

Advising Documentation in Pathways: Sensitive Situations

Caution should be exercised when using Pathways to document topics that contain sensitive or time-sensitive subject matter, including (but not limited to) sexual assault, crime, medical diagnoses, and mental health issues.

Do not use Pathways to document emergency situations. If a student issue is an emergency or requires an immediate response, please call the Pitt Police: 412-624-2121. The [CARS Team](#) will continue to respond to student behavior identified as reasonably causing concern for students' health, welfare, and safety.

Advisors and mentors are among the most salient relationships students will form in college and on the front lines of student success. Because of the critical role a mentoring and advising relationship can play in a student's college experience, we know that providing information about how to help students through difficult situations is important to fostering that relationship. Oftentimes, students trust advisors and mentors with these difficult conversations. It is important to *remember to listen first then assess later*. This guidance will help in the assessment of the student situation, including how to document information in the Pathways platform and how to refer the student to an appropriate office at the University of Pittsburgh. Information about how to make a referral in the Pathways system can be found here:

<https://www.pathways.pitt.edu/resources/referrals>

General Don'ts and Do's When Documenting Sensitive Situations:

Don'ts	Do's
Summarize <i>everything</i> that was discussed. Notes are intended to be a brief record of advising contacts highlighting recommendations, referrals made, and follow-up plans.	Briefly summarize what was discussed as it related to student success for future reference by the student, other support staff, and future advisors
Report problems with specific instructors	Summarize specific course recommendations
Use acronyms students and other campus support staff may not understand	Spell things out for a general audience
Include speculation, subjective opinions, or judgments	Write fact-based academic-related notes
Include sensitive information, personal concerns, private matters	Use general or coded language concerning sensitive material
Report details surrounding sensitive referrals	Record referrals made
Include notes about negative student behaviors	Include notes about positive student behaviors
Attach emails with sensitive/private content that the student likely didn't intend for other campus providers to read	Attach important emails

Scenarios: How Much Might Be Too Much?

The following examples are meant to help advisors consider ways in which they could document certain types of sensitive situations in the Pathways system. They are NOT meant to provide advisors with recommendations on how to best handle those situations. If you are uncertain about how to handle similar situations, discuss them with your supervisor for guidance on appropriate action.

If a referral made is of a "sensitive" nature, you may record, "Referred to appropriate resources" if you choose. However, it is also okay to be more specific about the referral office (ex: Disability Resources or Counseling Center).

What you should avoid including is very specific and/or in-depth details about mental/medical conditions/diagnoses or personal issues/situations that the student reports to you. Use caution when documenting anything related to political or religious affiliation, disclosed or perceived sexual orientation, or any other information that could potentially disadvantage a student if released to others.

Tip: “When in doubt, leave it out.”

Scenario 1: Student discloses sexual assault

During an advising appointment, a student discloses to you that she was the victim of sexual assault.

Too much...	About right...
<p>“Jane disclosed that she was raped at an off-campus party this weekend. I confirmed that the alleged perpetrator has been arrested and does not pose a continuing threat to Jane’s safety. We discussed the communication of excused absences to her professors for the duration of her hospitalization. To fulfill my Title IX reporting obligation, I contacted Student Affairs immediately after our advising meeting. I also set up a meeting for Jane with a member of the CARS Team for ongoing support.”</p>	<p>“After Jane disclosed a recent incident of a serious personal nature, I connected Jane to the Associate Dean’s Office to talk about outreach to her instructors. I also contacted Student Affairs and made sure that Jane was aware of campus and community resources that are available for continued support and connected her to them.”</p>
<p>Possible Referrals: Title IX Office, CARS</p>	

Scenario 2: Student discloses that they feel suicidal.

A student verbally says to you during an advising appointment, “I’m thinking about committing suicide before the semester is over.”

