

# Supporting Student Wellbeing From a Distance

This guide provides information on how to communicate and answer common questions related to uncertainty and the present situation, as well as a list of resources to support student wellbeing.

## Communicating during times of uncertainty

1. **Normalize** the experience of finding the current situation difficult and upsetting
2. Convey **compassion and understanding** for students' concerns and challenges
3. Reassure them that these are highly unusual times and university leadership, staff, instructors, and students are **learning how to handle it, together**
4. **Validate and address** students' concerns or questions as you are able given the information available to you, and your own capacity
5. **Acknowledge** that the situation is changing quickly, and that solutions are changing as circumstances change
6. **Connect** students to places where they can get updated information as the situation unfolds

## Quick Tips

**Check in.** Even under typical circumstances, a check-in email from an instructor sends a powerful message, "I care about you", which is a key part of students' sense that they belong and can succeed. In times of particular stress or challenge, such as the current global crisis, a check-in email is especially impactful. It can be meaningful even sent to large groups of students (e.g., the entire class section) if you indicate that you will read and respond to individual student responses. If you cannot respond to each student, perhaps because you are teaching many hundreds of students or are yourself facing overwhelming challenges at this time, you can include a link to course advisers, teaching

assistants, and other student supports.

**Show that you see them as a whole person.** Indicate that you understand that students have other roles besides being students, and that these roles are also being impacted amid this public health emergency. Encourage self-care, and convey that you are aware that students are facing a variety of changes in their living situations, financial statuses, health statuses, and social networks, and that you, and your institution, are working on how to begin addressing students' needs.

**Convey that it is normal to have intense emotions and difficulty concentrating.** Let students know that most students (and, if you feel comfortable sharing, most instructors) feel anxious, frustrated, and uncertain in this circumstance. The stress, and the constantly changing information on news and social media, makes it difficult for almost anyone to sustain attention to tasks such as coursework. Tell them that struggles to manage emotions and maintain attention are not a sign that they do not belong or cannot persist through this period. Tell them you believe they can succeed in their educational goals in the short term and long term, and then set up a structure that supports them to do that.

**Assure them you are learning how to handle it - together.** You do not have the time, or capacity, to meet the highest standards as you adapt your course to the needs of this global pandemic. Activities will translate awkwardly to a virtual environment. Mistakes will be made. You may be slow returning grading, and things may fall through the cracks. Let students know that this is an unusual and highly challenging situation and you are learning along with them, and adapting things as you learn.

## Uncertainty: Addressing concerns about changing circumstances

<b><i>What they say</i></b>	<b><i>How You Can Begin to Address It</i></b>
I'm scared.	<p>This is an unprecedented and difficult situation. <b><i>It is completely normal to be scared.</i></b> Could you share more with me about what's worrying you?</p> <p>Provide resources appropriate to their concerns from the list at the end of this document.</p>

<p>What is going to happen with [plans not yet solidified]?</p>	<p>I don't know the details, but what I can tell you is that UNB is working on a plan to address this. It would help me to understand how this impacts you.</p> <p><b><i>What are you most concerned about related to [plans]?</i></b></p> <p><b><i>Refer students to: <a href="http://www.unb.ca/coronavirus/">www.unb.ca/coronavirus/</a></i></b></p>
<p>The university is making new decisions, and changing policies every day. Why?</p>	<p>Our primary concern is for the safety of our students. We are trying to make the best decisions for everyone, using the information available to us at the time. I know this feels chaotic, but the situation is changing rapidly, here and around the country.</p> <p><b><i>I will do my best to share updated information with you as soon as I have it.</i></b></p> <p><b><i>Refer students to: <a href="http://www.unb.ca/coronavirus/">www.unb.ca/coronavirus/</a></i></b></p>
<p>I don't know what's going on. Why isn't UNB telling us more about what is going on?</p>	<p><b><i>I know things are uncertain right now, and that's very difficult. Here is what I can tell you</i></b> about UNB's planning process for this situation.</p> <p><b><i>Refer students to: <a href="http://www.unb.ca/coronavirus/">www.unb.ca/coronavirus/</a></i></b></p>

## Self-Talk: Coping with what YOU need in times of uncertainty

University staff are trying to support students while facing significant challenges of their own. Many of you are juggling caregiving responsibilities while trying to work from home. Many of you have financial stresses and fears about yourself and your loved ones. If there was a straightforward solution for continuing to be productive while coping with these stressors, you would have found it by now. Here are some suggestions for having these conversations **with yourself**:

