

# STUDENT HEALTH AND WELLBEING

## ASSISTING STUDENTS IN DISTRESS

---

▶ **Recognize signs of distress**

You may be the first person to see signs that a student is in distress or they may come to you specifically for help. Use this folder to familiarize yourself with common signs of distress, from mild to severe, and the steps you can take to offer assistance.

▶ **Reach out and refer**

Your role is not to diagnose or treat students, but you are in a position to make them aware of the help available. Early intervention plays a key role in helping students get back on track.

▶ **Access expert advice when needed**

There may be times when you need more advice about how to support a student in distress. For more severe and urgent concerns, you can consult with:

1. **UBC Student Health Service** 604.822.7011

2. **UBC Counselling Services** 604.822.3811

*Please identify yourself as a faculty or staff member who would like to consult about a student in distress*



# HAVING A CONVERSATION WITH A STUDENT IN DISTRESS

## 1. IF YOU'VE REACHED OUT TO THE STUDENT

- Be specific about the signs and behaviours that you've noticed > *"I've noticed you've missed the last two midterms"*
- Express your concern > *"I am concerned and wanted to check in to see how you're doing"*
- Reassure the student that reaching out to students who may be struggling is something all UBC faculty and staff do to help
- If a **student doesn't want help**, respect their decision.  
Accepting or refusing assistance must be left up to them, except in emergencies
- Try to leave room for reconsideration later on

## 2. RESPOND WITH EMPATHY AND NORMALIZE STRESS

- Listen actively and help the student feel heard and understood > *"It sounds like you are facing some difficulties in your life right now"*
- Where stress seems related to traditional academic pressures, acknowledge that stress is a normal part of the university experience

## 3. ASK OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS:

Giving students an opportunity to talk often has a calming effect and helps to clarify their concerns

- What have you tried so far?
- What do you think the main challenge is?
- Do you feel like you have the support you need right now?

## 4. DISCUSS RESOURCE OPTIONS

- Point out that help is available; while seeking help can feel difficult at first, it is a sign of strength
- Provide the student with information about resources and supports (**see next page**) →
- Encourage the student to identify the next steps they plan to take

## 5. ENTER AN EARLY ALERT CONCERN: (SEE BACK COVER)

- Whether or not you've had a conversation with the student, enter an Early Alert concern  
[earlyalert.ubc.ca](http://earlyalert.ubc.ca)

### IF A STUDENT DOESN'T WANT HELP

- Respect their decision. Accepting or refusing assistance must be left up to the student, except in emergencies
- Don't force the issue or trick them into going to a referred resource
- Try to leave room for reconsideration later on

# SIGNS OF DISTRESS AND RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

## IMMINENT RISK OF HARM

### Examples:

- Active thoughts of suicide with a plan or suicide attempt
- Behaviour that is violent, destructive, aggressive, or threatening to self or others
- Student is confused, hallucinating, or has trouble remaining conscious

## HIGH LEVEL OF DISTRESS

### Examples:

- Deterioration in personal appearance and hygiene and significant impairment with daily tasks
- Expressions of severe hopelessness or references to suicide
- Self-harm behaviour such as recent cutting or hitting, severely restricted eating with weight loss/ severe binge eating
- Substance use concerns
- Loss of touch with reality/severely disorganized thinking
- Serious physical health concern

## MODERATE CONCERN

### Examples:

- Low or irritable mood with change in energy, appetite, sleep, and/or concentration, which is impacting daily functioning
- Family or relationship problems, interpersonal conflict
- Traumatic event such as loss of loved one, homesickness, lack of social support
- Difficulty concentrating or learning new tasks
- Binge eating

## GENERAL SUPPORT

### Examples:

- Stress about exams, deadlines, grades, roommates, relationships, finances, adjustment to university
- Advice about healthy eating, sleep, or sexual health

### STEPS TO TAKE:

1. **Student to go to nearest hospital - Call 911**
2. **Call UBC Campus Security** 604.822.2222
3. **Enter an Early Alert concern** (see back cover), monitored 7 days/week

### RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS:

#### During office hours

- **UBC Student Health Service** 604.822.7011  
Or student's family doctor or nearest medical clinic

#### After-hours or in an emergency

- **24/7 Crisis Centre** 1.800.784.2433 [crisiscentre.bc.ca](http://crisiscentre.bc.ca)
- **Urgent Care, UBC Hospital** 604.822.7121 (open from 8am-10pm)  
Or nearest hospital emergency department (24/7)
- **Access and Assessment Centre, Vancouver General Hospital**  
604.675.3700 (7:30am-11pm)

### RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS:

#### During office hours

- **Counselling Services**, Room 1040, Brock Hall  
Drop-in for Wellness Advising (assessment, wellness planning and referral to the most appropriate level of support) or Drop-in Counselling (single session, goals/strengths based)

#### After-hours or anytime

- **Empower Me** 1.844.741.6389 (toll free, 24 hours, multilingual)  
Free counselling sessions delivered in person, by telephone, by video-counselling, or by e-counselling
- **Medimap** [medimap.ca](http://medimap.ca)  
See available walk-in clinics and wait times, and book an appointment before visiting the location.
- **Mind Health BC** [mindhealthbc.ca](http://mindhealthbc.ca)  
Take an online mental health assessment and find resources
- **Health Link BC** call 811 or visit [healthlinkbc.ca](http://healthlinkbc.ca)  
Check physical health symptoms online and find resources

### RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS:

#### During office hours

- **UBC Wellness Centre**, Room 1400, UBC Life Building  
Drop in to talk with a trained student, or attend a workshop

#### After-hours or anytime

- **Empower Me** 1.844.741.6389 (toll free, 24 hours, multilingual)  
Free counselling sessions delivered in person, by telephone, by video-counselling, or by e-counselling
- **Students.ubc.ca**  
Find resources, tutorials, and helpful tips organized by topic

# TALKING TO A STUDENT IN DISTRESS

## USE EARLY ALERT

Always submit an Early Alert concern as part of your response, regardless of the perceived severity.

Early Alert allows faculty, staff, and TAs to identify their concerns about students sooner and in a more coordinated way.

### EARLY ALERT:

- Provides support for all students
- Allows for earlier support before difficulties become overwhelming
- Results in less time and fewer resources needed for students to recover
- Collects concerns from different sources across campus, allowing for a better understanding of individual student needs and how to provide appropriate support in a coordinated way
- Protects student privacy using a secure system
- Is not connected to the student's academic record

### SUBMIT AN EARLY ALERT CONCERN

[earlyalert.ubc.ca](http://earlyalert.ubc.ca)

### HOW DOES EARLY ALERT WORK?

1. Faculty and staff notice a student is facing difficulties and identify their concerns using Early Alert
2. Managers, Student Support Services review all concerns submitted and identify the most appropriate resources for students in need of support
3. Advisors then reach out to students and offer to connect them with resources and support

92% of students respond positively to the invitation to meet with an advisor

### TAKE CARE OF YOUR WELLBEING:

UBC faculty and staff have access to a wide range of benefits and services to support their positive mental health and physical wellbeing

[www.hr.ubc.ca/wellbeing-benefits/](http://www.hr.ubc.ca/wellbeing-benefits/)

### QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, OR REQUESTS FOR COPIES OF THIS DOCUMENT CAN BE DIRECTED TO:

**Student Development and Services**  
Office of the Vice President, Students  
604.827.2565  
[urgent.vps@ubc.ca](mailto:urgent.vps@ubc.ca)

Original concept for this document courtesy of Queen's University and McMaster University.

© University of British Columbia, 2018

2019-09-29