

OZARKS TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Counseling Services

DATE: July 1, 2008
TO: OTC Employees
FROM: Joyce R. Thomas, Director of Counseling & Advising
RE: Assisting Students in Distress

Eight years ago, the counseling department was asked to provide Student Services staff with information on how to more effectively communicate with people in distress. This information was requested primarily by the front-line staff members who have such a high volume of contact with OTC students both in person and over the phone.

This guide could be helpful to any staff member, within any Division. For this reason, I am forwarding a copy of the guide to you. If you believe that members of your staff could benefit from this information, please feel free to distribute it as you deem appropriate.

If you have any questions, concerns, comments or suggestions, please contact me at 6973.

pc: OTC Administration and Staff

Communicating with People in Distress

Helpful Hints

Whether on the phone or in person, when you find yourself talking with someone who appears to be in extreme distress, the following are some ways to help you feel confident that you are managing the situation in the best way possible.

1. THERE IS NO MAGICAL, "RIGHT" THING TO SAY

- Listen
- Respond to what you hear
- Be honest in your concern for the person
- Be honest that you recognize the person needs to receive help, and you will do your best to connect the person with a staff member who can help

2. BE AWARE OF YOUR LEVEL OF RESPONSIBILITY

- You are not responsible for solving this person's problem
- You are not responsible for learning how to counsel this person
- You are not responsible if this person chooses to harm him or herself
- You ARE responsible for responding to the person's need for help
- You ARE responsible for connecting this person with a professional (on or off campus)

3. KNOW WHO TO CONTACT

- If you receive a phone call from someone threatening suicide, do your best to keep the person on the line using the ideas identified above. If appropriate, try and get the person's name and location. Calling 911 (or having a colleague call 911 while you keep the individual on the line) is the best course of action in this type of crisis situation. Follow-up your 911 contact by consulting with the staff from Counseling & Career Resources.
- In most instances, the distressed individual is not threatening immediate harm to self or others, and you will have time to connect the individual with a member of our counseling staff for assistance. If you are transferring a phone call to one of our staff, please be sure to stay on the line with the individual until you are sure the transfer was successful. It is okay to interrupt any of us when a crisis situation is occurring.

Counseling Services Main Number: 447-6974

Joyce Thomas	6973	James Carpenter	6981
		Crystal Joifrita	6980

- If none of the counseling staff is available, the following OTC employees can also be contacted to assist you:

Steve Fritts	6969	Ramona George	8861
Julia Edwards	8188	Paula Johns	6975
Karla Gregg	6966	Susan Blakey	8123

- Be sure to communicate with the distressed person what you are doing and why. **"I can hear that you are very, very upset. I want to connect you with a professional staff person who can help. I am going to stay on the line with you until I am sure you are speaking with someone who can help."**

4. THERE ARE NO PROFESSIONAL STAFF PEOPLE AVAILABLE, BUT CONTACTING 911 IS NOT NECESSARY

In very rare circumstances, you may have trouble connecting with any of the above staff members. If this occurs, here are some important community mental-health referral numbers to which you can confidently refer the person. As indicated above, if you transfer the individual to one of the numbers below, **PLEASE** stay on the line until you are sure the individual is speaking with someone who can help (Hit "Transfer;" dial 9 + seven digit number; when a person at the agency answers, identify yourself and the person you are transferring; release the phone call).

BURRELL BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CRISIS LINE		862-6555
MISSOURI VICTIM CENTER	(victims of violent crimes)	864-7233 (SAFE)
SIGMA HOUSE	(drug/alcohol abuse)	862-3339