

Student life can be very stressful. Most students juggle heavy course loads with work, family and other commitments. Chronic stress is often made worse by crises: unforeseen events that can catch students off guard.

As members of the Carleton University community, we all have concern for the wellbeing of our students. We also have a role to play in identifying students who are in distress. Recognizing the signs of distress, and responding with concern and interest, are important factors in helping students resolve the problems they are facing and continue to be successful in both academic and extracurricular activities.

This document outlines the warning signs of a student in distress and how to help a student who approaches you looking for help. You can use this folder to help you compile resources and tools to help students who are experiencing difficulty or who are in distress.

## Recognize

Everyone experiences crises at some point in their lives. All students deal with crisis differently. However, there are several warning signs that can indicate that a student may need additional support:

- a sudden drop in grades;
- increased absences from class;
- lack of participation in class discussions;
- isolation from friends or classmates;
- missed assignments or the inability to complete assignments;
- loss of interest, lack of energy or difficulty concentrating.

More advanced signs that a student may be in crisis include:

- sharing personal problems with you;
- disruptive or unusual behaviour, aggressiveness, emotional outbursts or crying;
- increased irritability;
- decrease or increase in appetite or excessive weight gain or loss;
- lack of personal hygiene;
- excessive fatigue;
- illogical or confused thinking or writing;
- increased use of alcohol or recreational drugs.

## Respond

- **Express concern** without making assumptions about the student. Be specific about the behaviour that concerns you, and approach the student in a supportive role. For example, "I've noticed you have been absent from class lately and I am concerned," rather than "Where have you been? You need to be more concerned about your grades."

- **Listen** to the student as they explain what they are dealing with and ask questions to clarify what help they need. This will help you refer the student to the most appropriate office on campus.
- **Acknowledge** students' thoughts and feelings in a **sensitive and compassionate** matter. Let them know you understand by repeating back to them what they are telling you. For example, "It sounds like you are feeling lonely on such a big campus."
- **Reassure** the student that everyone experiences crisis at some point in their life and that things can get better.

## Refer

If you notice these kinds of warning signs, or if a student in difficulty approaches you looking for help, you can assist by making a referral to an appropriate service. Here are some tips:

- Point out the **different services on campus** that can help, and that seeking help is not a sign of weakness, but it is a sign of courage and good judgment. Ensure that the student has the contact information for the office you are referring them to.
- **If the student is hesitant or reluctant**, or if they have questions about being referred to a student support service:
  - Let them know that there is no charge for using student support services and that their fees cover the use of counselling services.
  - Help them by offering to make the initial contact to the service or accompanying the student to the service if doing so is appropriate and if you feel comfortable. It is okay to call the resources for the student while they are there with you.
  - Tell them that Health and Counselling Services is confidential.
  - If the student says "no", respect their decision, but let them know that your door is open if they would like to reconsider.
- Except in emergency situations, the option to accept or refuse assistance must be left up to the student. If they become defensive, don't force the issue or trick them into going.
- **Communicate** to the student to let them know what you are going to do.
- **Be aware of your own boundaries** around time and personal involvement with the student.
- Give yourself permission not to know what to do. Recognize your limits and consult with others in Health and Counselling Services or University Safety.
- **Be aware of the student services on campus** and how they can help students in distress:
  - The Student Support Services Guide for Faculty and Staff, found online at [carleton.ca/student-support/resources/guide](http://carleton.ca/student-support/resources/guide), is a great resource for instructors to use when making referrals. You can also contact the Office of Student Affairs to seek help with a referral.
- **Refer** the student to the Coping with Crisis portion of the Student Affairs website ([carleton.ca/studentaffairs](http://carleton.ca/studentaffairs)).

## Report

### Urgent situations

#### Situations requiring immediate referral

If you are faced with the following situations, dial 4444 from any phone on campus to connect to University Safety.

- Threats and/or disruptive behaviour
- Direct or indirect reference to suicide

Alternatively, if you are comfortable, you can walk the student to Health and Counselling Services, Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Note: If the student is off campus, dial 911 and also notify University Safety. If you are unsure if the situation warrants a 911 call, you can call the Crisis Line at 613-722-6914.

### **Non-urgent but concerning situations Care Report**

If you are very concerned about a student's behaviour and would like to make record of an incident or conversation with a particular student, please fill out the Incident Report Form. You can link to this form from the Student Affairs website at [carleton.ca/studentaffairs](http://carleton.ca/studentaffairs). This will automatically begin the process of creating a confidential file in the Office of Student Affairs, and the Director of Student Affairs will begin the process of monitoring the student for signs that he/she may be at-risk.

#### **FOLLOW UP**

- You are encouraged to follow up with the student to see if they have connected with the resources you recommended.
- When dealing with crisis, it is hard to predict how long it will take a student to recover. Students will need time to resolve the issues. If warning signs persist, you can consider submitting an online care report or contact our Case Manager in Student Affairs.
- The directors of Health and Counselling Services, University Safety, Student Affairs or the Vice-President (Students and Enrolment) and University Registrar are responsible for contacting parents or guardians of the student as needed.

**For additional resources, please contact the Office of the Vice-President (Students and Enrolment) at [vpstudents@carleton.ca](mailto:vpstudents@carleton.ca).**

Use this chart as a referral guide to the many student and faculty services on campus.  
Common questions and categories are to the left and right that point to the relevant service in the centre.

