REFERRING TO THE RMIT COUNSELLING SERVICE

If you have a student experiencing difficulties, you may help by referring them to Counselling. Early intervention often prevents situations from worsening and restores the student's confidence.

Below is a summary of indicators to assist you with the referral process.

What might you notice and when might you refer?

Warning signs include:
» changes in mood and behaviour
» social withdrawal and isolation
» changes in work quality and/or consistency
» difficulty focusing on a specific topic in conversation
» difficulty focusing on a specific task
» disorganised/impaired thinking and/or speech
» intense emotional expression or lack of emotion
» expression of feelings of persecution and/or strong mistrust of others
» violent outbursts
» signs of excessive alcohol and/or drug use
» expressions of general unhappiness persisting over a period of weeks
» references to suicide or irresponsible or self-destructive behaviours
» frequent class absence or disappearance over extended periods
» gain or loss of a significant amount of weight
» traumatic or unexpected changes in personal relationships
» increasing dependence on you or others (for example, hanging around your room).

You might also consider making a referral when:
» the student expresses a preference (directly or indirectly) to speak with someone else about their concerns
» the problems or requests the student makes are beyond your level of competence and/or comfort
» personality differences interfere with your ability to work together
» the student raises issues that are too personal and/or cross the boundaries of your professional role
» after considerable time and effort, you don’t feel able to help the student.

How to make the referral

If a student has told you their story and you think they need professional help you could say something like:

“From what you have just told me, you have a lot to deal with.” (List the elements of their story if you can). “Have you thought about talking to a counsellor about this? We have a free and confidential professional counselling service on campus. I can give you their contact details or you can call from here if you like.”

If they agree give them the contact details and/or the phone.

Sometimes after a person has confided in you, they may be reluctant to seek counselling. This can leave you feeling...
helpless and burdened with their story. Or you may feel flattered and keep helping the person because they refuse to go anywhere else. Beware of this.

**What to say to a student reluctant to seek counselling**

“I don't want to have to tell my story again.”
“I understand that what you have told me is difficult to talk about. You’ve told me now and it will be easier the next time and different because the counsellor will ask you different questions. They are the professional.”

“I feel comfortable talking to you.”
“I am glad you have felt that you can talk to me and you certainly have a lot to deal with but I am not a trained counsellor. The best way I can help is to encourage you to see someone who is. Here is the Counselling Service brochure. Would you like to take one or call them from here?”

“I don't know if a counsellor will be able to help.”
“Why don’t you give it a go? They are professionals and it is their job to find ways to help you.”

Don’t be put off by the student’s reluctance. Remain positive and helpful and provide information and opportunities for them to contact a counsellor. It may help if you walk with the student to RMIT Counselling, but ensure they make the appointment themself.

**CONTACT US**

RMIT Counselling offers a Duty Work telephone service for staff seeking a counsellor’s advice about a student. Call extension 54365.

Ultimately, not everyone will choose to see a counsellor. If you are seriously worried about a student, ask their permission to ring a counsellor for advice while they are present. You may call back afterwards for advice or debriefing for yourself.

You may need to call emergency help if a student discloses self harm or harm to others. This is usually 000 or your local hospital emergency department. If you would like help to do this call RMIT Counselling (extension 54365) and RMIT Security (extension 53333).