

When to refer a hurting student.

Knowing when and how to refer a student to someone who can provide them with a higher level of help may be the most significant skill a volunteer youth worker needs in this time of increased complexity in the lives of teenagers.

Eight situations when it's best to refer a student to a professional or someone with more education, experience, or expertise.

1. When one student is taking most of your time
2. When you feel out of your depth or are outside of your training, experience, comfort or responsibility
3. When the situation involves a violation of the law
4. When there is a medical/physiological concern of any kind
5. When there is talk of suicide (even hints)
6. When you get the sense that you are being lied to
7. When there is the reporting of any kind of abuse – know your legal obligations
8. When inappropriate relationship dynamics develop (romantic attraction, crushes, emotional co-dependence, etc.)

Remember that referring a student is never an indication of failure or inadequacy on your part. It is the most loving thing you can do to ensure that the students in your care are receiving the best possible help that you can find them. If that's not you, your best gift to a hurting student is to put them in the hands of someone who has education, expertise, or experience to deal with the complexity of the situation they find themselves in.

Courtesy of Dr. Marv Penner, Executive Director at the Coalition for Youth Ministry Excellence.