Too much...	About right...
<p>“Met with student to talk about next semester’s classes. Recommended he gets started on his foreign language requirements. At the end of our meeting, when I asked him how things were going, John said “I’m thinking about committing suicide before the semester is over”. I immediately walked John to the University Counseling Center (UCC).”</p>	<p>“Met with student to talk about next semester’s classes. Recommended he get started on his foreign language requirements. At the end of our meeting, when I asked him how things are going, John disclosed a serious personal situation so I immediately walked John to the University Counseling Center (UCC).”</p>
<p>Possible Referrals (suggested order): University Counseling Center, Pitt Police, CARS, Residence Director Pathways referral</p>	

Scenario 3: Student discloses learning disability

A student informs you that she is not doing well in coursework despite the fact that she is using every tutoring/learning assistance resource available. After you learn that she is indeed trying and that she seems to lose concentration very quickly, you decide to refer her to Disability Resource Services.

Too much...	About right...
<p>“Jane came in to discuss her lack of success in her coursework this term. After an extensive</p>	<p>“Jane came in to discuss her lack of success in her coursework this term. After an extensive</p>

conversation of how she is approaching her schoolwork, I decided to refer her to Disability Resource Services for consultation because it's clear to me that she has attention deficit disorder."	conversation of how she is approaching her schoolwork, I referred her to Disability Resource Services for consultation."
Possible Referrals: Disability Resource Services	

Scenario 4: Mental Health

A student disclosed an illness (mental or physical) that is affecting schoolwork.

Too much...	About right...
"Met with Joe to reduce his course load because he indicated that he is suffering from bipolar disorder and cannot handle five courses this semester. Joe stated that he is working with a psychologist and is currently taking medication. Joe will consult with me for future term scheduling."	"Met with Joe to suggest ways that he could reduce his course load due to a health-related situation. Joe will consult with me for future term scheduling. I also connected Joe to campus resources for additional support."
Possible Referrals: University Counseling Center , Residence Director Pathways referral	

Scenario 5: Death in Family/Family Emergency

A student discloses that their grandfather has passed away and that they will need to be absent to attend the funeral.

Too much...	About right...
"Bryce's grandfather died this weekend after a long battle with Alzheimer's Disease. Bryce will miss class this coming week to attend the funeral in California. I extended my condolences and appropriate staff in the Associate Dean's Office so that they might send out official notification to his professors. I asked if he wanted me to refer him to the UCC for grief counseling after his return. He will let me know."	"Bryce had an unfortunate familial matter come up and has to travel to California. He will miss the next week of classes. I connected him to the Associate Dean's Office for possible notification to his instructors. I made sure to discuss support services on campus should he wish to make use of them upon his return."
Possible Referrals: University Counseling Center , Director of Advising Unit and/or Dean's Office, Student's Instructors	

Scenario 6: Challenging Student Advising Appointment

You met with a student after they requested to discuss adjusting their course schedule. He was very rude and inflexible; the scheduling process was very difficult.

Too much...	About right...
"Met with Mark related to his request to adjust his schedule. Mark demanded to have all of his courses after 12:30pm and would not take a math course despite my suggestions. Mark was extremely rude and told me that I was no help.	"Met with Mark related to his request to adjust his schedule. He resisted many of my suggestions. I explained the potential impacts of his preferences on his academics. We worked out his schedule after much deliberation. He elected not to take a math course against my guidance."
Possible Referrals: Director of Advising Unit, Office of Student Conduct	

Scenario 7: Reported Behavioral Issues

A student has missed 2 weeks of classes and has been unresponsive to any emails from the professor and advisor. The advisor calls the Residence Director to see if they can check on the student. The Residence Director tells you that the student hasn't left her room in 2 weeks and isn't showering.

Too much...	About right...
"Professor Jones reported to me that Sara has missed 2 weeks of classes and has not responded to emails. I called her RD. The RD told me that the student hasn't left her room in 2 weeks and isn't showering. I asked the RD to bring the student into my office or to the UCC for assistance."	"Professor Jones reported to me that Sara has missed 2 weeks of classes and has not responded to emails. I called her RD. Based on our conversation, I asked the RD to bring the student into my office or to the UCC for assistance."
Possible Referrals: Residence Director Pathways referral , CARS , University Counseling Center , Student's Instructors	