STUDENT HEALTH
AND WELLBEING
ASSISTING STUDENTS IN DISTRESS

Recognize signs of distress
You may be the first person to see signs that a student is in distress or they may come to you specifically for help. Use this folder to familiarize yourself with common signs of distress, from mild to severe, and the steps you can take to offer assistance.

Reach out and refer
Your role is not to diagnose or treat students, but you are in a position to make them aware of the help available. Early intervention plays a key role in helping students get back on track.

Access expert advice when needed
There may be times when you need more advice about how to support a student in distress. For more severe and urgent concerns, you can consult with:

1. UBC Student Health Service 604.822.7011
2. UBC Counselling Services 604.822.3811

Please identify yourself as a faculty or staff member who would like to consult about a student in distress

For unusual or particularly complex student concerns that are not addressed in this document:

Student Development and Services,
Office of the Vice President, Students
604 827 2565
Urgent.vps@ubc.ca

USE EARLY ALERT
Always submit an Early Alert concern as part of your response, regardless of the perceived severity.

Early Alert allows faculty, staff, and TAs to identify their concerns about students and connect them with the help they need.

EARLY ALERT:
• Provides support for all students
• Allows for earlier support before difficulties become overwhelming
• Results in less time and fewer resources needed for students to recover
• Collects concerns from different sources across campus, allowing for a better understanding of individual student needs and how to provide appropriate support in a coordinated way
• Protects student privacy using a secure system
• Is not connected to the student’s academic record

HOW DOES EARLY ALERT WORK?
1. Faculty and staff notice a student is facing difficulties and identify their concerns using Early Alert
2. Managers, Student Support Services review all concerns submitted to ensure the student has been referred to the appropriate resource
3. If the need for additional referral(s) is identified, an advisor will reach out and offer to connect the student to resources and supports.

90% of students respond positively to the invitation to meet with an advisor

SUBMIT AN EARLY ALERT CONCERN
earlyalert.ubc.ca (monitored 7 days/week)

TAKE CARE OF YOUR WELLBEING:
UBC faculty and staff have access to a wide range of benefits and services
www.hr.ubc.ca/wellbeing-benefits/

QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, OR REQUESTS FOR COPIES OF THIS DOCUMENT CAN BE DIRECTED TO:
Student Development and Services
Office of the Vice President, Students
604.827.2565
urgent.vps@ubc.ca

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HAVING A CONVERSATION WITH A STUDENT IN DISTRESS

1. IF YOU’VE REACHED OUT TO THE STUDENT
   • Be specific about the signs and behaviours that you’ve noticed > “I’ve noticed you’ve missed the last two midterms”
   • Express your concern > “I am concerned and wanted to check in to see how you’re doing”
   • Reassure the student that reaching out to students who may be struggling is something all UBC faculty and staff do to help

2. RESPOND WITH EMPATHY AND NORMALIZE STRESS
   • Listen actively and help the student feel heard and understood > “It sounds like you’re facing a lot of difficulties in your life right now”
   • Where stress seems related to academic pressures, acknowledge that stress is a normal part of the university experience

3. ASK OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS:
   Giving students an opportunity to talk often has a calming effect and helps to clarify their concerns
   • What have you tried so far?
   • What do you think the main challenge is?
   • Do you have the support that you need?

4. DISCUSS RESOURCE OPTIONS
   • Point out that help is available; while seeking help can feel difficult at first, it is a sign of strength
   • Provide the student with information about resources and supports (SEE NEXT PAGE)
   • Encourage the student to identify the next steps they plan to take

5. ENTER AN EARLY ALERT CONCERN: (SEE BACK COVER)
   • Whether or not you’ve had a conversation with the student, enter an Early Alert concern earlyalert.ubc.ca (monitored 7 days/week)

CONNECT TO RESOURCES

IMMINENT RISK OF HARM
• Active thoughts of suicide with a plan or suicide attempt
• Behaviour that is violent, destructive, aggressive, or threatening to self or others
• Student is confused, hallucinating, or has trouble remaining conscious

HIGH LEVEL OF DISTRESS
Examples:
• Deterioration in personal appearance and hygiene and significant impairment with daily tasks
• Expressions of severe hopelessness or references to suicide
• Self-harm behaviour such as recent cutting or hitting, severely restricted eating with weight loss/severe binge eating
• Substance use concerns
• Loss of touch with reality/severely disorganized thinking
• Physical health concerns

ALL OTHER MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS
Examples:
• Low or irritable mood with change in energy, appetite, sleep, and/or concentration, which is impacting daily functioning
• Persistent worry, obsessions, agitation, irrationality, racing thoughts, panic attacks
• Flashbacks to a traumatic event, intrusive memories and thoughts
• Interpersonal conflict
• Lack of social support
• Disordered eating

GENERAL SUPPORT
Examples:
• Stress about exams, deadlines, grades, roommates, relationships, finances, adjustment to university
• Advice about healthy eating, sleep, or sexual health

RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS:
24/7
• Empower Me 1.844.741.6389
  Call for free life coaching or counselling including evenings and weekends
• Mind Health BC mindhealthbc.ca
  Take an online mental health assessment and find resources
• First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Helpline 1 855 242 3310, hopeforwellness.ca
• Health Link BC healthlinkbc.ca
  Check physical health symptoms online and find resources

RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS:
During office hours
• Counselling Services 1040 Brock Hall students.ubc.ca/counselling-services
  Walk in to book an appointment with a Wellness Advisor for assessment and referral to the most appropriate level(s) of support

RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS:
During office hours
• UBC Wellness Centre, Room 1400, UBC Life Building
  Drop in to talk with a trained Wellness Peer Educator or attend a workshop
• Centre for Accessibility students.ubc.ca/accessibility
  Accommodations for disabilities, including chronic mental health conditions

STUDENT IN DISTRESS
HAVING A CONVERSATION WITH A STUDENT IN DISTRESS

IF A STUDENT DOESN'T WANT HELP
• Respect their decision. Accepting or refusing assistance must be left up to the student, except in emergencies
• Don’t force the issue or pressure them into going to a referred resource
• Try to leave room for reconsideration later on > “if you change your mind you could always access the resources I’ve provided to you”

EXAMPLES:
GENERAL SUPPORT
- Accommodations for disabilities, including chronic mental health conditions
- Drop in to talk with a trained Wellness Peer Educator, or attend a workshop
- Find resources, tutorials, and helpful tips organized by topic
- Take an online mental health assessment and find resources
- Call for free life coaching or counselling including evenings and weekends

HEALTH CONCERNS
- Disordered eating
- Lack of social support
- Interpersonal conflict
- Physical health concerns
- Loss of touch with reality/severely disorganized thinking
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