

THE DIT COUNSELLING SERVICE

A RESOURCE GUIDE for Staff

Making an effective referral

*Dr. Susan Lindsay
Head of DIT Counselling Service*

The following tips may be helpful in making an effective referral:

- Explain clearly why the student should seek assistance from another source.
- Suggest the offer of a referral to the counsellor. If you are particularly concerned about a student's immediate welfare, you may accompany them or make the initial contact with the student's permission. Referral to a support service can only be made with a student's consent. A student cannot be forced to avail of a service; neither can the service pursue a student who does not want to avail of its service.
- If the student agrees to a referral, move directly towards arranging an appointment. With the student present, call the secretary to the counselling service or the counsellor directly and make an appointment. As appropriate, suggest to the student that with permission, you are willing to give information about the nature of the problem and the reason for referral. The counselling service will offer an appointment as soon as possible. While your offer to make the calls is an expression of concern, some students may want to make the call themselves and would appreciate the use of your phone. If the student is not ready to schedule the appointment, encourage seeking help as soon as possible rather than putting it off. If you have a serious concern about a student and you wish to make an immediate referral to a counsellor, it is always advisable to involve the student in the decision to see a counsellor. In other words *always seek the consent of a student before you arrange for the counsellor to see him/her.*

Tips for Referring Reluctant Students

When you believe that a student might benefit from professional help, it is best to be honest about your reasons and express your concern about his or her well-being. Sometimes students may be reluctant or shy in accepting a referral, so here are some suggestions.

Second opinion needed

Present the referral as a help to you. Explain that the student's problem is outside of your area of expertise and that you require a second opinion.

Give assurance!

Dispel myths that surround seeking help, especially as this age group dislikes being anything but self-reliant. Encourage the student to schedule "just one" appointment with a professional. Suggest that to get help is a positive sign of personal strength.

Inform about all available options

Some students may not feel comfortable about seeing a counsellor, but will agree to visit a G.P. Others may choose to talk with a chaplain. Therefore, it is very helpful and often enlightening to present all of the student's options when discussing support services.

Referral to other internal support services

Apart from the Student Counselling Service, there is a wide availability of support services available to DIT registered students including Careers Service, Chaplaincy Service, Disability Service, Access Service, retention Office, Health Services and Student Services. It is useful for every lecturer to know something about these services. Please refer to the DIT Student Handbook or web site for detailed information on all of the above services. Please see appendix 1 on page for the contact names and numbers for the main services.

Explore the student's reluctance

If the student is reluctant to seek help, ask why s/he is not keen on seeing a professional. Possibly it relates to a previous negative experience. Or maybe there is a misconception that if s/he sees a psychiatrist or counsellor in College, the information will be passed on to his or her lecturers and family. If you explore the reluctance, you may be able to resolve the concerns.

Help the student make an appointment

Ask if the student would like you to arrange an appointment for him or her with a professional. This is especially helpful if s/he is depressed and lacks the energy to negotiate details. If you arrange the appointment, inform the professional of your specific concerns regarding the student.

Honesty about involving others

If you feel the situation is an emergency (you believe there is the possibility of harm to the student or others) and the student will not see a professional, you may need to speak to someone on his or her behalf. If possible, before doing so, gently explain that you will need to speak with a professional and /or the student's family. Give the student the choice about who you will contact.