

Assisting students in distress

Understanding common behavioural indicators can help determine the appropriate level of response. By trusting your instincts and using the indicators listed below, you can help connect the individual to the support they need before their situation escalates.

Indicators of Concern

Individuals showing signs of concerning behaviours and/or appear to be in moderate distress likely have support options, but may need to be reminded of them.

Indicators

- Change in mood and attitude
- Isolating oneself from others
- Altered class participation
- Procrastination on personal commitments or academic assignments
- Slight drop in attendance and grades
- Lack of motivation
- Deterioration in personal hygiene or dress
- Dramatic weight gain or loss and/or change in appetite and food behaviours
- Heightened levels of stress and anxiety
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Increase in risk-taking behaviour

What to do

- Address the individual's situation empathetically and without judgment, using the steps from the "How to Help" section.
- Provide resources and follow up, if required.

CRITICAL Indicators of Concern

Individuals showing signs of critical behaviours and/or appear to be in high distress likely need professional support due to the impact of their concerns. These situations need to be addressed and followed up with, but may not require immediate action.

Indicators

- Extreme mood swings, aggression, or other disruptive behaviour
- Significant depressive state or devoid of emotion
- Acute emotional distress or high levels of anxiety and worry
- Bullying or harassment
- Dominating classroom discussion
- Hostile or sarcastic remarks
- Considerable problems with roommate, partner, friends, and/or family
- Disclosure of self harm, disordered eating, substance abuse, current or prior
- Sexual assault and/or partner/ family violence
- Serious academic concerns (e.g. significant drop in attendance and grades)
- Severe/prolonged illness or injury
- Lack of food, shelter, and/or financial means

What to do

- Listen to the individual and help them get to appropriate support services using the "Quick Referral Guide".
- Contact the Helping Individuals At Risk office at 780-492-4372 to note concern, establish a follow up plan, and discuss further support for the individual.

If there is risk of immediate harm to self or others, contact **9-1-1**.

URGENT Indicators of Concern

Individuals showing signs of severe behaviours and/or appear to be in imminent harm are in need of immediate attention and intervention by other helping professionals and/or emergency services.

Indicators

- Thoughts of suicide or suicidal behaviours
- Threats and actions of aggression towards others (physical, verbal, correspondence)
- Imminent threat or action of serious injury to others
- Serious actions of harassment towards others (physical, verbal, online)
- Persistence of unwanted/unwarranted contact or harassment/bullying
- Physical contact/attack
- Presence of or threat to use a weapon

What to do

- Contact 9-1-1.



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How to help

Many of our U of A community members will experience stressors throughout the year. For most, speaking with someone and feeling understood will be enough. The following six SUPPORT guidelines are a framework on how to listen and communicate with care when assisting someone. The questions in two through five can also be useful when checking in with ourselves.

S Start the Conversation

- State the specific behaviours you have witnessed that are causing you concern (see Indicators of Concern below).
- Express your willingness to talk about what they are experiencing.
- If the person is unable or unwilling to talk at that moment, offer to follow up later when it works better for them.

Communicate your concern by saying:
“You look...” “You sound...” “I heard...” “I saw...”

U Uncover the Concern

- Listen without judgment and give the person time to express their thoughts and feelings.
- Clarify the impact or intensity of the situation by paraphrasing using feeling words: “It sounds like you’re feeling sad to be away from home.”
- Ask open-ended questions, such as, “How long have you been feeling this way?”
- Allow space for silence. This gives the person time to think and process.

This step is about active listening and will build trust and increase understanding for both you and the person you’re supporting.

PP Probe Possibilities & O Outcomes

- Examine possible resolutions while respecting the individual and their experience.
- Discuss what they see as an appropriate action on how to address their situation. The most sustainable action plans are those developed by the individual.
- Encourage the individual to consider how their course of action might play out in the long term.

Explore solutions by asking:
“What ideas do you have?” “Have you thought about...”
“How likely are you to do that?”

Consider the impact of the solutions by asking:
“What would happen if you did that?”
“What might the impact of these actions be?”
“Is that a problem for anyone else?”

R Results

- Establish a sense of hope by offering support and encouragement, while reinforcing that change is possible.
- Remember that they may not be ready to make a decision and respect their need for more time.
- Support them in their decision.

Inquire what the person is going to do by asking:
“What would you like to do?”
“How can I help you move forward with this?”

T Touch Base

- Suggest and accompany the individual to a helping resource, if desired.
- Inform the individual you will check in with them to see how they are doing.
- Believe what the person is telling you, and don’t promise something that you can’t deliver.

Offer support that is realistic for you to accomplish, specific to the situation, and meaningful to the person rather than vague statements.

The SUPPORT steps are based on content from the Community Helpers Program™

Quick referral guide

On Campus

If unsure where to refer to, contact the **Community Social Work Team** at **780-492-3342**.

ACCESS Community Brokers
780-975-5854

Academic Success Centre
780-492-2682

Clinical and Counselling Services
780-492-5205

DoS Virtual Drop In
www.ualberta.ca/provost/dean-of-students/dos-virtual-drop-in.html

First Peoples’ House
780-492-5677

Helping Individuals at Risk
780-492-4372

Interfaith Chaplains
780-492-0339

International Student Services
780-492-2692

Peer Support Centre
780-492-4357

Protective Services
780-492-5050

Sexual Assault Centre
780-492-9771

University Health Centre
780-492-2612

Off Campus

If there is risk of immediate harm to self or others, contact **9-1-1**.

The Support Network
2-1-1

ACCESS 24/7
780-424-2424

Crisis Support Centre, 24 hr Distress Line
780-482-HELP (4357)

Crisis Services Canada
1-833-456-4566

Kids Help Phone
1-800-668-6868 or
Text HOME to 686868

TelAide
514-935-1101

The First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Line
1-855-242-3310

Black Youth Helpline
1-833-294-8650

Trans Lifeline
1-877-330-6366

Alberta Mental Health Helpline
1-877-303-2642