

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN FACULTY/STAFF MENTORS AND MENTEES

Many skills are vital for mentors to develop in order to perform and serve their students effectively. In most cases you will deal with issues related to academics, but as your relationship grows with your students, they may come to you with issues of a more personal nature – these issues will often have an impact on their success as a student. The most important thing to remember in any situation is that you're not a counselor. Know your limits – sometimes the best way you can help others is by referring them to someone else with more experience.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Listen

Fully participate in a conversation by being an active listener and utilizing some simple counseling skills such as reflecting, encouraging and asking questions. Be aware of how your body language can affect a conversation.

Ask open-ended questions

Any question that elicits a “yes/no” answer won't be as helpful as a “what, when, how, who” question. “Why” questions seem like they would get more information, but keep in mind that they can sometimes imply criticism and cause defensiveness (i.e., “Well, why didn't you go to all the study sessions?”).

Attend and respond to both content and feeling

Often there are two things going on at once—there is an issue, and the person has some kind of feeling or reaction to that issue. You need to attend and respond to both. Consider this: “I'm so mad about my Chem test!” What is the content (performance on the Chem test)? What is the feeling (anger)? It's important to attend to both. Remember that issues presented to you could have some underlying themes and might even be symptoms of a larger problem.

Let the student solve the problem

It's easy to want to try to solve things for people, but that's not really as helpful as it might seem. Usually, the student knows the answer or knows how to solve the problem but just needs someone to ask the right questions and encourage their processing.

Refer to/use your resources

Don't expect yourself to be a trained counselor. But know your resources (RAs, GAs, other Res. Life Staff, Dean of Students Office, etc) and help people make use of those individuals and services. It's OK to say, “I don't know” as long as you get the information for the person.