

EI Centro College

Office of the Ombudsman

TO: ECC Faculty/Staff
FROM: Dr. Bettie Tully, College Ombudsperson and Counseling Faculty
DATE: August 31, 2006

SUBJECT: Helping Students

Those of us who counsel and otherwise work with stressed students would like to ask for your assistance. Many of you already know the drill, but this memo might serve as a useful review. Recent studies have confirmed that 35 to 40% of students at any college are likely to be suffering either from depression or excessive anxiety. I would be surprised if these figures are not even higher at EI Centro, considering the prevalence of financial and family hardships. Many of these students are usually reticent about asking for help, even though they are feeling helpless and hopeless. Sometimes, a teacher is in the best position to become aware of such symptoms—either through routine observations of in-class behavior or from subjective writing assignments that tend to evoke self-disclosure.

Observable symptoms of depression could be sadness, hopelessness, tearfulness, fatigue, discouragement, and loss of interest in activities. Symptoms of excessive anxiety could be persistent worry, sudden onsets of fear or terror, tasks not completed due to a lack of concentration, forgetfulness, or desire for perfection. Some students may be on medication for various mental or physical illnesses, and like the rest of the world, the medication may need adjustments, or the student may have forgotten the regimen. We also associate some of these same behaviors and attitudes with apathy or lack of ambition, so the need to see beyond surface impressions is obvious.

Many of you have asked about strategies that would allow you to intervene—at least to the extent of suggesting available resources. I wish I could give you a list of sophisticated intervention techniques, but the truth is that since each victim of depression or anxiety is in a different stage, a natural demonstration of genuine empathy is usually the least intrusive approach. Empathy, of course, is best demonstrated by listening actively and fully attending to a person. More importantly, an appropriate verbal response that accurately reflects what you see and hear may be the catalyst for a student to confide in you. Sometimes, a simple authentic inquiry regarding a student's well-being will elicit an outpouring of concerns or problems. Most people in trouble are desperate for someone who cares enough to really hear them. On the other hand, if the student is engaging in disruptive or bizarre behavior, then the college nurse or campus police should be summoned as soon as possible.

At EI Centro, the troubled student should be referred to one of the Ombudspersons or other counseling faculty. (For information, call the Ombudsman Office at X2105 or the Counseling Center at X2083.) Ask the student if he/she knows one of the counselors or has a preference. If you are able to bring the student to a counselor's office or assist him/her in arranging an appointment, it would be very helpful. The professionally trained counselor will take it from there. Most likely, a few counseling sessions will help move the troubled student to the next recovery stage of being open to off-campus resources where long term care is available. In other cases, even a brief counseling relationship may help a student become empowered to utilize family or social support systems that can often achieve the same outcomes.

FOR EMERGENCY PROCEDURES, PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING:

IN AN EMERGENCY SITUATION, WHERE THE STUDENT IS SO DISTRAUGHT THAT HE/SHE APPEARS TO HAVE THE POTENTIAL FOR DOING HARM TO SELF OR OTHERS, A DIFFERENT AND MORE EXPEDIENT PROCEDURE IS IN ORDER. The El Centro College suggested protocol is as follows:

- Stay with the student while you call or have someone else call a counselor or an ombudsperson. (X2083-Counseling Center; X2105-Ombudsman)
- Upon arrival, the counselor will make a cursory assessment of the situation, and if it seems severe, he/she will notify the Executive Dean of Student and Enrollment Services, Health Center Nurse and Campus Police.
- The counselor will stay with student and teacher and try to determine if the student has access to a family member, physician, pastor, or other support person.
- If so, the Executive Dean of Student and Enrollment Services or designee will contact the support person, inform them of the student's state, and request their presence on campus as soon as possible.
- If no support person can be located, the Health Center Nurse (X2113) or Campus Police (911) will contact the appropriate response team for safe transport to a treatment facility.

THE STEPS LISTED ABOVE COMPRISE THE PREFERRED PROTOCOL. HOWEVER, IF IT IS AFTER REGULAR DAYTIME HOURS, OR IF YOU HAVE ANY DIFFICULTY CONTACTING A COUNSELOR OR THE HEALTH CENTER NURSE, OR IF YOU SENSE IMMINENT DANGER TO ANYONE, CALL CAMPUS POLICE(911) IMMEDIATELY!

CAMPUS POLICE CAN BE REACHED AUTOMATICALLY BY ANY OF THE RED CALL BOXES FOUND IN EACH CLASSROOM ANB BY THE ELEVATOR BANKS ON EACH FLOOR, OR BY DIALING 911 ON ANY CAMPUS PHONE.

A COUNSELING FACULTY PERSON IS ON DUTY EVERY EVENING (MTWR) IN THE COUNSELING CENTER. CALL EXTENSION 2084 OR 2083.

Thanks for your continued assistance in our efforts to better serve students. As faculty members, you are the front line helpers, and you may provide the only bridge for students who need to discover recovery resources.

