

Responding to students' concerns for each other

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The situation

A student(s) tells you they're concerned about another student's mental health or wellness, but they don't want you to tell the student they told you.

What do you do?



What you can do

- ✓ Provide support to them--*they* are the primary person to support right now.
Don't ignore them to talk about or problem-solve about the student of concern.
- ✓ Listen with empathy
they probably had a hard time making the decision to tell you
- ✓ Validate their perspective & experience
this makes it more likely they'll continue coming to you with concerns
affirm that the situation *is* concerning (from their perspective)
empathize with their concern and stress
- ✓ Reassure them
that you will do all you can to ensure the student gets care & support
that *they* are not responsible for the student's health & safety



What you can do

- ✓ Talk with them about managing their own stress and health--how to care for themselves while handling this concern for another
- ✓ Remind them of the need to set boundaries
 - their primary duty is their own learning and immersion experience
 - they need not feel guilty for not doing more for the other
 - they might actually be perpetuating the other's experience of not taking good care of themselves, if are caretaking*
- ✓ Check back in with them some time later



What you *can't* do

✗ - Refrain from disclosing anything about the student's situation, despite what you know.

✗ - Tell them that you can neither confirm nor deny what they are reporting--you are responsible to keep what *you* know confidential: you can receive information from them, but you cannot share any.

✗ - Be clear that you can't do much to support the student if you don't have their permission to share their concerns to initiate a conversation. About all you can do is maybe try to subtly ask that student how they're doing.



What you *can't* do

- ✗ - Be clear that you can't protect their wish for confidentiality if you must take action for the student's health/safety
- ✗ - Be transparent that you cannot *force* the student to do anything or take any action. You can always offer support and resources, but you can't force a student to do anything. Don't promise any outcomes (eg "I promise they'll get the care they need.")



Finally, considering support for the student of concern

- Is the student's health/safety of concern enough that you *must* do something? Then do it.
- If their fundamental health/safety is *not* at risk, can you subtly check in with them?
- Could you proactively offer support/resources to the whole group without singling them out?
- Must you simply wait and see if they seek help, but be prepared to respond? with resources?



Breakout discussions

Scenario 1: Two students ask to talk to you, and report that their roommate is cutting her arms most nights. They help clean up the tool and blood for her, and try to take turns staying up half the night to comfort and watch her.

Scenario 2: The girlfriend of a student comes to you crying, saying her boyfriend, another student in the program, was physically assaulted the previous evening, due to his race, and he's really upset and talking about quitting the program and going home. She doesn't want him to leave, and wants you to stop him, but she also doesn't want you to tell the boyfriend she's told you.

Scenario 3: your own example



Discussion

