Recognizing and Responding to

Students in Distress

Step 1: Recognize
Step 2: Respond
Step 3: Refer

With thanks to Queen's University for allowing modification of their content.

*According to the 2014 National College Health Assessment Survey of students in full-time programs at Confederation College.

Confederation COLLEGE

In their daily roles supporting students at Confederation College, faculty and staff will sometimes be faced with situations where students are experiencing difficulty. Staff and faculty can play an important role in assisting students by being alert to signs of distress, informed about College resources, and willing to assist in an appropriate manner. This resource outlines signs of distress and the necessary steps to take when signs of distress are noticed.

Step 1

Recognize Signs of Distress
Be alert and aware of signs of distress.

Step 2

Respond
Speak directly with the student or contact an appropriate service provider to express your concern. If students are exhibiting signs of risk to their safety or the safety of others, report this immediately.

Step 3

Refer
Offer the student information about available resources. Help them connect with Student Services if they desire.

10.6%* of students reported seriously considering suicide in the past 12 months and 1.7% reported attempting suicide.

Step 1: Recognize

Emergencies

The following situations require immediate referral and reporting:

Direct or Indirect Reference to Wanting to Die/Suicide
Regardless of the circumstances or context, ANY reference to wanting to die/suicide should be taken seriously and a mental health professional should be contacted.

Warning signs might include:
- Expressed feelings of worthlessness, helplessness or hopelessness, verbally or in writing;
- Expressed thoughts that the world and their family and friends would be better off without them;
- Expressed feelings of powerful guilt;
- Expressed desires to die by suicide.

Threats or Disruptive Behavior
Immediately report any of the following:
- Any type of physical violence causing bodily harm (self or other);
- Specific threats of violence or harm.

Behaviours of Concern
Student:
- Is incoherent or unintelligible;
- Cannot be calmed.

Drug and Alcohol Abuse or Misuse
Immediately report any of the following:
- Potential drug overdose;
- Potential alcohol poisoning.

If a student appears to have a pattern of substance abuse, try to refer them to counselling when they are sober.

If a student is exhibiting signs that s/he may pose an immediate danger to her/himself, you should immediately contact one of the following resources.

Weekday Business Hours Emergencies

Couselling Services	807-475-6618
Toll Free	1-800-465-5493
Campus Security	922 *(from any campus phone)*
Emergency Response Services	911

After Hours Emergencies

Campus Security	922 *(from any campus phone)*
Emergency Response Services	911

Step 1: Recognize CONTINUED

Other Situations Requiring Attention

Disordered Eating
Refer a student to counselling for the following reported behaviours:
- Excessive dieting;
- Uncontrolled binge eating;
- Induced vomiting after eating.

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.

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.

Difficulty Communicating and/or Distortions of Reality
Refer a student to counselling for the following reported behaviours:
- Difficulty communicating (difficulty forming thoughts, difficulty completing sentences, irrational conversations);
- Distortions of reality.

Learning and Academic Challenges
Refer a student to faculty or Student Services staff for the following reported concerns:
- Serious academic concerns;
- Considering withdrawal;
- In jeopardy of failing.

Other Signs of Distress

- Changes in academic performance (deterioration in quality of work, frequently missed assignments and classes, excessive procrastination, avoidance of participation);
- 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, problem eating, excessive or disrupted sleeping);
- Changes in hygiene or dress;
- Changes in relationships or social behaviour (withdrawal, isolation or dependency);
- Difficulty concentrating or communicating;
- Disturbing content in a written work or artistic work.

Step 2: Respond

Faculty and staff are not expected to take on the role of counsellor. You may choose to have a direct conversation with a student to gather a little more information, express concern and refer them to appropriate services.

What to Do and Say

Approach • It is OK to ask and express concern • Be specific about the behaviour that worries you	**Example:** "I've noticed you've been absent from class lately and I'm concerned about you."
Listen • Listen non-judgmentally, having an open world view • Meet in a private location, be patient and give your undivided attention	**Example:** "Is there anything I can do to help you?"
Support • Acknowledge their thoughts and feelings in a compassionate way • Offer hope and reassure them you are concerned and want to help	**Example:** "It sounds like you're feeling out of place."
Refer • Provide student with resources • Offer to make the call with the student	**Example:** "If you'd like, I can call and book the appointment for you while you are here with me."

35.9%*
of students felt so depressed that it was difficult to function at some point within the last 12 months.

