



School of the Art Institute
of Chicago

Office of
Student Affairs

Counseling
Services

Emotionally Distressed Students How Faculty and Staff Can Help

Overview

- **Counseling and Consultation** - One of the primary purposes of the School's Counseling Services is to provide counseling to School of the Art Institute students experiencing emotional distress. Counseling Services psychotherapists are also available to consult with staff and faculty members on how to deal with emotionally distressed and/or distressing students.
- **Location and Phone** - Counseling Services is located at 116 S. Michigan Ave., 13th floor. The telephone number is 312.499-4271.
- **Eligibility** - Currently enrolled degree-seeking SAIC students may receive up to 16 sessions of confidential counseling and psychotherapy.
- **Fees** - Counseling Services are free of charge.
- **Confidentiality** - Counseling Services are confidential. Information communicated to SAIC counselors will not be disclosed to anyone outside Counseling Services without written consent from the client. There are rare exceptions to this policy. These are when, in the judgment of the counselor, disclosure is necessary to protect the patient or someone else from serious harm or when the law requires disclosure.
- **Making an Appointment** - To schedule an appointment, call 312.499.4271 or make one in person at 116 South Michigan Avenue, 13th floor. Regular Counseling Services hours are 9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. Students will typically meet with a psychotherapist for an intake session within a few days of contacting Counseling Services. Students in crisis will be seen as soon as possible.
- It is preferable that students contact Counseling Services themselves to arrange an appointment. They will feel more committed and involved if they do so, and are more likely to show up for the appointment they make.
- In rare instances, you might accompany the student to Counseling Services to make an appointment, or remain with the student while s/he makes the phone call. This would be appropriate, for example, if the student appears disoriented or acutely suicidal (see the Students in Crisis section).

Resources

Office of Student Affairs (OSA)

OSA Main Number **312.629-6800**

Residence Life **312.629-6870**

Wellness Center

Counseling Services **312.499-4271**

Disability and Learning Resource Center **312.499-4278**

Health Services **312-499-4288**

Security

112 South Michigan **312.345-3528**

Sharp **312.899-1210**

Columbus Drive **312.443-3760**

Sullivan Center **312.629-6800**

24-Hour Crisis Line Northwestern Memorial Hospital 312.926-8100

Distressed vs. Distressing Students

It may be helpful to clarify a key distinction — the difference between students who are in emotional distress, versus students whose behavior is distressing to others. Students who are distressed are experiencing emotional pain, which may be generated by external factors and/or internal characteristics. Sometimes, this emotional distress can be observed by others—it may show up as public tearfulness, angry comments, extreme withdrawal from others, or in other ways. Distressed students may be referred to our office, and generally find counseling helpful in addressing their concerns. Students who are distressing, on the other hand, are those who cause distress to other people (e.g., instructors, classmates, administrators, roommates) due to their inappropriate behaviors. Examples of such behaviors include disruptive outbursts in class, theft, and threats of harm. It is appropriate for faculty and staff to alert their department heads and/or the Office of Student Affairs regarding these or other distressing behaviors committed by students. Students who engage in behaviors that cause undue distress in the school community should be dealt with in accordance with school and departmental policy for handling such problems. As you might imagine—and may have experienced—the most complicated situations involve students who are both distressed and distressing. These students should also receive appropriate disciplinary intervention through their department and/or the Office of Student Affairs. This is true whether or not the troublesome behavior arises from emotional disturbance. Additionally, the appropriate department head or the dean of student affairs may choose to consult with Counseling Services should psychological intervention seem appropriate. Such students may be encouraged to seek counseling. When working with these challenging students, it is important to seek consultation and guidance from your department head or other appropriate administrators. It is also important to get support for yourself (see the Knowing Your Limits section).

When and How to Intervene

In your role as a staff or faculty member at the School of the Art Institute, on occasion you will come in contact with students who are emotionally distressed. A student might directly confide his or her concerns to you, another student might share concerns about a classmate, or through observing the student's behavior, you might infer that the student is emotionally distressed. Students who reveal to you directly that they are emotionally-distressed and have been unable to resolve their concerns on their own may be reaching out for help and be ready to accept it. The situation is more difficult when students do not confide in you directly, but you infer from their behavior that they are in distress. Depending on the particulars of the situation, you may or may not choose to approach the student. This decision depends on such factors as what behaviors of the student are concerning you, how troubled the student seems to be, your relationship with the student, how approachable the student is, as well as your personality style and feelings about intervening. If you think the student might be open to discussing

concerns with you, generally the best approach involves letting the student know that you've noticed that the student seems upset lately, and you're interested in hearing what's going on and if the student would like to talk to you about it. Keep your comments "open-ended," rather than asking questions that can be answered with "yes/no" responses. Be aware that some students may reject your efforts, may deny any troubles, and/or may feel intruded upon. On the other hand, most students will feel appreciative of your interest and concern, and your contact with them might be an important step toward their dealing with their problems. If you have questions or concerns about approaching a particular student, feel free to call Counseling Services for a consultation. We may be able to offer suggestions that will be of help.