What you think	<b><i>How You Can Begin to Address It</i></b>
<p>My students are struggling with serious issues like food and housing insecurity, and the loss of a loved one. I</p>	<p><b><i>It is true that you cannot save your students from going through this difficult time. But in situations of great adversity and uncertainty, your support can have the most impact.</i></b></p>

<p>don't know how to help them.</p>	<p><b>Remember what you can do:</b> acknowledge that the student is experiencing a true hardship; express your care and concern for them and their situation; connect students to resources on your campus or in your community that provide support for essential needs.</p>
<p>I have too many students, and I can't respond to all of the questions and concerns I'm getting.</p>	<p><b>This is a difficult and extraordinary situation.</b></p> <p>Most university staff are feeling overwhelmed by this situation at times, in their work and in their personal lives.</p> <p><b>Students can understand that staff have full plates of their own.</b> If you feel comfortable doing so, you can let students know, perhaps with an email autoreply or very quick response email, that you may not be able to respond in a timely fashion but you do want to hear from students, and you are working to get information and pass on students' concerns.</p>
<p>I am feeling overwhelmed. I am afraid I am getting burned out.</p>	<p><b>This is completely understandable.</b></p> <p>You are doing important, challenging, and difficult work to support students through this ordeal. <b>There is no easy solution for this situation, for the students or for you.</b></p> <p>You might consider using these same strategies for yourself: Normalize, for yourself, the experience of finding the current situation difficult and upsetting. Have self-compassion for your own concerns and challenges. Remember that these are highly unusual times and university leadership, staff, and instructors, and students are learning how to handle it, together. Address your own concerns to the extent that is possible. Remind yourself that the situation is changing quickly, and that solutions are changing as circumstances change. Wait for updated information as plans continue to unfold.</p> <p><b>You can't solve all of your own problems any more than you can solve students' problems, but you can give yourself permission to feel how you are feeling and do the best you reasonably can, under your own constraints.</b></p>

## Referral List

Emergency Situations Physical violence; immediate or imminent concern for their or someone else's safety; specific threats of violence or harm	<b>CALL 911</b>
Situations Requiring Immediate Referral/Reporting Direct or indirect references to suicide, such as expressing feelings of worthlessness or hopelessness; distorted reality  Experiencing overwhelming feelings of anxiety or stress and finding it difficult to cope.	<b>Counselling Services</b> <b>453-4820   <a href="mailto:counsel@unb.ca">counsel@unb.ca</a></b>  <b>Counselling Services voicemail and email will be monitored during regular business hours which are Monday-Friday from 8:15am to 4:30pm.</b>  <b>Student Health Centre</b> <b>453-4837   <a href="mailto:shc@unb.ca">shc@unb.ca</a></b>
After hours crisis support for someone needing immediate help	<b>Mobile Crisis Unit</b> <b>453-2132 24/7</b>
Support for someone who may need crisis support later on	<b>CHIMO Helpline</b> <b>450-HELP (4357)</b>
Non-Emergency/Non-Immediate Referral Primary Health Care	<b>Student Health Centre</b> <b>453-4837   <a href="mailto:shc@unb.ca">shc@unb.ca</a></b>
Accessibility and disability support	<b>Student Accessibility Centre</b> <b>453-3515   <a href="mailto:unbsac@unb.ca">unbsac@unb.ca</a></b>
Learning and academic challenges	<b>Writing &amp; Study Skills Centre</b> <b>452-6346   <a href="mailto:wss@unb.ca">wss@unb.ca</a></b>
Financial concerns	<b>Financial Aid</b> <b>453-4796   <a href="mailto:finaid@unb.ca">finaid@unb.ca</a></b>
Online mobile-friendly self-help resources	<b>TAO (<a href="http://thepath-ca.taoconnect.org">thepath-ca.taoconnect.org</a>)</b> <b>Using enrolment key Unb1785!</b>
Sexual Assault	<b>Campus Sexual Assault Support Advocate</b> <b>453-4530   <a href="mailto:csasa@bellaliant.com">csasa@bellaliant.com</a></b>

## **Support Groups**

Counselling Services is currently offering a number of support groups for students during this time. A full list of these groups can be found on the [UNBF Counselling Services website](#).

## **Contact and Document Info**

For questions or feedback, please contact Matthew MacLean, Mental Health Strategist  
[macleanm@unb.ca](mailto:macleanm@unb.ca)

Material in this document was adapted with permission from materials provided by the College Transition Collective based in the University of Stanford's Psychology Department.