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## Using Campus Resources and Referral Techniques

### Learning Objectives

After completing this chapter the peer educators will be able to

1. List available campus and community resources.
2. Assess the appropriateness of campus and community resources for use by students.
3. Take advantage of consultation with available professional staff and other knowledgeable sources of information when making informed decisions for assisting students.
4. Refer students to appropriate campus and community resources.
5. Offer post-referral follow-up and support.

A recent newspaper article headlined the hypothetical consumer notice, "Warning: attending college can be dangerous to your health." The article referred to a common theme in news stories concerning today's generation of college students, who are facing a level of complexity and change in their lives that was unknown to their predecessors even a few years ago. Students today have an escalating number of choices they must make about their careers and personal life. They must adapt rapidly to changes in technology that make last year's inventions quickly obsolete.

Their world has shrunk to a figurative backyard of international opportunity in which Internet communication, multinational businesses, and intercultural exchanges are a daily reality. At the same time, the rules and norms of society are in more flux than ever before with a myriad of options for social contact and intimacy—the important areas where individuals receive support and security in their lives. Whereas the more traditional family and societal standards of a few years ago set down a template of expectations for former generations to follow, the new generation has a proliferation of life options and ultimately more confusion as to what are the most important and valuable standards to assist their decision process. Many experts observing this phenomenon have noted the increased levels of stress, feelings of alienation, and survival living—which emphasizes immediate gratification instead of long-term direction (Newton, 1998).

Students, more than ever before, need to make use of resources to assist in managing the decisions, stresses, and information overload of the present world. And, as Ian Birky, a director of counseling, points out, "Students often are trying to go it alone, giving rise to more stress and anxiety than they can handle, when they need to reach out to someone else to talk about how they are feeling and managing the exhaustive pressure in their drive to succeed. . . . many do not know how to seek out this help!" (Cited in Vigoda, 1998, p. 1.)

A very important role for the peer educator is to assist students as they seek, find, and contract necessary resources outside their daily routine. Students serving in helping roles must have a firm grasp of available campus and community resources and know their appropriate uses. In addition to a knowledge of resources, it is important that the peer educator learn how to direct students to these resources effectively.

### Campus and Community Resources

When any student strives to achieve a goal, whether it is academic success, overcoming a personal obstacle, or achieving a new skill,

the effort will almost certainly entail the use of special resources. Every campus has in place an array of people and services with primary responsibility for providing this sort of assistance. Student affairs offices, various academic services, faculty members, community services, and even private businesses are potential sources for information and aid. Most of these forms of assistance will involve human resources, but there are also many physical facilities and technological resources. For example, Web pages, media kiosks, or other facilities that make use of electronic interactive media can provide information formerly available only from face-to-face interviews or library searches. Help telephone lines and 800 or 888 connections are additional sources. Knowing where to go for what becomes a crucial bit of information for effective peer helping.

Many students are not familiar with their campus and community resources, and thus are unable to take advantage of them. Another problem students face when contemplating the use of campus resources is the misinformation and rumors that sometimes circulate about an office, service, or resource. Both lack of information and misinformation can quickly block use of a resource that could be a valuable asset in personal goal accomplishment.

At times, students may feel reluctant and even embarrassed to admit needing help. Even asking a question of a faculty member after class may be difficult for fear of appearing stupid. Therefore, peer educators can play a significant role in providing objective and reassuring information about the resources available. In your role you may be called upon to share information about the existence of a resource or about its adequacy and quality, sometimes dispelling myths that might otherwise discourage students from taking advantage of available services.

It is also noteworthy that peer educators can often provide evaluative feedback to campus and community resources regarding the students' perception of the services in question. This information gives the agency, program, or department the opportunity to clarify its role, improve publicity, and even improve the quality of its services and interaction with students.

Students will often hang back and avail themselves of support services and resource opportunities only when a situation has reached critical proportions. Peer educators can provide an important and advantageous service by getting a student to sources of assistance before the crisis breaks, when prevention and early intervention are possible. Ideally, campus resources are best used to help students achieve their personal and academic goals before those goals have been threatened by a developing problem.

