

Supporting Students in Difficulty

A Guide for JIBC Staff & Faculty



Life is complex and has many demands. This is especially true when students attending the Justice Institute of British Columbia (JIBC) are balancing work, personal, family, social, and financial responsibilities in addition to achieving their goals for professional and personal growth and learning. Recognizing these complex demands, JIBC provides free and confidential counselling to students.

Student Counselling and Advising works in collaboration with JIBC staff and faculty and provides personal, academic, and career counselling to students in ways that are consistent with best practices in post-secondary educational institutions. Research indicates that counselling is effective in student success and retention.



715 McBride Blvd • New Westminster, BC • V3L 5T4
Tel: 604.528.xxxx • Fax: 604.528.xxxx • Email: xxx@jibc.ca

www.jibc.ca

Student Counselling and Advising values the role staff and faculty play in identifying students at risk and/or in need of support. To assist faculty and staff perform this important role, these are guidelines to help you effectively respond to students in difficulty.

- To refer a student for personal, academic, and/or career counselling, you or the student can confidentially contact the Coordinator of Student Counselling and Advising at 604.528.5884 or e-mail studentcounselling@jibc.ca and every effort will be made to respond in a timely manner

How do you know when a student may be in difficulty?

Common Signs to be Aware of:

Behavioural Signs:

- Repeated lates, absences from class and/or frequently leaving class
- Evidence of lack of motivation /desire to learn or to be in class
- Missed assignments /missed appointments
- Themes of despair, hopelessness, isolation, violence, or rage
- Disorganized or erratic behaviour
- Disruptive, aggressive, or violent behaviour
- Direct statements indicating a personal or family problem
- Expressed need for help
- Indications of substance use (i.e. smelling of alcohol or marijuana, lethargy)

Physical Signs:

- Unkempt appearance
- Lack of personal hygiene
- Significant weight change
- Appearance of excessive fatigue, lack of sleep
- Appearance of extreme stress
- Suspicious injuries such as bruises, burns, cuts

Personality Signs:

- Sudden change in attitude (i.e. withdraws, exhibits unprovoked anger or hostility)
- Overly anxious
- Ongoing expression of sadness, depressed mood or tearfulness
- Difficulty interacting and communicating such as distortions of reality, bizarre, strange or paranoid behaviour, rapid incoherent speech

Academic Signs

- Suspected learning problem or disability in the areas of reading, writing, comprehension
- Difficulty keeping up with course work
- Significant discrepancy between potential and performance
- Frequent requests for special accommodation (i.e. extensions on assignments)
- Problems with concentration or keeping on task
- Insufficient test preparation
- General lack of interest or motivation
- Test anxiety

- Problems with organization or time management
- Unrealistic career goals
- Strong reaction to poor test or assignment grades

Other Signs:

- Other students or peers expressing concern for the student
- Your own sense that something is wrong
- Oppression/discrimination/ victimization (i.e. withdrawn, fearfulness, target of jokes)
- Socially isolated

Life Stressors

- Death or serious illness of significant person
- Loss, such as, ending of relationship, failure in class

The presence of any of these signs may indicate the student is in difficulty. It is recommended that faculty or staff meets with the student to discuss their concerns and/or consult with Student Counselling and Advising Services at 604.528.5884; email studentcounselling@jibc.ca

What to do? Responding to Students in Difficulty

Make Contact with the student

- Speak with the student in private
- Stay calm and express your concern for the student, "I've noticed lately that you have been coming to class late and looking real tired."
- Listen reflectively and reframe the student's experience, "You have had to take on a second job to support your family & that can make it difficult to get proper sleep and be in class on time."

Supportive Communication:

- Be patient, give the student the opportunity to talk
- Let the student know you are listening attentively and show that you are interested and concerned through your verbal and non-verbal responses
- Be non-judgmental and find the positives, "It's been difficult to get to class on time. Even with everything going on in your life I am impressed that you are making it to class."
- Determine what the student needs from you "It sounds like a lot is going on in your life right now. How can I be of help?"
- Thank the student for sharing their situation with you and assure them that their confidentiality will be respected. "I appreciate you sharing your situation with me. It helps me to understand why you have been late for class. How can I help? Please be assured that what you have said to me will remain in confidence." **

***Refer to section on "Confidentiality" for Exceptions and Limitations to Confidentiality*

Supportive Communication Means Avoiding Some Common Reactions:

- Avoid minimizing the student's feelings by saying things like "It will get better" "It's not that bad"
- Avoid expressing disapproval regarding the student's thoughts or feelings
- Avoid asking "Why" questions
- Avoid acting defensively or personalizing what the student is saying i.e. "You could have come talk to me sooner"

Be Aware of Your Role Limitations:

- Do not take on too much responsibility
- Do not deal with a crisis alone
- Stay within your role as faculty, staff or advisor

How to refer a student to Student Counselling

What to Say to the Student:

Make a general statement such as: "You seem upset (concerned, overwhelmed) about this. I think that you could use some help in sorting out these issues. I am concerned about you and would like to suggest you to consider talking with the counsellor at JIBC." If the student is open to meeting with the counsellor you can refer the student to Student Counselling and Advising in the following ways.

