Personal Counseling Services
Faculty and Professional Consultation and Referral Guide
Lisa Mattila, LMHC --- Personal Counselor
Student Development Center --- Susan B. Anthony Building --- Room 114

In addition to counseling students, the personal counselor also provides support to faculty and staff members who have concerns about their students. The personal counselor is a good resource to help clarify student behavior issues.

The personal counselor is also available to present workshops on a variety of topics such as:

- ✓ Stress Management
- ✓ Test Anxiety
- ✓ Conflict Resolution
- ✓ Interpersonal Skills
- ✓ Workplace Communication

What are some of the signs that might indicate a student is struggling?

Faculty and staff are often the first to notice changes in a student's behavior. It is important to recognize any of the following behaviors and if appropriate, make a referral to Personal Counseling:

Academic problems: Some students find college work more difficult than they had anticipated. While many will go through a successful adjustment period, those who demonstrate a consistent discrepancy between performance and potential may welcome some assistance. Test anxiety, repeated absences, poor time-management skills or an inability to comprehend material may be issues which counseling can address.

Significant changes in mood, appearance or behavior: It is often difficult for students to share with others that they are having a problem. Observing a change in appearance, a need for constant attention, a decline in academic performance or poor attendance may, however, alert you that a student is struggling. If a student engages in harassment or expresses unwarranted anger toward you or another student, intervention on different levels such as campus security or the Dean of Students may be required. The presenting behaviors need to be addressed immediately and the personal counselor can help students with underlying issues.

Suicidal feelings: If a student writes about or talks about suicide, it is important to let the student know you are concerned about them. All suicidal feelings should be taken seriously until the student has been assessed by a counselor, who can help determine the student's needs and appropriate treatment.

Substance and alcohol abuse: Many students wonder if they are drinking too much or may have other questions about substance abuse. You may note behavioral changes such as an inability to focus, a decline in performance or inconsistent class attendance.

Changes in personal relationships: Students who have had changes in their personal lives may be more sensitive or may find it difficult to relate appropriately with others. Traumatic events such as divorce, separation, death of a family member or friend, significant illness or changes in family responsibilities can all contribute to a student's level of stress. If a productive student's performance deteriorates, you may wish to have a conversation about your concerns and introduce the idea of counseling and or other resources.

When should I refer a student to counseling?

Each faculty or staff member has a different comfort level when addressing student issues. Aside from some of the signs and symptoms such as lack of productivity and disruptive behavior that may indicate the need for counseling, there are other useful guidelines for you to consider:

- ✓ You feel that the student is presenting a problem or a request that is outside of your range of knowledge.
- ✓ You feel a dual relationship with a student could become problematic. It may be difficult to balance being both faculty member/staff and the student's confidant.
- ✓ You sense that your student is struggling even though they haven't shared anything specific with you.
- ✓ You have already tried to help the student but the situation hasn't changed and you realize the student may need more assistance.

How do I refer students to Personal Counseling?

When you have determined that counseling might be beneficial, it is important to present your concerns in a sensitive manner while being as specific as possible. For example, if a student has not been doing as well academically and you have noticed that the student appears withdrawn, a private conversation could be warranted.

Some students feel reluctant about talking with a counselor because they feel they should be able to "handle this on their own." Reassure them that seeking counseling is a sign of strength and will help them to "get back on their own."

Students also worry that counseling may affect their academic record. Remind them that what they share with their counselor is confidential and will not appear on their record.

You can also help a student who is struggling with some issues by calling the counseling office for them or by walking them over to the office in the Student Development Center. The choice of following through on counseling is up to the student. A student may choose

to meet once or twice with the counselor or may meet on an on-going basis throughout the semester.

What do I do if a student expresses suicidal feelings?

If a student expresses suicidal feelings or expresses an action or plan involving harm to oneself or others, it is important to get help as soon as possible by calling the personal counselor at extension number 1609 [Mon-Fri, 8:30 a.m.– 4:30 p.m.] If the student is in the process of hurting themselves/others, call Campus Security at extension number 6100.

Other serious concerns warranting immediate attention are when students behave in a disruptive manner or when a student has received a threat of violence. During these circumstances it is important to notify Security at extension 6100, or call the Student Development Center, as soon as you are made aware of this threat.

If you determine that the student is at **serious risk**, it is important to **call campus security 6100 or call 911**. Please do not handle these types of situations on your own. Get assistance to ensure your safety as well as the student's safety and well being.

In cases of psychological crisis other community resources that can be utilized are noted below:

Brien Center (Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services of the Berkshires)
24-hour Crisis Line 413-499-0412

Berkshire Medical Center 413-447-2000

Elizabeth Freeman Center (Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault) 413-499-2425
413-443-0089

It is our hope that this guide has addressed many of your concerns. You are also invited to visit Personal Counseling Services at any time, located in the Student Development Center in the Susan B. Anthony Building. Feel free to call Lisa at extension 1609 or send an email to lmattila@berkshirecc.edu.