

# IDENTIFYING AND ASSISTING STUDENTS IN DISTRESS IN AN ALTERNATE DELIVERY ENVIRONMENT

This guide updates a previous document meant to support staff and faculty in assisting students in distress and promoting student wellbeing. Over the past term, we have learned a lot about the student experience in the current environment and this new guide updates this information based on this new knowledge.



## YOUR ROLE

As a staff or faculty member, it's your role to:

- 1** Identify students in distress and refer them to appropriate campus resources
- 2** Establish and maintain an appropriate learning environment that is both supportive and equitable
- 3** Have knowledge of relevant campus resources for referral

## WHAT IS A DISTRESSED STUDENT?

Any student who is experiencing emotional and/or psychological conditions that are interfering with their ability to learn or negatively impacting their wellbeing.

## WARNING SIGNS OF POSSIBLE DISTRESS

- 1 Lack of communication, especially despite repeated attempts to contact them
- 2 Frequent absences from class
- 3 Disturbing or worrying tone and/or content of communication
- 4 Asking instructor for help with personal problems
- 5 Dependency on advisor/instructor/staff member
- 6 Excessive attempts to contact the instructor
- 7 Disruptive, argumentative, or otherwise inappropriate behavior in discussion posts
- 8 Complaints from other students who have to work with the student
- 9 Excessive procrastination
- 10 Uncharacteristically poor preparation or performance
- 11 Repeated requests for extensions or special considerations

- 12 Excessive displays of emotion such as sadness, anxiety, or anger
- 13 References to suicide, homicide, or other violence in verbal statements or writing

Regardless of the circumstances or context, any reference to committing suicide should be taken seriously and a mental health professional should be contacted.

**UNBF COUNSELLING SERVICES**  
counsel@unb.ca | 506.453.4820

**UNBSJ COUNSELLING SERVICES**  
sjcounselor@unb.ca

**IN THE EVENT OF AN  
ACTUAL SUICIDE ATTEMPT  
IMMEDIATELY CALL 911**

If the student is on campus,  
also contact campus security

**UNBF**  
506.453.4830

**UNBSJ**  
506.648.5675

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

1

### Check-in

For larger class sizes, ensure students are being checked in with by lab instructors, section heads, TAs, etc

2

### Encourage engagement and build community

Make it a part of the class (ie actually satisfies course requirements and is not an additional expectation)

3

### If you decide to communicate your concern to a student:

- a. Reach out to the student privately to help minimize embarrassment and defensiveness.
- b. Do not promise the student confidentiality regarding what he or she shares.
- c. Express your concern in a non-judgemental way. Respect the student's value system, even if you do not agree with it.
- d. Assist the student with problem solving: identify options for action and resources available for help.
- e. Let the student know the limits on your ability to help him or her.
- f. Encourage your students to take a look at the resources available to students.

[UNBF Student Support Directory](#)

[UNBSJ Student Support Directory](#)

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### Express compassion and normalize challenging experiences

There is no question that the pandemic will cause everyone to experience additional stress and mental health challenges. It is important that students know these experiences are normal and make sense given the challenges they face and that there isn't wrong with them. This perspective will encourage students to seek help and take steps to improve their wellbeing.

5

### IF A STUDENT DISCLOSES THREAT TO SELF OR OTHERS:

If a student has disclosed that they are considering suicide or harming another person, intervention is always required. This must always be reported to proper personnel to ensure the student's safety.

- a. If possible, obtain the student's contact information (address and phone number). Contact Counselling Services at:  
**UNBF COUNSELLING SERVICES**  
[counsel@unb.ca](mailto:counsel@unb.ca) | 506.453.4820  
**UNBSJ COUNSELLING SERVICES**  
[sjcounsellor@unb.ca](mailto:sjcounsellor@unb.ca)
- b. For imminent threats, please contact 911.
- c. And if the student is on campus, contact 911 AND Campus Security 506-453-4830 (UNBF) 506-648-5675 (UNBSJ)

## HOW TO START A CONVERSATION WITH A STUDENT ABOUT YOUR CONCERNS

1

### Talk in private and when you are not rushed

2

### Be specific and direct

Describe the behaviours that are concerning and ask how the student is doing. For example:

- I noticed that you were tearful (rather than depressed) in the group discussion today. I just wanted to check in and see if you're okay.
- I noticed that your grades have dropped quite a bit from last year. That can happen when courses get more challenging, but sometimes it happens when students have other things going on in life that are affecting their studies. Is that happening for you?

