Your guide to
RECOGNIZING & RESPONDING TO STUDENTS IN DISTRESS

dal.ca/thrive
1 RECOGNIZING
a student in distress

SIGNS THAT A STUDENT MAY BE IN DISTRESS:
- Significant changes in mood
- Difficulty controlling emotions
- Others have expressed concern about the student
- Changes in academic performance
- High levels of irritability
- Listlessness or falling asleep in class
- Unusual behaviour
- Significant weight loss or gain
- Changes in hygiene or dress
- Changes in relationships or social behaviour
- Difficulty concentrating or communicating
- Disordered eating
- Assault and/or harassment
- Learning and academic challenges
- Withdrawal from social interaction

2 RESPONDING
to a student in distress

APPROACH
“I’ve noticed you’ve been absent from class lately and I’m concerned about you.”
- It is OK to ask and express concern
- Be specific about the behaviour that worries you

LISTEN
“Is there anything I can do to help you?”
- Listen with an open mind
- Be patient and give your undivided attention

SUPPORT
“It sounds like you’re feeling out of place.”
- Acknowledge their thoughts and feelings in a compassionate way
- Offer hope and reassure them you are concerned and want to help

3 REFERRING
a student in distress

Faculty and staff can refer students to King’s resources listed on the next page and/or to the Dalhousie Student Health & Wellness Centre where a member of our interprofessional healthcare team will assess, triage, and assist the student in meeting their needs.

Don’t forget to: Point out that help is available and seeking help is a sign of strength and courage, not a weakness. Offer to follow up with the student, but don’t insist on knowing what the student has done.

If the student appears reluctant:
- Offer to refer the student online to our campus case manager, who will reach out to the student and offer support.
- Offer to sit with the student while they make initial contact themselves.
- Accompany the student to their appointment if appropriate and you feel comfortable.

IF THE STUDENT SAYS “NO” TO A REFERRAL
- Respect their decision. Accepting or refusing assistance must be left up to the student, except in emergencies when life is in danger.
- Don’t force the issue or trick them into going.
- Try and leave the door open for later consideration.

“I respect your decision. I hope you will keep these options in mind. My door is always open.”

Has someone shared an experience of sexualized violence with you? The Purple Folder is your guide to responding and navigating these conversations. dal.ca/purplefolder
The Student Health & Wellness Centre's interprofessional team includes:

- nurses
- physicians
- social workers
- psychiatrists
- counsellors
- psychologists
- health promotion experts

If there is an academic issue, you can also refer your student to the Registrar's Office:

First floor of the A&A Building,
902-422-1271 ext. 108, registrar@ukings.ca,
ukings.ca/academic-services.

The inclusion of resources external to that of Dalhousie University does not reflect importance or endorsement, and the University does not control or guarantee the relevance or competence of their services.
IN A MENTAL HEALTH EMERGENCY SITUATION

Is someone...
Making direct or indirect reference to wanting to die/suicide?
Making threats or engaging in disruptive behaviour?

If you answered ‘yes’ to EITHER of the above, call one of these numbers now:

Emergency Services
911

Security
902-494-4109 (daytime, Dalhousie)
902-430-7938 (nighttime)

Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team
902-429-8167