Responding to Students Who Confide in You

The most appropriate response to students who disclose their personal concerns to you is to:

- Listen.
- Empathize with the feelings being expressed. Try to understand what the student is saying from their perspective (which does not mean you have to agree with that perspective!).
- Be as genuinely supportive as feels appropriate to you.
- Keep your own limits in mind, for example, don't get more involved in the student's life than is comfortable or appropriate for you (i.e., in terms of how frequently personal conversations occur, when and where they take place, how much you "take on" in trying to help).
- For students who seem to need more than you are able or willing to provide, or if professional counseling seems indicated, suggest that Counseling Services staff might be helpful, and that they are there to provide confidential help to students. If you need more information and advice on dealing with a student, call Counseling Services and ask to consult with a counselor. The consultation could take place on the phone, or you could make an appointment for the consultation. While it is important to respect the student's privacy, as a faculty or staff member it may be helpful to know that you are not bound by the same professional and legal standards of confidentiality as psychotherapists. There are times when it is appropriate and necessary — and ultimately, in the student's best interest— for you to discuss a troubled student with others who might be helpful.

What about students who need counseling but will not go?

If it seems clear that a student needs or could benefit from counseling, but is reluctant to go, you might mention any of the following that seem appropriate for that student:

- The student can try one session to see how it feels.
- The visit will be kept strictly confidential.
- All the student has to do to get an appointment is go to the Counseling Services office, or call to make a counseling appointment. The student can choose to provide initials instead of a name, if preferred.
- It's free.
- Students with very troubling concerns often get help at Counseling Services.
- A student doesn't have to be seriously disturbed to go to Counseling Services. Counseling Services staff will make referrals to psychotherapists or agencies in the community if the student prefers to go outside for therapy.

Accepting the Student's Right to Say No Except in certain life-threatening situations, the choice of whether or not to seek professional help at the Counseling Services office is up to the distressed student. If a distressed student remains adamant about not seeking counseling, you need to accept the student's decision. If you are quite concerned about such a student, consult with Counseling Services staff. Perhaps a psychotherapist could suggest alternative ways of approaching the student, to help you more effectively intervene on the student's behalf.

Knowing Your Limits While sometimes difficult to do, it is important that you realize the limits of your own responsibility when assisting distressed students. If you are involved in intervention with a student, either on your initiative or because the student approached you:

- It does not make you responsible for the student's emotional well being.
- It does not mean you must (or can) solve the student's problems. Often, intervention with students in distress involves considerable time and energy on the part of faculty and/or staff, which can lead to feelings of frustration and being "used up." Furthermore, responding to distressed students can trigger complex personal thoughts and feelings for faculty and staff working with such students. It is important to obtain support for yourself as you engage in work with students in distress. This support might come from colleagues, partners, friends, or through consultation with Counseling Services staff.

Students in Crisis If you become aware of a student who is not simply distressed and upset but is out of control, violent, and/or imminently suicidal or homicidal, then immediate intervention is needed. Contact School of the Art Institute Security immediately; they will attempt to ensure the physical safety of the student and/or others. Then, contact Counseling Services, and tell the person answering the phone that you are dealing with a student emergency, and request an immediate consultation with a school psychotherapist. In collaboration with the responding psychotherapist, a determination will be made as to how to proceed. Depending on circumstances, we might assist you in trying to get the student to our office, or we may determine it is necessary to meet with the student at another school location (e.g., your classroom, a residence hall room, etc.).

What if Counseling Services is Not Open? If a crisis situation develops during a time when Counseling Services is not open, you can consider the following options:

- Getting the student to agree to go to Counseling Services when it re-opens (in cases where you are sure the student will be safe until then).
- If the student lives in school housing, contact Residence Life for advice and assistance.
- Getting the student to the nearest hospital emergency room (for students you believe are a danger to themselves or others or are unable to take care of themselves enough to avoid endangering themselves). The Dean of Student Affairs and School Security will help with this, and should be contacted immediately if you find yourself with a student who requires emergency services.