



Identifying and Responding to Students in Distress

IS THE STUDENT IN DISTRESS?

- The student is reporting significant problems
- There are observable signs of distress
- Significant changes in mood
- Difficulty controlling emotions
- Other marked changes in behaviour
- Others (faculty, staff, students) have expressed concerns about the student

OTHER SITUATIONS REQUIRING ATTENTION:

- Disordered eating
- Assault
- Harassment/bullying
- Marked change in mood or behaviour
- Difficulty communicating
- Distortions of reality
- Learning and academic challenges
- Any concern on your part about the student's well-being

WHAT TO DO:

- Listen to the student
- Be supportive, non judgemental
- Provide information about resources
- Offer to make a referral and/or to accompany student
- If student does not want to use the resources, respect the student's decision and encourage the student to talk again.

EMERGENCY SITUATIONS:

When the student is a threat to him or herself, or others –

CONTACT:

Counselling Services	494-8260
After Hours (Campus Security)	492-8778

Other Situations Requiring Attention:

DIFFICULTY IN COMMUNICATING AND/OR DISTORTIONS OF REALITY

Refer a student to counselling for the following reported behaviours:

- Difficulty communicating (difficulty forming thoughts, completing sentences, irrational conversations)
- Distortions of reality

MARKED CHANGES IN MOOD OR BEHAVIOUR

Refer a student to counselling for the following changes in regular behaviour:

- Withdrawal from social interactions or academic work
- Notable changes in energy levels or appearance

DISORDERED EATING

Refer a student to counselling for the following reported behaviours:

- Excessive dieting
- Uncontrolled binge eating
- Induced vomiting after eating

LEARNING AND ACADEMIC CHALLENGES

Refer a student to faculty or academic advisors for the following reported concerns:

- Serious academic concerns
- Considering withdrawal
- In jeopardy of failing

ASSAULT AND/OR HARASSMENT

These issues may require the attention of Campus Security for safety reasons, and counselling for the student involved:

- Sexual assault
- Harassment, bullying, physical or emotional abuse
- Stalking
- Discrimination

The student may prefer to contact an off campus organization, as indicated on the attached Resources List.

Other Signs of Distress:

• Changes in academic performance (deterioration in quality of work, frequently missed assignments and classes, excessive procrastination, avoidance of participation)

• Facial tics

• Listlessness or falling asleep in class

• Unusual behaviour (unexplained crying, laughing to self, rapid speech, disorganized thinking, suspiciousness)

• High levels of irritability

• Significant weight loss or gain

• Physical symptoms (nausea, headaches, problems with eating, excessive or disrupted sleeping)

• Changes in hygiene or dress

• Changes in relationships or social behaviour (withdrawal, isolation, or dependency)

• Difficulty concentrating or communicating

What to do and Say:

APPROACH:

- It is OK to ask and express concern
- Be specific about the behaviour that worries you

LISTEN:

- Listen non-judgementally, having an open world view
- Meet in a private location, be patient and give your undivided attention

SUPPORT:

- Acknowledge their thoughts and feelings in a compassionate way
- Offer hope and reassure them you are concerned and want to help

REFER:

- Provide student with resources
- Offer to make the call with the student

"I've noticed you've been absent from class lately and I'm concerned about you."

"Is there anything I can do to help you?"

"It sounds like you're feeling out of place."

"If you'd like, I can call and book the appointment for you while you are here with me."

Making a Good Referral

- Point out that help is available and seeking help is a sign of strength and courage rather than weakness. Acknowledge that seeking help can be scary
- Research resources (see the back of this folder, contact the Director of Financial Aid and Student Counselling for recommendations on how to approach the situation at ext.8130)
- If the student is reluctant, you can help by—
 - Offering to contact the resource on their behalf while they are in your office
 - Offering to sit with the student while they make the initial contact themselves
 - Accompanying the student to the appointment if appropriate and you feel comfortable
- Provide the student with take-away materials and information (contact numbers, etc...)
- Offer to follow-up with the student, but don't insist on knowing what the student has done

If a Student Says "No" to a Referral

- Respect their decision - Accepting or refusing assistance must be left up to the student, except in emergencies, when life is in danger
- Don't force the issue or trick them into going. Try and leave the door open for later reconsideration

"I respect your decision. I hope you will keep these options in mind. My door is always open."