- Provide the student with the contact information for Student Counselling and Advising Services: 604.528.5884; email studentcounselling@jibc.ca . Both ways are confidential.
- With the student's permission, you can contact the Coordinator of Student Counselling and Advising by telephone with the referring information and the student will be contacted. If e-mailing, it is preferable that you do not put identifying information in the e-mail. You will be contacted to obtain the student's name and contact information.

On the New Westminster campus there are additional ways to refer students:

- Contact the Coordinator of Student Counselling and Advising by phone with the student present and, if possible the student will be seen immediately, or an appointment time will be arranged.

- Accompany the student to Student Services where i) the Coordinator of Student Counselling and Advising will be contacted, and if available, the student will be seen ii) if not available, the Coordinator of Student Counselling and Advising will contact the student in a timely manner.



The student may be hesitant about connecting with counselling. Listen to the student's concerns about seeking help. Normalize the referral process, making it clear that students often experience an overload of stress or life issues. Counselling is frequently recommended; it is free, easy to access and strictly confidential.

Suggest the student check out counselling to see if it may be helpful. Even if the student is not ready to seek formal help at this time, you have empowered and supported the student to think about resolving the issues that impact on their educational success.

Students Who May Require Immediate Referral

Safety-risk Behaviours:

- Relationship violence evidenced by bruising, fearful attitude
- Expressions of despair, hopelessness, helplessness
- Giving away valued possessions
- Self-injurious behaviours (i.e. cutting, burning)
- Threats or violence towards others
- Written work, artwork, or verbal statements expressing finality or suicidality
- Reference to suicide

In situations where a student mentions, refers to or talks about harming or killing themselves the following steps are to be taken:

- Take the threat seriously
- Say something like “It sounds like you are unhappy and do not believe things will get better. How can I help?”
- Listen carefully and encourage the student to talk about what s/he is feeling and thinking. If you believe the risk is high for suicide, remain with the student. Assure the student that s/he can and will be helped
- Show support. Ask if the student has experienced feelings of suicide before. If the student has experienced suicidal thoughts in the past ask, “What happened to help you get through those feelings in the past.” As well as giving you clues as to what has worked in the past, the student will be reminded that positive change is possible
- Get Help. “You have told me something very important, and because I am concerned and want to support you, I am going to get help.” Ask the student to help you get help, “Who can I call to help? A friend, family, doctor etc?”
- If the student does not know who to call or refuses to provide any information, then be clear and firm about the options available. The options are talking to a counsellor or calling an ambulance. Depending on the time of day, availability of the counsellor, and the JIBC campus location, the only option may be to call 911

On the New Westminster campus, during the day, call the Coordinator of Student Counselling and Advising Services at (604) 528-5884 or call 911 for an ambulance, and tell them that you are with someone at risk for suicide.

On all other campuses call 911 for an ambulance, and tell them that you are with someone at risk for suicide. If the student leaves and you feel there is a risk to their safety call the Police.

Remember, demonstrating empathy and expressing hope are two important intervention qualities.

Confidentiality



Although faculty and staff are not bound by the same laws around confidentiality as counsellors, respecting student confidentiality reflects best practice.

Exceptions and limitations to confidentiality:

- In cases where abuse/neglect involving children and youth under 19 years old, faculty and staff have a legal obligation to report to child welfare. If it is after hours or you are not sure who to call, phone the Helpline for Children at 310-1234 at any time of the day or night. The Helpline call is free. You do not need an area code and you do not have to give your name
- In cases where there is a risk of harm to self, confidentiality cannot be assured to the student

Confidentiality Guidelines

Many students are concerned about the confidentiality of meeting with a counsellor. You can convey to the student that the following information is kept confidential:

- That the student is seeing a counsellor
- All contact information, including appointment times
- Information is not discussed with teaching faculty and does not appear in the student's academic file

The counsellor is the only person that has access to the information discussed in the counselling sessions, unless the student provides signed permission for specific information to be shared.

How Student Counselling and Advising Services Supports Faculty and Staff

Consultation with the Counsellor

The Coordinator of Student Counselling is available to meet with staff and faculty who are concerned with a student but unsure about how to handle the situation. You are encouraged to consult

- When you are concerned about a student's well being or academic performance but unsure whether to intervene.
- When you are uncertain how to respond to a student's approach for help.
- When you continue to be concerned about a student who has declined help
- To discuss how to share your concerns with the student
- To strategize about managing disruptive /inappropriate behaviour

Staff and Faculty Development

The Coordinator of Student Counselling and Advising welcomes opportunities to assist in the professional development of staff and faculty in areas promoting student success such as building resiliency, enhancing coping skills, supporting online learners etc.

Class Presentations

The Coordinator of Student Counselling and Advising, with sufficient notice, will do class presentations on several topics, including stress management, trauma and self care, coping with grief.

Tragic Response Debriefing

Counsellors can be present in the classroom to offer debriefing and support to students in the aftermath of a tragic event such as a death or incidence of violence.