



CAMPUS CRIME

Mental Health

They're Not Bobby Knight Wannabes: Campus Coaches Offer Kindly Advice

A new service aimed at colleges with smaller budgets for counseling services provides college students with life coaches to help them deal with problems such as eating disorders, depression and drug or alcohol abuse.

The Campus Coach program offers students the friendly ear of a trained professional via telephone or computer. "College students experience significant adjustment issues to the tremendous stress and pressure of life on campus," said Chuck Taylor, an executive vice president of ValueOptions, the company that offers the service. "In many cases, budget restrictions have left schools without the resources they need to address these issues."

The company notes that suicide is the third overall cause of death among college-age students; and more than 75 percent of college students feel overwhelmed, with 22 percent of those kids sometimes feeling so depressed they cannot function.

The service is designed to help students avoid the stigma they might feel by going to a counseling center while also getting them help. "Students often times are unwilling or feel it's not necessary to take that first step when they have an issue they need help with," ValueOptions spokesman Tom Warburton told *CC*. "We can help them with problems like credit card debt, a problem with a roommate, overwork, basic stress. If people don't get those kind of issues resolved in a timely manner, they can fester and grow into a larger problem."

When the problems are severe enough to require more in-depth help, coaches refer students to campus counseling services. "Campus Coach is staffed by licensed clinicians and certified counselors," Warburton explained. "But, because these are not on-site counselors, it is a preventive resource. It is by no means designed to replace the student health center. So anything that is deemed clinical — a student starts talking about being seriously depressed or having suicidal or violent thoughts — they are referred to the university counseling center."

Edward Hallowell, a Harvard University (Mass.) professor specializing in children's mental health, had praise for the program. "Prevention and early intervention are the critical first steps necessary to keep students healthy, productive and successful in school when they encounter personal problems," he said. "Campus Coach reaches those students who might not seek assistance from university health services until an issue or a problem becomes serious. Furthermore, by employing a goal-oriented and solution-focused approach that helps students think through issues and come to conclusions in a collaborative, problem-solving way, Campus Coach helps students develop critical skills that will better prepare them for life after graduation."



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