



Recognizing and Supporting Students in Distress

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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 CUE 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.

Some students will access Counselling Services and other campus or community resources on their own, but other students may need assistance in accessing support. The information below outlines the warning signs of a student in distress and how to help a student who approaches you looking for help.

Recognize

Everyone experiences crises at some point in their lives. All students deal with a 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
- aggressiveness, disruptive or unusual behaviour, 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

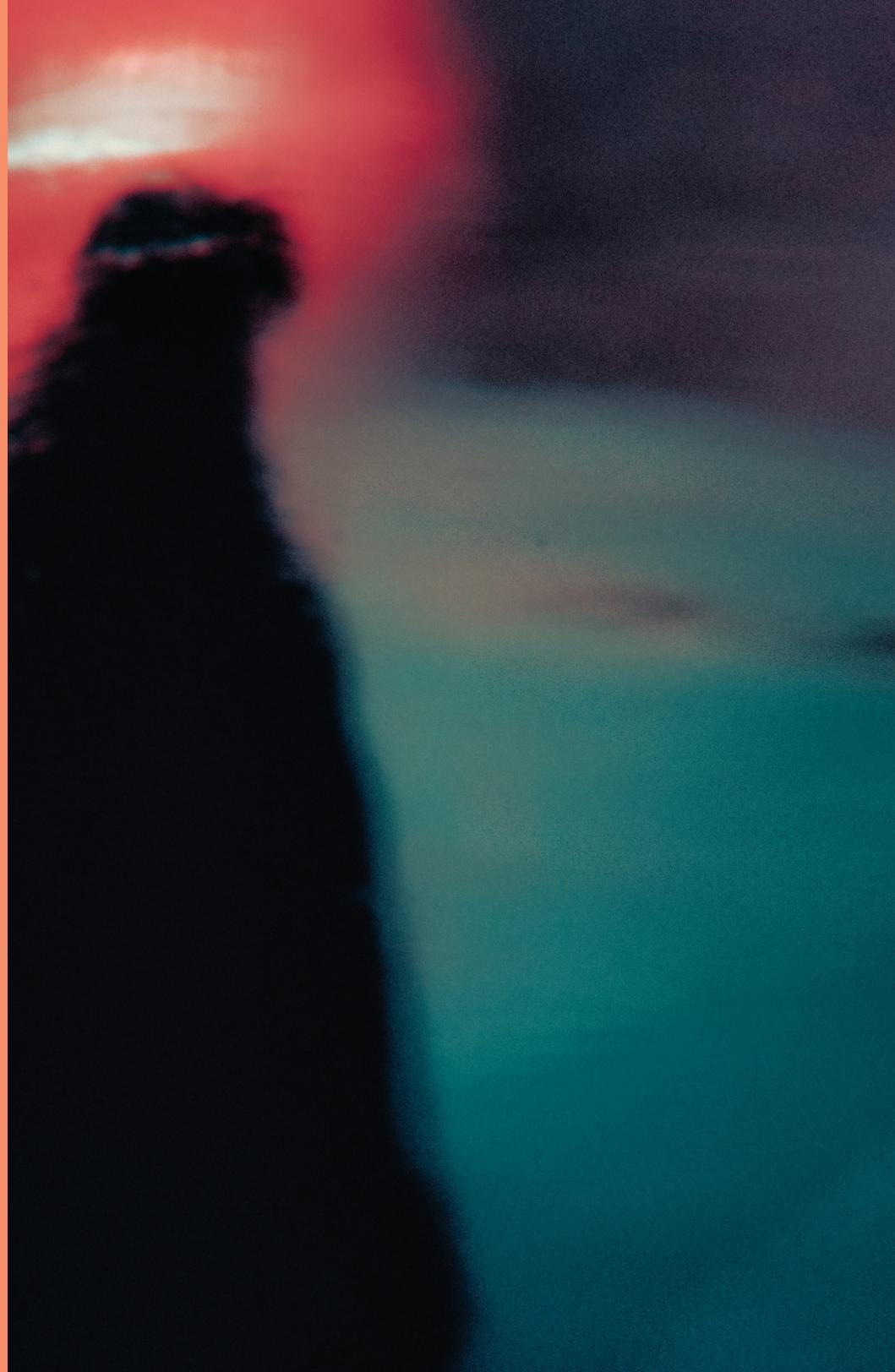
Respond

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.”*

ACKNOWLEDGE the student’s thoughts and feelings in a sensitive and compassionate matter. Let the student know you understand by repeating back to them what they are telling you. For example, *“It sounds like you are feeling lonely on campus.”*

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.

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.

- 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 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 Counselling Services, Security, or the Vice-President, Student Life and Learning.

Be aware of the student services on campus and how they can help students in distress:

- The [Resources & Supports On and Off Campus](#) is a great resource for instructors to use when making referrals. You can also contact Student Life and Learning at studentlife@concordia.ab.ca or **780-479-9241**, or stop by the Student Success Centre on the main floor of the Hole Academic Centre to seek help with a referral.

Refer the student to the [CUE Wellness](#) google site for more resources and support.

Report

Urgent situations are situations requiring immediate referral.

If you are faced with the following situations, dial **780-479-8761** or **5555** from any phone on campus to connect to Security.

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

Alternatively, if you are comfortable, you can walk the student to [Counselling Services](#) in the Student Success Centre, **Monday - Friday, 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.**

Note: If the student is off campus, dial **911** and also notify Security. If you are unsure if the situation warrants a **911** call, you can call the Edmonton Distress Line at: **780-482-HELP (4357)**.

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 an online [incident report](#) on the Behavioural Support and Intervention Team (BSIT) webpage. This will automatically begin the process of creating a confidential file and the BSIT will begin the process of monitoring the student for signs that they 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 [incident report](#) or contact the Vice-President, Student Life and Learning.

The Vice-President, Student Life and Learning or the President are responsible for contacting parents or guardians of the student as needed.