**SUPPORTING VERSUS RESCUING RESPONSES** 

*Coordinators commonly find themselves in situations where students require a supportive response. However, at times, students ask or expect help that goes beyond the duties and responsibilities of the position and based on many factors, Coordinators (and all faculty) make choices about what and how they will proceed. Although it is recognized these may be common practice for many, provided below are definitions of supporting and rescuing as well as a range of responses to consider when working with students.*

Supporting

In general, supporting someone involves providing encouragement and resources to motivate them towards growth and change. Although there are times when people may be overwhelmed and require some direct assistance to lessen the stress, supporting occurs when there is recognition that the person in need does have or is gaining the capacity to deal with challenging situations. An important distinction between supporting and rescuing responses is thinking about whose needs are being met by the decisions made and actions taken to resolve the presenting problem.

Supportive behaviour creates space for people to meet their objectives rather than protecting them from tension, avoiding making a needed change, or sidestepping a consequence. In the academic environment, at times it may be more supportive to allow students to face their struggles and experience the consequences of decisions made. In addition, applying a supportive approach is satisfying to experience while better protecting the energy of the person providing the encouragement and resources.

Rescuing

Rescuing, can look a lot like supporting. Generally, people will defend their choice to rescue because it’s often done in the moment, it feels good, and it avoids or relieves tension felt by all involved. Sometimes, those in these helping positions also hide what they’ve done because on some level, they are aware that the decisions made, and actions taken are beyond their scope. In fact, the person in need often sanctions and defends the rescuing that occurs too because it “saved” them or “fixed’ something in the moment.

However, the act of rescuing puts the emphasis on the needs of the person doing the rescuing to be seen as knowledgeable and helpful, to protect themselves from discomfort, or to avoid more work. Unfortunately, this is at the expense of person in need who may be able to use their existing or growing knowledge and coping skills to resolve challenges or face consequences. An ongoing issue is if a rescue response is applied towards a particular person multiple times and that individual does have or is gaining capabilities to deal with difficulties, over time, that individual loses many opportunities for growth and change. In the realm of academia, rescuing can decrease opportunities for students to experience transformational learning. In addition, the person doing the rescuing in the moment experiences energy, but risks residual fatigue, burnout and stress that can impact their work and/or other areas of their life.

Examples of Responses to Students

**Confronting Versus Avoiding**

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|  | Supportive Behaviour  | Rescuing Behaviour  |
|  | **Confronts Tough Topics and Accepts Tension**  | **Avoids Tough Topics to Distance Oneself from Tension**  |
| •  | Addresses student choices and behaviour o The Coordinator meets with a student to discuss the impact of a series of disrespectful emails sent to the Coordinator and/or faculty. The Coordinator explores the purpose of the emails with the student, the negative perceptions that the student has created for themselves, and reviews the Student Rights and Responsibilities policy and regulations that are to be followed. They agree to a plan whereby the student will start communicating with faculty using a respectful tone and language.  | •    | Ignores or minimizes the impact of the student choices and behaviour o The Coordinator ignores the disrespectful emails by a student despite the negative impact on them and on faculty. o The Coordinator explores the purpose of the tone and language in the emails with a student and casually cautions them without reviewing impact, perceptions, Fleming policies, nor a plan moving forward.  |
| •  | Addresses complaints by students o The Coordinator applies active listening when negative feedback is provided by a student about their program or discipline/subject area. The student is asked about their ideas and solutions and the Coordinator agrees to discuss with the rest of the faculty in order to consider changes. Time frames for a response from the Coordinator are established.  | •  | Dismisses complaints by students o The Coordinator hears the negative feedback provided by a student about their program or discipline/subject area, but defends the concerns raised. Solutions are not discussed nor is there any indication that the feedback will be brought to the faculty team. * The Coordinator hears the negative feedback, provided by a student while non-verbally denying problems or discouraging the discussion. There is no indication that the feedback will be brought to the faculty team to be considered.
* The Coordinator hears a few of the concerns raised by a student, but moves quickly to asking them about the strengths of the program or discipline/subject area or other topics.
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| •  | Validates students’ thoughts, feelings, and choices o The Coordinator gives time and space for a student to express their upset feelings about a final course grade received before providing information about next steps.  | •  | Stops students from fully expressing themselves o Too quickly, the Coordinator tries to stop a student from being upset about a final course grade by using humour or giving advice before they finish expressing themselves.  |

