



How to Refer Students to the DCU Counselling & Personal Development Service

July 2025



Dear Colleagues

The Counselling and Personal Development Service is a professional, confidential and free service, which is available to all registered undergraduate and postgraduate DCU students.

The service provides one-to-one counselling and specialist input on a wide range of personal, academic, family, social, psychological and mental health issues that hinder a student's academic performance in a non-judgmental and open manner. This includes support and help at time of immediate crisis.

The service also provides a range of on-line wellbeing, resilience and mental health advice and information including bibliotherapy which is quality self-help reading for psychological health. In addition, the service offers a mindfulness-based stress reduction lunchtime series and a student empowerment and life skills programme.

The Counselling and Personal Development Service is staffed by qualified and experienced counselling psychologists/psychotherapists and psychotherapists at an advanced stage in their training. We advise if you have a difficulty, don't sit on it, do something about it sooner rather than later.

Common Signs of Student Distress

Academic Indicators of Student Distress

- Significant changes in academic performance
- Sporadic class attendance or absences
- Frequently missing deadlines
- Poor concentration
- Loss of motivation
- Procrastination
- Over working, perfectionism, excessive anxiety about academic work

Physical Signs of Distress

- Significant weight gain or loss
- Marked changes in personal hygiene or dress
- Signs of exhaustion, falling asleep in class
- Smelling of alcohol, cannabis

Behavioural Indicators of Distress

- Social isolation or withdrawal
- Excessive dependence on staff
- Unusual or bizarre behaviour, unexplained crying, laughing, rapid speech,
- Disorganised thinking, suspiciousness, paranoia
- Incoherent and/or incessant talking

- Uncharacteristic behaviour; unusually cheerful, aggressive, withdrawn, irritable, loud,
- disinhibited
- Disturbing or disruptive behaviour

Emotional Indicators of Distress

- A marked change in mood
- Absence of response to normally upsetting events
- Expressing feelings of worthlessness
- Appearing tearful, sad, agitated

Distressing Life Events

- Recent break-up of a close relationship
- Death or illness of a loved one or significant other
- A major disappointment, e.g. exam failure
- Serious interpersonal conflict
- A trauma: assault, sexual, emotional, physical and/or other abuse
- Unplanned pregnancy
- Sexual orientation crisis
- Legal or disciplinary event
- Accident, illness or critical incident.

Other Indicators of Distress

- Something about the student makes you feel uneasy or concerned
- Students, staff or relatives telling you there is a difficulty
- A history of mental health difficulties
- Evidence of self-harming behaviour or of suicidal ideation or plans.

When to Refer

When personal issues arise in the course of a student's academic life, there are some indicators which suggest the time to refer to The Counselling and Personal Development Service.

- When a significant amount of time has been given to addressing the personal issue.
- When you are unsure of what to do or how to respond.
- When you feel out of your depth.
- When the situation is depleting you of your own emotional resources.
- When you are worried about the student's safety.
- When you are covering the same ground with the student repeatedly.
- When no change is evident.
- When your suggestions are constantly rejected.
- If you feel the student is becoming too dependent on you.



References to Suicide

All references to suicide must be taken seriously. It is ok to ask, “Are you having thoughts about suicide?” If you are in doubt about the student’s feelings or intentions, a consultation call to us is a good way to help you reach an appropriate judgement about what action to take.

If a student identifies the specific how, when and where of a suicide plan, immediate consultation and referral is critical.

How to Refer

If you decide that a referral is appropriate, we recommend that you talk to the student in a straightforward way. Point out the behaviours that have led to your concern. Outline that your recommendation represents your best judgement about how the student can get help.

Except for emergencies, the option for the student to accept or reject your referral is left open. Sometimes students are sceptical of such help and are reluctant to use it. It is important that you accept the student’s reaction, while calmly reiterating your recommendation without undue pressure. Reassure the student that the service is confidential and is supportive in approach.

How to Make an Appointment

If a student wishes to enquire about registering with our service, and, to avail of a counselling appointment, they can contact us at the relevant email address below using a DCU student email address.

For The Glasnevin Campus: counselling@dcu.ie


For The St Patrick's and All Hallows Campus: spd.counselling@dcu.ie

Please choose the campus that's most convenient and contact that email address only.

The Counselling & Personal Development service will then send a separate link to complete the registration process. Once registered, someone will be in touch when a suitable appointment is available.

Alternatively, they can call into us in person at one of our two locations:

Henry Grattan Building (ground floor), Glasnevin Campus,
Monday-Friday (8am -1pm/ 2pm -4pm)
Telephone: +353 1 700 5165
or



Block A, Health Centre, St Patrick's Campus
(9am -1pm/2pm - 5pm)
Telephone: +353 1 700 9215

For further information please see: <https://www.dcu.ie/counselling/making-appointment>

Consultation Service to Staff

If you are unsure of what to recommend or how to respond, a brief telephone consultation may be of assistance in clarifying one's approach.

For guidelines on:

- Identifying and responding to student in distress guidelines
- First-aid suicide intervention guidelines
- How to respond to a student in a psychological and/or medical crisis
- Wellbeing first aid support for a student at the scene of a critical incident

Visit our website www.dcu.ie/counselling

Counsellor Contact Details

Name and Title	Telephone	Email
Helena Ahern, Head of the Counselling & Personal Development Service	01 700 5161	helena.ahern@dcu.ie
Ruán Kennedy, Senior Counsellor	01 700 8417	ruan.kennedy@dcu.ie
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