Step 3: Refer

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

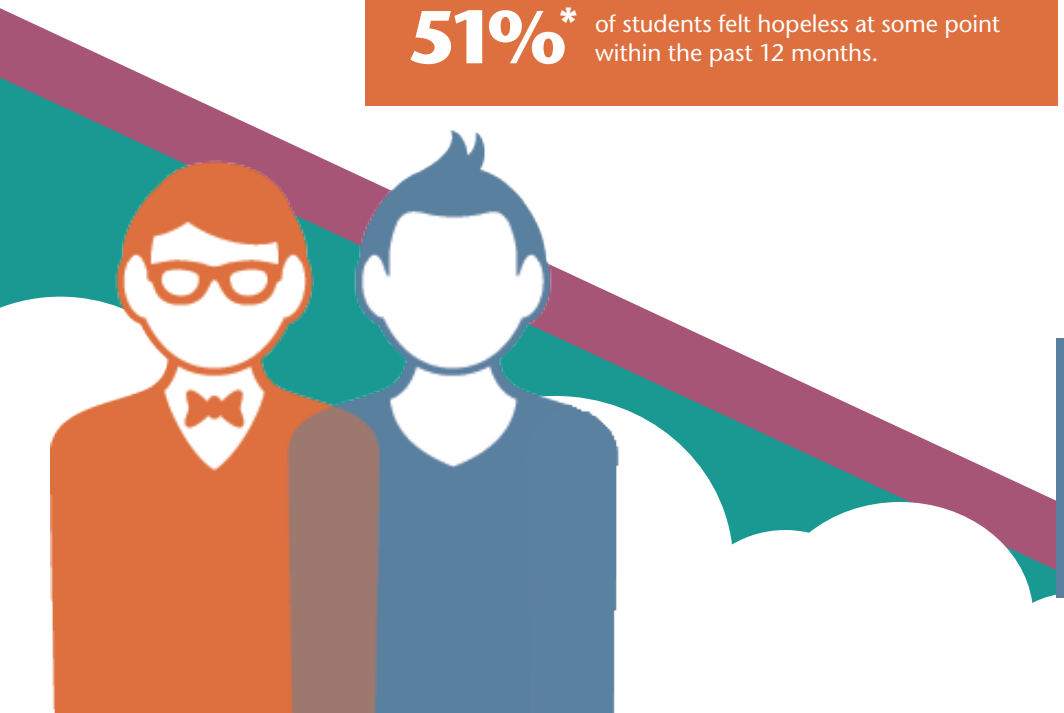
If a student appears reluctant, you can help by:

- 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;
- Providing the student with take-away materials and information (contact numbers, locations, etc.);
- Offering to follow up with the student, without insisting 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;
  Example: "I respect your decision. I hope you will keep these suggestions in mind. My door is always open."

51%* of students felt hopeless at some point within the past 12 months.



57.1%* of students felt overwhelming anxiety at some point within the last 12 months.

Resources

Crisis

*Telephone resources available **24/7***

Campus Security
922 (from any campus phone)

Emergency Services
911

Thunder Bay Crisis Response Services
807-346-8282
1-888-269-3100

Sexual Assault & Sexual Abuse Crisis Line
807-344-4502

24/7 Information on all services in Thunder Bay and Region
211

Health and Counselling
Counselling Service
Student Success Centre – Front Desk
Services available 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. EST
807-475-6618
Toll free: 1-800-465-5493
Video counselling is available for students in the region through Bridging the Distance

BRIDGING the DISTANCE
Promoting Mental Health and Well-being

Thunder Bay Campus Health Centre
807-475-6169

Telehealth Ontario
1-866-797-0007
1-800-797-0000

Academic

School of Business, Hospitality and Media Arts
807-475-6424

School of Health and Community Services
807-475-6282

School of Engineering Technology and Trades
807-475-6104

School of Aviation
807-474-2013

Community Integration Through Co-operative Education (CICE)
807-473-3739

Peer Tutoring/Study Skills
807-473-3874

Student Accessibility Services
807-475-6618

Other

Campus Security
922
807-623-0465

Apiwin
807-475-6252

International Student Office
807-475-6467

Ombuds Office
807-475-6209

Residence
807-475-6381

Community

Good 2 Talk
Ontario post-secondary student helpline
1-866-925-5454

Thunder Bay Counselling Centre
Walk-in counselling service
Wednesdays 12:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.
807-684-1880

Dilico
Walk-in counselling service
Tuesdays 1:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.
807-624-5818
1-855-623-8511

Ontario Mental Health Helpline
Help in 170 languages
1-866-531-2600