3

### Truly listen

While it is automatic to want to fix, solve and make suggestions, one of the most meaningful ways to communicate care is to express an interest in hearing and understand a person's experience. Other ways to communicate genuine interest include limit distractions, try not to rush the conversation, reflect back what you've heard and ask questions to clarify.

4

### Acknowledge common stressors and experiences

Students often have the "I'm the only one" experience. While it is important for a student to have their experience respected, there are times when it can be very helpful to know that other students have similar experiences. Example:

- Many first year students question whether they have what it takes to succeed at university, but think they are the only ones who doesn't have it all worked out. How are you finding things?

5

### Ask questions that help the student talk about their concerns

Often people have new understandings when they describe their circumstance to an interested party. The following questions can help facilitate this process:

- What is the hardest part of this for you?
- What are you most concerned about?
- How is this affecting you?

**6****Resist the urge to begin with suggestions or advice**

Unless the situation is urgent (an immediate action is needed or the student is unable to engage in discussion or problem solving), it is most helpful to foster the student's sense of being able to cope. Invite the student to them to draw on their own resources and experiences and encourage them to talk with people they trust and think may be helpful (e.g., friends, family, religious leader). Examples:

- What options are you considering?
- What have you tried so far?
- Have you been in a similar situation before? If so, what helped then?
- Who has been helpful to talk to in the past?

**7****Provide information on resources and support services available on campus**

Let students know about the **support services available on campus** and explain this as routine practice to avoid them feeling judged or deemed to be in need of special assistance. Connect the student to the support service if you have a serious concern.

Note that accessing these services is voluntary, unless the situation is urgent and the student is not safe managing on their own.

**8****Offer accommodations and assistance as appropriate. Be clear about expectations**

At UNB, instructors have the prerogative to grant academic accommodations (e.g., due date extensions, alternate dates for exams other than the final) without supporting documentation.

**WHEN TO REFER A STUDENT TO COUNSELLING SERVICES**

**It's ALWAYS OK to refer a student to counselling if you think they could benefit from it.**

Particularly if you have recognized signs/symptoms of distress including:

- withdrawal/avoidance
- disturbing speech/communication
- significant changes in mood, behavior or appearance

- the problem seems to be getting worse, and/or if it has been going on for more than a couple of weeks.

If you have immediate concerns about a student's safety or that they may cause harm to someone else, call campus police.

**UNBF**  
506-453-4830

**UNBSJ**  
506-648-5675

## HOW TO REFER

Explain clear, direct terms why you are referring a student to a campus resource.

When referring to support services, it can help to show students the website for the relevant resource and show them how they can access its services.

For more information on how to refer students, check out [this guide](#).

## HOW TO HANDLE QUESTIONS OR ANXIETIES RESULTING FROM THE PANDEMIC

Students may still have a lot of questions about the pandemic and the university, refer to this guide on how to handle common questions: [Supporting Student Wellbeing From a Distance](#).

## RESOURCES

Check out these guides to find out the best place to refer a student:

**UNB Fredericton**    **UNB Saint John**

## RESOURCES FOR INDIGENOUS STUDENTS

The Ntulsonawt Wellness Center offers Indigenous counselling services which is both client-centred and grounded in the First Nation culture. In addition to the counselling, the centre also provides opportunities for collective cultural initiatives and strives to bring a sense of community to strengthen a student's own Indigenous identity through these connections.

Ntulsonawt comes from the Wolastoqey language and was given to the Centre by Elder Imelda Perley and translates as one's personal path toward strength and wellness.

The Ntulsonawt Wellness Center is located at Marshall D'Avray Hall in room 342. To make an appointment or to get connected please contact Ntulsonawt Wellness Coordinator, Nancy Harn at [nharn@unb.ca](mailto:nharn@unb.ca)

The Student Intervention Team (SIT) at UNB Fredericton supports students who are experiencing distress or engaging in harmful or disruptive behaviours that compromise campus safety and/or compromise the student's ability to succeed in their program of study.

Consider referring a student to the SIT when:

- A student's concerning behaviour is persistent and the student is unable to navigate support services on their own.
- An offer of support from Student Services might make all the difference for a student in distress.
- An incident is so worrisome that a multidisciplinary team at UNBF should be aware.

For more information, visit [www.unb.ca/sit](http://www.unb.ca/sit) or email [sit@unb.ca](mailto:sit@unb.ca)