**Honesty Versus Placating**

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| Supportive Behaviour  |  | Rescuing Behaviour  |
| **Honesty with Students and Accepting Negative Reactions**  |  | **Placates Students to Avoid Negative Reactions**  |
| • Provides helpful information that may be perceived as a criticism O The Coordinator talks privately and gently to a student about an obvious hygiene problem that may negatively impact a placement, co-op, or future job opportunity. The student is given time to absorb the feedback and discuss if and how they wish to address the issue. Resources may be talked about for accessibility, availability, and meaningfulness.  | •  | Withholds helpful information because it may be perceived as a criticism o In order to not hurt a student’s feelings or be perceived as rude, the Coordinator ignores the obvious hygiene problem despite observations and concerns from others and recognition that it could impact future experiential and work opportunities. o The Coordinator knows that the professional course that the student is currently taking provides an overview of dress code and believes the student will receive the information, recognize the concern with their hygiene, and address it on their own. The Coordinator does not follow-up with the faculty and/or student to see if any changes have occurred.  |
| • Provides honest feedback to students o The Coordinator tells a student the concerns raised by faculty about their difficulty in meeting one of the industry specific skills and goes over in detail what level they are expected to meet before the end of the course(s) or program. The student is given time to absorb the feedback and discuss if and how they wish to address the issue. Resources may be talked about for accessibility, availability, and meaningfulness.  | •  | Provides inflated or understated feedback to students o In an effort to pacify the student reaction, the Coordinator tells a student that they will meet professional industry standards for a specific skill before they graduate. This is despite concerns raised by faculty. Options to assist the student may be discussed superficially, but no concrete plan is formed. o The Coordinator minimizes the importance of meeting the standard for a specific skill in their chosen field for the student or minimizes the faculty feedback about the student for fear of their reaction to it.  |
| • Truthfully answers questions about outcomes o The Coordinator informs the student of the academic appeal process and all possible outcomes for their upcoming appeal.  | •  | Gives false reassurance to students o In order to soothe a student’s nervousness, the Coordinator reassures them that they will be successful in an upcoming academic appeal.  |

**Promoting Versus Preventing**

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|  | **Supportive Behaviour**  |  | **Rescuing Behaviour**  |
|  | **Actions that Promote a Person’s Independence**  |  | **Actions that Prevent a Person’s Independence**  |
| •  | Encourages students to advocate for themselves to resolve issues o The Coordinator recommends a student speak with a faculty about concerns regarding a mark received for a recent assignment. The Coordinator validates the student’s reluctance to speak directly while reviewingthe potential advantages. If the student decides to follow-through with meeting the faculty, the Coordinator and student review how the student can contact, organize, and facilitate the meeting.  | •  | Speaks on behalf of students to resolve issues o The Coordinator contacts the faculty on behalf of a student to clarify an assigned mark despite the student’s demonstrated or growing ability to articulate their thoughts, feelings, and choices.  |
| •  | Encourages students to do things for themselves o The Coordinator recommends a student contact an employer to ask about who they should address their cover letter and resume to since it was not included in the job advertisement. The Coordinator validates the student’s nervousness, but reviews with student the advantages of showing initiative and the consequences of not following through. The Coordinator asks the student to follow-up with them when they have obtained the information sought.  | •  | Does things for students that they can do for themselves o In order to better ensure a student’s follow through with the application process because they have indicated they have never contacted a professional organization before, the Coordinator contacts the employer on their behalf.  |
| •  | Encourages students to make meaningful connections to other services and supports o The Coordinator explains the extent of their role and availability in supporting students and provides information about other services oncampus. After discussing accessibility, availability, and meaningfulness. The Coordinator encourages the student to explore those they are interested in to evaluate their usefulness. o The Coordinator explains the extent of their role and availability in supporting students and provides information about other resources available in the community. After discussing accessibility, availability, and meaningfulness, the Coordinator encourages the student to explore those they are interested in to evaluate their usefulness.  | •  | Responds to students beyond their roles and scope o Because a student has indicated they do not like or will not use other on-campus services available and the Coordinator fears the student will not follow-through, the Coordinator tries to independently resolve all of the challenges the student is facing academically. o Because a student has indicated they have no other informal or formal resources available or any that they trust and the Coordinator is concerned about their safety (housing, food security, mental and physical health, etc.), the Coordinator begins to respond to challenges the student is facing in other areas of their life. This may lead to the Coordinator exchanging personal contact information with the student and/or responding to the student after hours.  |

Shebib, B. (2023). Choices: Interviewing and counselling skills for Canadians. 8th Edition. Toronto: Pearson.