

I'm Not a Trained Counselor, but My Students Need Help!



Though we are not trained counselors, our students look to us for advice and support. How can we help our students when they need a listening ear? In this interactive session, you will learn the basics of how to provide effective support while avoiding common pitfalls.

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Today's Objectives

At the end of today's workshop, I will be able to:

- Explain general guidelines for assisting students with their challenges
- Describe how open-ended questions and sample scripts provide a foundation for counseling students
- Access appropriate resources for counseling students

A Thought to Begin

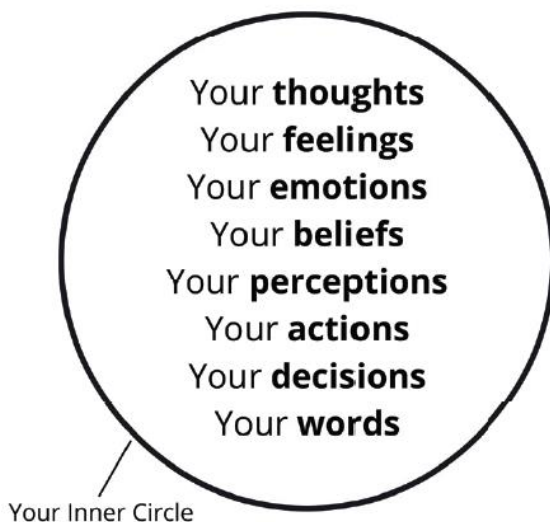
“Some people . . . think they know what others ‘should’ do. They are unable to realize their own limited knowledge of a person’s situation, as well as the person’s responsibility or ability to deal with his or her own problems . . . They do not foster maturity in their clients, but rather make them dependent on them” (Cloud, 1990).



Understand Our Locus of Control

As we work with our students, we must accept what we can and cannot control. While we can influence other people and their circumstances, we cannot or should not try to control them.

You own...



You do not own...



(Sam, 2021)

General Guidelines

- Listen with empathy and without judgement
- Don't argue or give advice
- Validate what the learner is going through
- Refer students to appropriate resources for help

[\(Hewitt, 2017\)](#)

What's Wrong with Giving Advice?

“Someone comes to us with a problem, and we, moved by the desire to be helpful, want to immediately provide a solution. Don't we have this temptation almost constantly? It's almost comic: We might not have the solution to our own problems, but somehow we always manage to have the best advice for others.

“What really happens when we provide advice? Unconsciously, we send to the other person the message that he or she does not have the resources to solve their problem. We say (without saying it), ‘You are not good enough.’ And we put ourselves on a pedestal, pretending that we understand the other person's problem when we are really not in their shoes.

“The best way to give an advice is not to give an advice at all, but instead to listen deeply.

“Rather than saying, ‘Here is what you need to do,’ we need to shut up and open the ear of our heart. We need to create a space where the other person can articulate what is afflicting him or her. Rather than providing a response, it's much more productive to be curious about the person's situation and encourage the conversation with open ended questions. In articulating his or her problem, often the best solution becomes self-evident . . . most of the time, the answer to a problem lies within us. All we need is to be reminded of how resourceful and powerful we can be.

“The best advice is to silence ourselves—and the temptation to provide immediate solutions—and to lend an ear to the other” (Civico, 2015).

Sample Scripts and Open-Ended Questions

Sample scripts and open-ended questions are excellent resources to help struggling students.

“Open-ended questions cannot be answered with a yes or no, or simple one-word answers. They create the space for people to tell their story in their own words, thereby influencing the direction of the conversation and supporting engagement. They also build relationships when coming from a place of curiosity, care and concern. This is the heart of collaboration. You are shifting away from advice giving into asking questions that allow students to process the best way forward. Following up with, ‘It sounds like you have some ideas to consider’ or ‘You have made difficult choices before, I am glad you are thinking this through to make the right decision’ gives them something to process.”

Sample Script

First, validate feelings and compliment strengths:

"I am so sorry you are going through this."

"I admire how you have been able to come this far."

"Nobody should have to go through this."

Then, ask some open-ended questions:

"What concerns you most about your situation, if anything?"

"What have you already tried to solve this?"

"How have you managed to get through other difficult times in your life?"

"What has worked in the past?"

"What can we do in the next two weeks to keep you in class?"

Finally, offer the support you can and what they can expect in the educational setting:

"How can we support you as you get through this?"

"Would it help if I referred you to a program that can offer _____ until you get on your feet?" (Offer an appropriate referral)

"I can give you a list of _____. Many students have to use these while they are job searching."

"I believe you can get through this and still reach your goal here. Can we schedule a 10-minute check in next week to see how things are going?"

[\(Palecek, 2020\)](#)

Case Study

Emma, an 18-year-old student, approaches you after class. It's obvious that she's been crying, and the baggy circles under her eyes signal she hasn't slept much lately.

"Do you have a minute?" she asks.

Emma goes on to tell you about troubles at home. Her mom discovered that her dad is having an affair. They had a very loud argument and called each other every name in the book. Her dad ended up gathering his things and moving out. Using a baseball bat, he smashed several holes in the walls and bashed in a window of her mom's car. After he left, Emma's mom called the police and put a restraining order out on her father.

Just before class, Emma's dad called her and apologized. He begged her to leave her mom's house and come live with him. He promised he would change and do anything for her.

"I love both my parents," Emma said. "It's like I have to choose between them. I have no idea what to do. You always seem so confident, and I really respect you. What should I do?"

What principles that we've discussed today could you use with Emma?