Possible Emergency Situations

- Take the situation seriously.
- Prioritize your safety and that of others.
- Avoid speaking privately if you feel unsafe. Consider leaving your office door open and notifying someone nearby of your situation. You may consider having another faculty or staff member present for the conversation.
- Speaking calmly, allowing the person a chance to verbalize concerns, where you can acknowledge the person's distress or frustration.
- Withdraw and clear others away if direct threats are made or if behavior escalates to aggression.

Emergency Counseling Referrals

If the matter is not a public safety issue, contact Counseling Services and inform the receptionist that you are dealing with an emergency situation and need to speak with a Counselor immediately. The Counseling staff will advise you of how to proceed. If the situation is determined to be a viable emergency, the person will likely need to be seen by a Counselor immediately, and it may be helpful for you to escort the student to Counseling Services (assuming you feel comfortable doing so). Please note that some counseling concerns may require that the student be referred off campus for crisis stabilization, hospitalization, or other specialized, treatment not available on campus. If this occurs, the Counseling staff will work with the student to establish an appropriate off campus referral.

Important Phone Numbers:

GSW Public Safety:
(229) 931-2245
or 911 should be contacted immediately.

If an emergency includes an imminent threat, GSW Public Safety (229) 931-2245 or 911 should be contacted immediately.

If GSW Public Safety determines Counseling Services or Asst. Dean of Students needs to be involved, they will make that contact.

Services Provided

Counseling Services provides personal, social, and academic counseling to currently enrolled GSW students and referral service for employees at no charge. Our individual counseling services are designed for clients who can benefit from time-limited counseling. If long-term therapy or other specialized services, such as hospitalization or medication are indicated, the client will be referred to an appropriate off campus resource.

If an emergency includes an imminent threat, GSW Public Safety (229) 931-2245 or 911 should be contacted immediately.

GSW Counseling Services Center
Monday to Thursday: 8 AM - 5 PM
Fridays: 8 AM - 3 PM

Georgia Southwestern State University
Counseling Services
Student Success Center
Offices 3401 - 3403 (3rd Floor)
Americus, GA 31709
Phone: (229) 931-2708
Fax: (229) 931-2835
E-mail: agk@gsw.edu

Responding to a student in distress or crisis can pose dilemmas and you might need to seek the assistance of other campus supports and services, such as Counseling Services, which serves to help both students and faculty/staff at these times. This pamphlet offers some guidelines for managing the kinds of unpredictable situations you could encounter and for enlisting the help of Counseling Services and/or other campus services.
Recognizing Warning Signs

Crisis situations where students show unrestrained emotion, aggression, or bizarre behavior, or self-report severe problems such as suicidal feelings or disturbed thinking are not usually common. It is more likely that faculty or staff (more so than other college constituents) may become aware of warning signs that indicate a need for intervention. These signs are not necessarily urgent but may be used as guidelines to help you determine whether or not to intervene.

- Changes in academic performance or obvious underperformance
- Changes in physical appearance or behavior
- Inadequate grooming or hygiene
- Inappropriate social conduct
- Poor attention/concentration or increased disorganization
- Social withdrawal or disinterest
- Increased absences/tardiness or erratic participation
- Reports of stressful events (e.g., relationship problems, death of loved one, trauma, etc.)
- Repeated requests for deadline extensions or other special considerations
- Coming to class intoxicated or “high”
- Talking/writing about death/suicide/violence, which is out of the ordinary for that person
- Sleeping or eating disturbances

Possible Emergency Situations

Urgent concerns that do require immediate attention may include:

- Suicidal ideation and/or threat
- Homicidal ideation and/or threat
- Fear of losing control and possibly hurting someone else
- Sexual/Physical assault or other types of abuse
- Recent death of loved one (particularly if the person is unable to manage emotions)
- Threatening or overly violent behavior

Suggestions for How To Talk to Students About Your Concerns

(Non-Emergency)

- **Speak Privately.**
  This may help minimize embarrassment and defensiveness.

- **Be Honest.**
  Be frank about your concerns, sharing what you have observed without judging (e.g., by describing behaviors).

- **Be Clear About Limits.**
  Clearly communicate the limits of your ability to help. It is not your role or responsibility to therapeutically counsel students, but you can help them find the support they need.

- **Suggest Counseling Services.**
  Counseling Services provides personal counseling. Examples:
  “Sounds like you are really struggling with _____. Many people find it helpful to talk with someone in confidence who is outside of the situation.”
  “I want to help you get the help you need and deserve. We have a Counseling Center on our campus where students go for all kinds of reasons.”
  “Meeting with a Counselor is free and confidential and will not go on your academic records.”

- **Consider Making a Referral.**
  Suggests a student seek help instead of telling them or ordering them to attend. If they are receptive to seeing a Counselor, provide them with the Counseling Services’ phone number (931-2708) or allow them to access your phone to make the call. Walking a student over to Counseling Services or calling for them may also be helpful, particularly if the student is upset and may benefit from the extra support. In addition, your contact will alert the Counseling Services staff of the immediacy of the situation. If the student reports having a therapeutic relationship before and “it did not help” suggest the student try one session with Counseling Services’ Licensed Counselor to see what happens.

Non-Emergency Consultation

If you are unsure of how to handle a situation, call Counseling Services, inform the receptionist who you are (faculty, staff, administrator), and ask to speak with the Licensed Counselor. If all Counselors are engaged, your call will be returned as soon as possible. A brief consultation with a Counselor may help you sort out the relevant issues and explore alternative approaches to use with the student. Conveying your concern and willingness to help in any appropriate way you can (including referral) is probably the most important thing you can do to assist a student in distress. Your support, encouragement, and reassurance are very valuable.

Disruptive classroom behavior is prohibited by the GSW Student Code of Conduct. Counseling Services will be happy to consult with you about these cases. However, behavioral problems need to be referred to the Asst. Dean Dr. Darcy Shraufnagel. Refer to GSW Student Handbook for further information.

Non-Emergency Referrals

When you discuss a referral to Counseling Services, it would be helpful for the student to hear in a clear and concise manner your concerns and why you think counseling would be helpful. Having the student call for an appointment tends to increase her/his responsibility and commitment to follow up by keeping the appointment. HOWEVER, there may be some situations where it is advantageous for you to call and make an appointment for her/him or even to accompany the student to our office. (Please refer to the section “Suggestions for How To Talk to Students About Your Concerns, Non-Emergency.”)

Confidentiality Policy

All students discussions are held strictly confidential except when the student is under 18 years of age, presents a danger to him/herself or others (including situations where abuse must be reported), or if information must be released due to a court order. Counseling referrals may only be acknowledged if the student gives the counselor permission to reveal to the referring person or anyone else, that they have attended counseling. All other information releases occur only if the student signs a release form.