

Use of Language in Starfish

Starfish is a powerful tool that the Trinity community can use to communicate about and with students in order to support their success. However, it is important that when raising flags, making referrals, and entering notes, careful and accurate language is used.

Starfish lets you know if the student will be able to see what you write (if you are ever not sure check the faculty resource page (<https://www.trinitydc.edu/faculty/starfishsupport/>) or email starfish@trinitydc.edu).

Even in the case that the student does not immediately see what you write, be aware that Starfish files have the potential to be part of the students' official record and so appropriate language is important.

Try to keep the following in mind as you use Starfish:

- ✓ Are you using language that is nonjudgmental (i.e. neutral)?
- ✓ Do you avoid making assumptions or expressing opinions about the student and always stick to the facts?
- ✓ Do you always indicate when something is an observation (e.g. "she *seemed* upset")?
- ✓ Do you make it clear when you are recording the student's own words (by using quotation marks or by writing "the student stated that...")?
- ✓ Are you using a growth mindset that focuses on providing supports to struggling students?
- ✓ Are you sharing personal information the student has shared? If so – why? Do you need to share this?

Counseling and Health & Wellness referrals are particularly sensitive:

Keep in mind that the student will receive an email with the referral information and such referrals should only be made following a discussion with the student.

Therefore, instead of "student is going through a lot and needs counseling" say "Based on our conversation, I am connecting you to our counselor, to discuss the information you shared with me" or "check in with Ms. Annie regarding support systems for the school year." For these referrals, less is more!

Do NOT use the term "mental illness" or make any reference to any diagnosis.