#### When to Refer

Frequently, the beginning peer educator finds it difficult to determine when to refer a student to another resource. It is natural to want to help—that's what draws people into the peer educator role—but watch out if you find yourself feeling pressured to relieve and resolve the concern of the person requesting and needing assistance. This pressure can lead to a tendency to give quick advice, offering a solution by providing a suggestion out of your own repertoire of answers or immediately directing the student to another resource that seems likely to hold the solution. Often, your own solution may not be the answer to someone else's concerns, and a quick referral may feel like a brush-off or the beginning of a run-around. The following guidelines (adapted from Ender, Saunders-McCaffrey, and Miller, 1979) will help you make adequate and welcome referrals.

#### Listen Carefully

The first and often the most important step is to listen carefully and clearly so as to understand what the individual needs in the way of assistance. Look back to Chapter Four for a discussion of the process of becoming an effective communicator. And remember, as a peer, you will probably be perceived as an approachable, friendly source to ask for assistance. Your support, encouragement, and guidance may be sufficient to help an individual figure out what to do, but there will be times when the student's concern is beyond your knowl-

edge, greater than you wish to handle, or otherwise in need of professional attention. This is the point when you consider referral.

#### Know Your Limits

The second important item to address regarding referrals is to know your own limits for giving assistance. As a general rule, when in doubt, refer the student to a more qualified resource. Trying to help a student with a serious problem when you possess only minimal skill and experience in that area may do more harm than good. Take, for example, the peer educator who, with little knowledge about the world of work, attempts to assist a student in clarifying a career decision. Such a student is apt to believe that the help received is the help needed in this area, and may therefore be reluctant to seek additional assistance from a more qualified source. The student may waste valuable time following a course of action that does not fit their real needs, such as majoring in a field that proves to be without long-term interest to them, and this may eventually lead to frustration with the process.

#### Seek Consultation

Sometimes there may be an intermediate step between understanding a student's needs and setting up a referral. This step is for the helper to seek a consultation with a knowledgeable resource person to find out about options for the student being helped. The student being assisted would first be informed that you, as a peer educator, would like to consult with another source that can give suggestions or input as to the next step in assistance. Using the example of the career issue previously mentioned, you could say, "I would like to talk to a counselor at the Career Counseling Office and get their suggestions as to activities that might be helpful for the questions you are having. Would you mind if I call them and get back to you with their suggestions?" By clarifying what you are seeking from a consultation and getting the student's consent, you are enabling the student to be informed and in control of this process. Sometimes

such a consultation can be made by phone with the student present, in other cases it may be preferable for the peer educator to meet with a resource then get back to the student in a timely way. When seeking consultative assistance, it is important to have clear and complete information about the needs of the student you are representing.

While consultation may take place through a person with expertise in an area of assistance, peer educators will also routinely seek consultation from the person who serves as the supervisor. It is important to regularly review the processes you are using as a helper and get feedback as to the appropriateness of your interventions and referrals.

#### **How to Refer**

When you refer someone to another resource, you want the referral to be seen as welcome assistance and not some sort of brush-off. The following guidelines (adapted from Ender, Saunders, McCaffrey, and Miller, 1979) will help you accomplish effective referrals.

#### *Be Honest*

Be direct and straightforward in your recommendation. Explain in a clear and open manner why you feel it is desirable or necessary to make a referral.

#### *Become Knowledgeable*

Explain fully the services that can be obtained from the resource agency or person you are recommending. Provide confirming data about how the referral source can be useful and describe the source's qualifications or capabilities. This information can be reassuring to the student so that they will receive the help they need. It is preferable to avoid making a "shot in the dark" referral or providing information that might turn into a turnaround because you do not know for sure that the agency has the assistance that matches the student's need. Check it out!

#### *Demonstrate Respect*

Allow the student to assume responsibility and control in making a contact or appointment. Student initiation and follow-up enhance commitment and promote a sense of autonomy in taking charge of the situation.

#### *Personalize the Referral Process*

It can be useful to give the student the name of a particular person or persons who can be a direct contact at the resource organization. This will personalize and make the experience seem less intimidating. Be careful about this sort of referral, though. It may be best to not provide the name of anyone who may be hard to contact or may seem less available than a general referral.

#### *Role-Play or Practice*

Assist the student in formulating questions to ask or approaches to take during an initial contact session. Some rehearsal or preparation can be reassuring.

