Supporting a Friend

Friends are often the first contact when we are looking for help. It can be difficult to know how to support a friend when we aren’t sure how to respond. Often we worry that we might make things worse by saying or doing the wrong thing.

Sometimes a friend just needs someone to listen and other times it is important to recognize when a situation is beyond your level of expertise.

1 Recognize

Any one of the following symptoms does not absolutely indicate serious distress. However, several signs and changes, which may be extreme or sudden, may point to potential mental health concerns.

Signs and Symptoms

Check in with your friend if you notice changes in any of the following:

- Emotional control
- Interactions with others
- Tired appearance
- Appetite/weight changes
- Isolation from friends/family
- Lack of personal hygiene
- Level of substance use

1 Reflect

If you need more help, you can contact:

- The crisis line
- GoodFriend
- Family, faculty or staff members
- Your resident advisor
- Health and Counselling Services

If the situation is an emergency:

Hang up and call 1-833-722-6494 (Community Health Services) or 613-520-4444 (Campus Security). The crisis team will respond to your call.

2 Respond

If you notice any of these signs or changes, the next step is to let your friend know that you are there for them and would like to help. Try to find a time when your friend is available and comfortable, and be sure to find a private location.

Notice

Try to give your friend tangible examples, and if observing general personal changes, be gentle and explain why you are concerned.

“I’ve noticed you haven’t been coming to the Caf lately and I am concerned because you usually love our group dinners.”

“I’ve noticed you have been quiet when we hang out, is everything okay?”

When you said __________, I thought that didn’t sound like you and I’m concerned.”

Listen

Validate what your friend is going through. It is also okay for you to be nosy – probe your friend and show you are interested by asking questions.

“I cannot imagine what you are going through, but I am here for you.”

“What else?”

“It sounds like you are frustrated with ________, is that right?”

Reassure

“I’m sorry you’re going through this. This sounds really tough.”

“Thank you for telling me.”

“You are not alone – many people experience these same problems. We can figure out how you are going to get through this.”

3 Refer

You can get a resource to your friend by checking if your friend needs to have all the answers

You aren’t alone and you don’t need to have all the answers.
University life can be quite busy and stressful at times. Your friend may be showing some signs of distress that are concerning but they are able to identify and use healthy coping strategies. They are not at risk of harm to self or others.

They may be experiencing:
- Academic concerns
- Financial problems
- Social difficulties
- Health or personal problems
- Homesickness
- Mild sadness or anxiety
- Lack of support

Resources:
It can be helpful to connect your friend to the variety of support offered on campus. They may not be aware of all of the campus resources or may need help reaching out.

Health and Counselling Services
613-520-6674
carleton.ca/health

Residence Counselling
613-520-8061

Sexual Assault Support Services
613-520-5622

University Safety
613-520-3612

Your friend’s usual coping strategies are no longer working. You may notice the signs of distress are more intense and they are having a difficult time functioning. They are not at risk of harm to self or others but professional support is required at this time.

They may be experiencing:
- Recent traumatic experience
- Deteriorating mental health
- Serious emotional difficulties
- Self-harm
- Bullying or harassment
- Lack of food/essentials
- Prolonged illness or injury

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Your friend is actively planning suicide or talking about suicide. They pose an immediate threat of harm to self or others.

You see or hear:
Direct or indirect reference to suicide.
- “I’ve got a way out of this.”
- “I just have some things to do.”
- “I just need to end it all.”

Demonstrating threatening, violent or destructive behaviour.
The situation feels unsafe.

Resources:
IMMEDIATE ACTION IS REQUIRED
On-campus:
University Safety - 613-520-4444
Off-campus:
Dial 9-1-1

If you are unsure what to do, you can also fill out a Care Report to notify the Office of Student Affairs:
carleton.ca/studentaffairs/care-report

The Crisis Line and Good2Talk can also provide you with free, confidential support if you are uncertain about how to help your friend or if you are concerned about leaving your friend alone.
The Crisis Line 613-722-6914 | Good2Talk 1-866-925-5454