

If yes, please describe the discussion and any agreements made:

___________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________

What action would you recommend for the student (i.e., grade reduction, failure for course, etc.)?

___________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________

Faculty Signature: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________

Submit this form to: Office of Student Success – Hampton Campus
Hastings Hall, Room 323
99 Thomas Nelson Drive
Hampton, VA 23670

CONFIDENTIAL
DISABLED STUDENT SERVICES

Mission

Thomas Nelson Community College is committed to creating an accessible environment for students with disabilities, while allowing the student an opportunity for growth, greater responsibility and empowerment.

How do students find out if they are eligible for services?

The student is responsible for self-identification and for obtaining and presenting current disability documentation from a professional who is qualified to assess his/her particular disability. Students should contact Disabled Students Services (DSS) at 825-2867, or 825-2833 to schedule an appointment with the DSS counselor.

We recommend that they contact the office 30 days before the semester begins to ensure that necessary services and accommodations are in place at the start of classes. Students will need to bring in the appropriate documentation (psychological evaluation, physicians statement, audiogram, etc.) to the initial appointment. The counselor can let students know what kind of documentation will be required, based on the nature of the disability.

Who is qualified?

The Americans with Disabilities Act states that a person with a disability is one who has a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities including walking, seeing, hearing, breathing, learning, and working. An “otherwise qualified” student is one who meets the academic and technical standards required for admission or participation in the specific program with or without reasonable accommodations.
What are the responsibilities of students, faculty, and the Disabled Student Services Office?

**Responsibilities of the DSS Office**

- Determine student eligibility for services
- Authorize appropriate academic accommodations

Assist and or consult with faculty (regarding accommodations, address questions or concerns regarding general disability or individual student issues)

**Responsibilities of the Student**

- Register with Disabled Student Services
- Provide current documentation of disability to DSS Office
- Complete accommodations forms with DSS Office
- Give accommodations forms to faculty and review procedures for receiving accommodations
- Students are not required to disclose the nature of disability, but are HIGHLY encouraged to do so

Inform DSS Office of any problems or concerns throughout the semester

**Responsibilities of the Faculty**

- Respect students’ right to privacy/confidentiality
- Review accommodations forms with students.
- Contact DSS Office prior to signing form, if there are any concerns with requested accommodations
- Provide accommodations to students, as listed on accommodation forms

Students ARE NOT entitled to accommodations, unless they have registered with the Disabled Student Services Office.
What services and accommodations are available?

A reasonable accommodation is a modification or adjustment to a course, program, activity or facility to enable equal access for qualified students with disabilities. Requests for accommodations and services are reviewed on a case-by-case basis and are determined by the nature of the student’s disability.

Some examples of possible accommodations are:

- Notetakers
- Textbooks in Alternate Formats
- Testing Modifications
- Sign Language Interpreters
- Assistive Technology
OFFICE OF STUDENT SUCCESS
HAMPTON CAMPUS (OSS-H)

• Joyce V. Johnson  Dean of Student Success
  Phone: 825-2827  *e-mail: johnsonj@tncc.edu
• Deborah Swinton  Administrative & Program Specialist
  Phone: 825-2827  *e-mail: swintond@tncc.edu
• Marilyn Starkes  Counselor (SDV Coordinator)
  Phone: 825-2827  *e-mail: starkesm@tncc.edu
• Janina Arrington  Counselor (Faculty Advising)
  Phone: 825-2862  *e-mail: arringtona@tncc.edu
• Tonya Burton  Academic Planning & Transfer Center Coordinator
  Phone: 825-3860  *e-mail: burtont@tncc.edu
• Carmen Croswell  Counselor (Advising & Gatoritation)
  Phone: 825-2790  *e-mail: croswellc@tncc.edu
• Veronica Dempsey  Transfer Specialist
  Phone: 825-3647  *e-mail: dempseyv@tncc.edu
• Kristi Escobar  Academic Advisor
  Phone: 825-2949  *e-mail: escobark@tncc.edu
• George Fenigsohn  Counselor (Advising & Crisis Support)
  Phone: 825-2835  *e-mail: fenigsobng@tncc.edu
• Addie Gaskill  Counselor (Advising & Registration)
  Phone: 825-2831  *e-mail: gaskilla@tncc.edu
• Linda Hubbard  Counselor (Advising & Registration)
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• Richard Hurst  Counselor (Disabled Student Services)
  Phone: 825-2833  *e-mail: hurstr@tncc.edu
• Claude Jordan  Education Support Specialist
  Phone: 825-3510  *e-mail: jordanc@tncc.edu
• Thomas Kellen  Counselor (Advising & COL)
  Phone: 825-2834  *e-mail: kellent@tncc.edu
• Tschenavia Patterson  Academic Advisor (Career Liaison)
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• Chad Smith  Counselor (College Success Seminars)
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OFFICE OF STUDENT SERVICES
HISTORIC TRIANGLE (OSS-HT)

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  Phone: 258-6525  *e-mail: arcementk@tncc.edu
• Nancy Bailey  Counselor (Advising & Disabled Student Services)
  Phone: 253-4331  *e-mail: arcementk@tncc.edu