

Implementation of a Peer Counseling Program at a Small Rural Wisconsin University

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Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this poster is to enable you to recognize the benefits of Peer Counseling, identify the steps needed for programming, and how to implement it on your campus.

University of Wisconsin - River Falls (UWRF) researched and implemented a Peer Counseling Program with the goal of increasing connection, reducing loneliness while increasing resiliency and retention of students. Counseling staff collaborated with campus partners to hire Peer Counselors and market the program. Peer Counselors meet with students in the Counseling Services office to assure safety and allow for familiarity with counseling resources. This poster highlights the benefits of Peer Counseling and identifies the steps needed to implement it on your campus.



Promotional textured sticker

Identified Problem

Counseling Services has seen an increase in loneliness among the student population at UWRF. According to CCAPS-34* results in 2024 – 2025, approximately 50% of students who engaged in counseling reported loneliness; 33% of whom reported high levels of isolation. Many students also endorsed significant social anxiety, including discomfort around unfamiliar people and concerns that others may not like them. These findings suggest that difficulties with social connection and belonging are a meaningful contributor to student distress and may represent an important focus for both counseling interventions and campus wellness initiatives.

Creating the Program

4 Key Components of a Successful Peer Counseling Program

- Adapt and create a policy and procedure manual
- Hire peer counselors (not paid; however, they can use it as an internship opportunity and/or volunteer hours for the UWRF Honors Program)
- Train the peer counselors
- Provide ongoing consultation

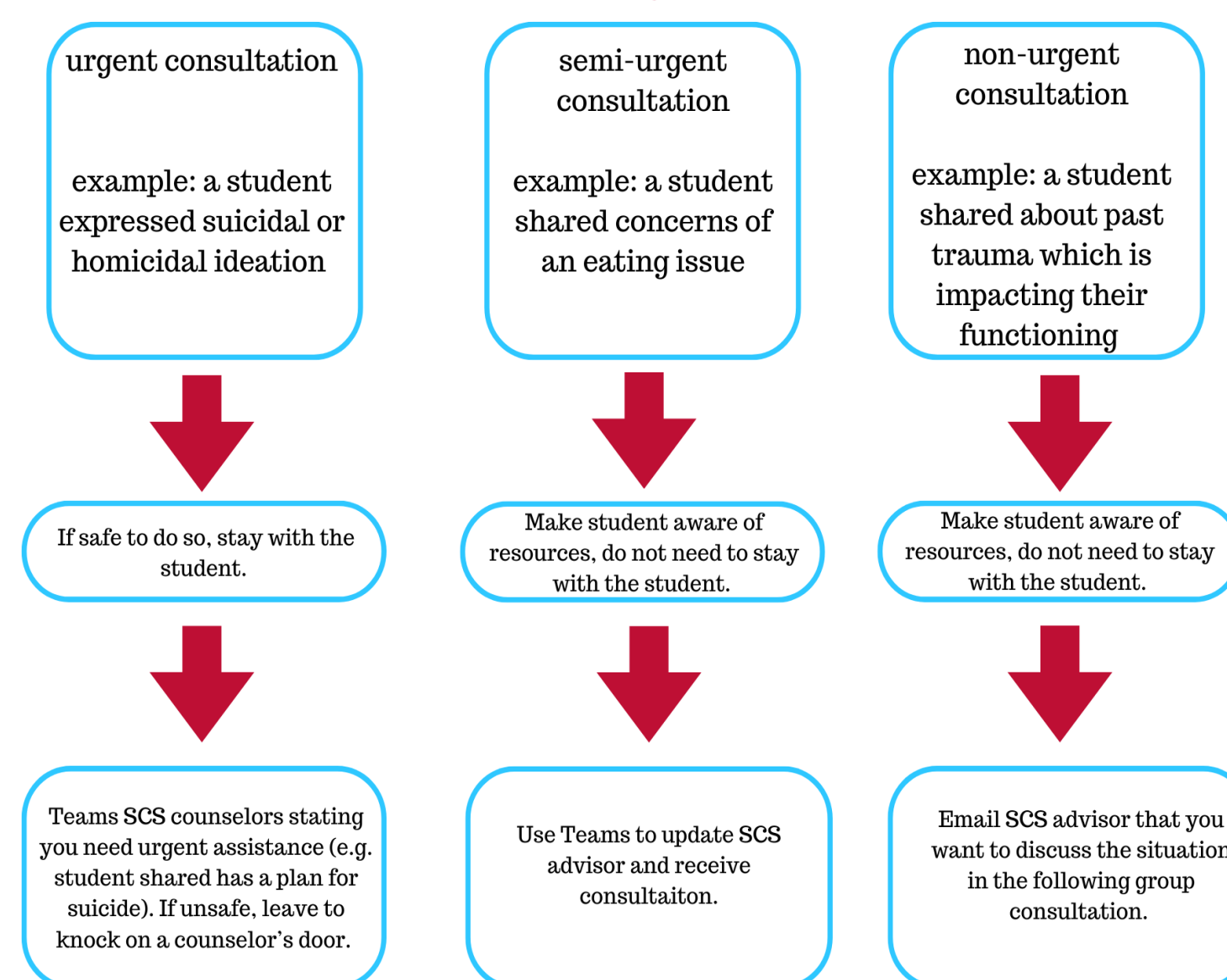
Marketing Plan

- Collaborate with campus partners such as professors, University Marketing Team, and Student Involvement
- Create advertising for digital campaign
- Develop promotional items

Risk Management Strategies

- Peer counseling appointments are held in Counseling Services during office hours
- Peer Counselors can immediately access professional counselors by knocking on a door or messaging on Microsoft Teams
- Emergency button on office phones

SCS Peer Counseling Escalation Pathway



Risk management escalation pathway

Process

Policy and Procedure

- Adapted University of Michigan's Peer Counseling Program, with permission
- Established calendar system using Navigate 360
- Created documentation and secure storage

Recruitment and Training

- Collaborated with campus partners to recruit Peer Counselors
- Reviewed applications and interviewed students
- Trained Peer Counselors
- Ongoing 1-hour weekly consultation

Resource Binder

- Notes
- Guide sheets on common topics
- Escalation pathway
- Marketing items such as textured stickers, business cards, etc.



Promotional textured sticker

Connecting Student with Peer Counselor

- Student expresses interest by completing online interest form, direct counseling referral, email, call, or stop by the office
- Coordinators assign student to a Peer Counselor
- Peer Counselor contacts student to schedule within 48 business hours
- All meetings take place within the Counseling Office
- Documentation is kept in a secure location

Conclusion

The UWRF Peer Counseling Program is low cost and provides the potential for step-down level of care within the Counseling Services office. The program also provides undergraduate Peer Counselors with real world experience. Students who engage with Peer Counseling have a positive experience with a peer and become familiar with the Counseling Services office. Students also have a decreased sense of loneliness. Counseling Services plans to continue to offer this program.



Advertising flyer with QR code to Peer Counseling website and student interest form

References

University of Michigan, Individual Peer Counseling, <https://uhc.umich.edu/individual-peer-counseling>

*Counseling Center Assessment of Psychological Symptoms

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the University of Wisconsin - River Falls for supporting this program, specifically the Student Counseling Services office. Campus partners were instrumental in recruiting Peer Counselors and marketing the program. We are grateful for the UW System Student Success Mini Grant which supported our marketing efforts. Thank you to the University of Michigan for guidance and permission to adapt their program.