#### *Carefully Assess the Need*

In some cases you may find a student resists or denies the need to go to a professional resource. You have several choices when you meet such resistance. You can accept the individual's decision to not take advantage of the referral. If you believe the individual simply needs more encouragement, you can provide more explicit reasons why you believe it is important for them to go. If the problem is uneasiness about approaching an office, you could consider more direct assistance such as offering to go with them to make an initial contact. Finally, if you believe there is the potential of danger to self or others, such as reference to a suicidal threat, you should go to the professional resource on your campus on your own so as to get consultation and assistance to aid that individual.

**Follow Up**

Encourage the student to get back in touch with you after visiting the recommended resource. In some cases, it would be appropriate to make the contact yourself if you don't hear back from the student in a reasonable time. This shows your concern and interest and provides continuity of the helping relationship. Also, this follow-up contact with the student provides additional incentive for the student to make contact with the referral source.

**Reflection Point 1**

Think of a time when you personally have needed to find out about a campus resource or needed information:

What obstacles or difficulties did you encounter in trying to get your situation resolved?

So what was the personal impact on you when dealing with these obstacles? Imagine someone else going through a similar situation to what you experienced.

Now what could you do to reduce the hassles and obstacles in getting what was needed?

**Chat Rooms and Other Online Resources**

In today's world, more and more students gain immediate access to other individuals, sometimes so-called experts, by way of e-mail, the Internet, and numerous self-help networks. Many students spend hours in Internet chat rooms, trying to meet a significant person through a media dating exchange, or joining a network of people who have similar interests, and become outlets for information and sometimes support. Although this can be an immediate source of contact at almost any time of day on almost any subject, students need to be very aware of the many potential problems associated with this resource.

First, using interactive computer and other media contact provides very little control over the authenticity of individual responses or of the message and information being communicated. Additionally, revealing personal information has little assurance of privacy or confidentiality, and may even be used in ways that are fraudulent or harassing. There are certainly occasions in which valid information and support can be gained from the Internet and similar resources, however, the "buyer should always beware" of possible misleading information or deceptions. Do not assume that a chat room can replace direct contact in face-to-face situations with a person or office of established reputation. Technology has produced an extensive resource for gaining information and developing rapid and expansive communication systems, but face-to-face contact is still the most direct and personal way to respond to individual needs and circumstances.

**Guidelines for Learning About Campus and Community Resources**

Before you tell someone to try a resource or service, you should make sure you know what it does best and how to take advantage of it. It is your responsibility to avoid spreading misinformation and dropping students into a frustrating runaround.

### *Tips for Evaluating Resources*

The following tips (adapted from Ender, Saunders-McCaffrey, and Miller, 1979) will be helpful as you evaluate referral resources.

1. Visit the service. Meet with staff members of the resources most frequently used by the students with whom you work. This process is time-consuming but provides many important benefits. It is easier to make an effective and reassuring referral if you know something about the beliefs and attributes of the persons at a particular office, as well as having a knowledge of the services provided.
2. Tour the facility. Ask for a tour of facilities and material resources such as library, media collection, or computer lab. Familiarity with the physical facilities will also enable you to refer a student to the most appropriate resource available. Ask to be on any mailing list the office has for announcing special events or programs. Get a copy of any descriptive brochure—with extras to hand out if they're readily available.
3. Understand the agency's referral process. Ask specific questions regarding referral procedures, activities of the office, office hours, and even the philosophy or attitudes of the staff toward providing service. Discover the process a student goes through when seeking assistance, such as filling out forms and scheduling appointments. Find out if the agency has a policy regarding confidentiality.
4. Check out willingness to serve as consultants. Explore the possibilities of using agency resource persons as consultants for helping you work with students. For example, if you were working with a student who has experienced a personal crisis, it would be very useful to know how to access a counseling psychologist or similar personal counselor to find out about dealing with crisis and referral.

### Reflection Point 2

Think about your own work with other students and the limits of your skills:

What benefits can peer educators derive from having knowledge of campus and community resources?

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So what criteria does one use when deciding if a referral is an appropriate strategy? Looking at the reverse standard, when would it be inappropriate to use referral?

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Now what competencies and knowledge must you, the peer educator, possess to be an effective referral agent?

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### Summary

Knowledge of available campus and community resources and of appropriate ways to make a referral will be an effective tool for a peer educator to use in work with students. The more you know about the purpose and function of various offices, the more effective you will be in helping students develop plans, solve problems, and achieve their goals.

