Teachable Moments with Students in Distress

William and Mary Counseling Center
240 Blow Memorial Hall
221-3620
The Teachable Moment

Motivational Interviewing and Stages of Change


Change is most likely to occur when a person progresses along a path of emotional readiness indicators:

- Pre-contemplation
- Contemplation
- Decision-making
- Action
- Maintenance
Pre-Contemplation Stage

► Students in this stage wish to change others or the environment, or they feel coerced into seeking help by an external entity. They are not yet choosing to change themselves.

- Grade arguments
- Critique of course organization or other unsolicited feedback
- Poor performance that is blamed on external and/or unclear factors
Trends in Late Adolescent Development

► Socio-cultural trends
  ▪ Increasing emphasis upon academic achievement and career success which may overwhelm
  ▪ Increasing competition at earlier ages
  ▪ Decreasing stability of family and community connections

► Trends in mental health
  ▪ Gradual de-stigmatization of mental health issues
  ▪ Better training of PCPs – earlier detection
  ▪ More effective psychiatric medications

► Trends in Neurobiology
  ▪ Brain development not complete until late 20’s

Mental Health Care in the College Community, 2010. Jerald Kay and Victor Schwartz
The Intellectual Student Challenge

► Early developmental focus on the mastery of cognitive skills and abilities
► Pairing of praise and positive reinforcement with linear thought and achieving the “right answer”
► Identity develops in context of external reward and individual achievement
► Disproportionate intellectual and social/emotional growth
Trends in Higher Education Mental Health

The Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors Annual Survey, 2010. Barr, et. al.
Faculty Often the First to Recognize Signs of Difficulty

► How to identify...

- Trust your perceptions
- Listen carefully
- Consult with colleagues
- Consult with Counseling Center
Disturbances in Emotion

- Being overwhelmed with painful emotions
- Not being able to modulate feelings
- Excessive worry or fear
- Emotional responses disproportionate to circumstances
Disturbances in Thinking

- Impaired attention and concentration
- Obsessive thoughts one cannot control
- Paranoia – fears that are not reality based
- Highly unusual beliefs
- Seeing or hearing things others don’t
Disturbances in Behavior

- Inappropriate patterns of sleep, eating and overall level of activity
- Significant deviance in self-care
- Evidence of self-destructive behavior
- Impulsivity combined with poor judgment
- Being noticeably slowed down or speeded up
Disturbances in Relationships

- Social withdrawal/isolation
- Overdependence on others – difficulties being alone
- Excessive aggression towards others
- Consistent blaming of one’s problems on others
- Frequent instability and disruption of relationships
Faculty Guidelines for Helping Students

► Make class policies clear on your syllabus
  ▪ Absence, late, incomplete and make-up policies
  ▪ Grading system and expectations
  ▪ List your office hours and preferred method of contact (Consider student lifestyle differences)
  ▪ List classroom policies regarding behavior (cell phones, computers, interpersonal behavior)

► Know and provide information regarding resources
  ▪ Academic Advising and Departmental resources
  ▪ Dean of Students and Code of Conduct
  ▪ WMCC
Helping Students Get Help

► Set limits with reasonable flexibility
► Let the student know specifically what you are seeing or hearing that makes you concerned
► Express your intention to continue to support them, but the need you see for involving others
  ▪ Stay in your role
  ▪ Follow up
  ▪ Let student take responsibility for what they can manage
Helping Students Get Help

► Be willing to personally facilitate the connection to services in some way (call ahead or come with student)

► Reassure the student that your relationship will stay in tact

► Provide helpers with all the information they need to understand your concerns
William and Mary Counseling Center

► Room 240 Blow Memorial Hall
► 8:00 am- noon and 1:00 – 5:00 pm Weekdays
► Same Day or Next Day Appointments
  ▪ 221-3620
► Immediate Crisis Assessments Daily
► After hours/Weekends Call WMPD (221-4596) and ask for “On-Call Counselor”
Not Sure if a Referral is Called For?

► Call WMCC for a phone consult
  - 221-3620

► Or ... Start with the Dean of Students Office
  - 221-2510
Dean of Students Response

- They reach out to students on a wide range of issues
- They can assess sources of support and challenges
- They will mobilize necessary resources
- They can help students to get help when the student is unwilling or unable to do so on their own
FYI

► WMCC saw about 1000 students last year (14% of the student body)
► WMCC will see 35-40% of a class during their time in college
► 79% of students we saw said we helped them deal with problems more effectively
  ▪ 89% of students would recommend it to a friend
  ▪ 74% indicated that the services they received helped improve their academic work